

ASSESSING PLACE CHARACTER IN RESPONSE TO WAL-MART

by

Dana Colleen Reinke

B.A., Alma College, 1999

M.A., University of Pittsburgh, 2001

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
The School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2006

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

It was defended on

November 21, 2006

and approved by

Cecilia A. Green, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology

Sabina E. Deitrick, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs

Patrick Doriean, Professor, Department of Sociology

Dissertation Advisor: Kathleen M. Blee, Professor, Department of Sociology

Copyright © by Dana Colleen Reinke

2006

ASSESSING PLACE CHARACTER IN RESPONSE TO WAL-MART

Dana C. Reinke, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2006

Community members across U.S. municipalities grow more vocal in their concerns about how outside retail corporations shape local community life. The way these residents respond to nation-global corporations, and the way they make arguments about what it means to live in their community, is an interesting social phenomenon. By studying community response to “big box” retail development I answer the question: how does a geographic location become ascribed with a definition of community? Utilizing geographic theorist Krista Paulsen’s place character element as an analytic tool to understand a local response to potential development of a Wal-Mart Supercenter, I examine definitions of community as they relate to issues of consumption practices and community relations. These issues were identified through various methodologies including ethnography, semi-structured interviews, historical narrative analysis and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) demographic data.

Building on sociologist Thomas Gieryn’s “sociology of place” framework, I uncovered new aspects of the socio-cultural, political and economic makeup of the communities studied. This makeup is represented in the material, social practices and symbolic characteristics by which people denote local place character. Identifying these characteristics is an important step in understanding why social movements occur where they do, the nature of the emplaced social movement activity, and what inspires community members to respond to what they perceive as an external threat. My research findings advance a place-sensitive sociology that reintroduces the role of community as a part of an individual’s identity. By expanding the definition of community beyond the geographical setting, the built location and the meanings and values associated with a place can be studied as part of individual’s response to social change. Additionally, my research finds that a place-sensitive sociology is also important for understanding the varied and nuanced ways that globalization impacts various scales, particularly

the local. As the traditional national barriers to the global flow of people and commerce are eroded, local communities will increasingly become a focal point at which globalization can be challenged.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | XI |
| 1.0 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 1.1 THEORETICAL ROOTS..... | 1 |
| 1.2 LOCAL-GLOBAL CITIZEN..... | 5 |
| 1.3 SHIFTING SANDS: THE U.S. SOCIAL-ECONOMIC COMPACT..... | 7 |
| 1.4 CONSUMING IN THE LOCAL | 9 |
| 1.5 ALL TOGETHER NOW | 11 |
| 2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS | 13 |
| 2.1 WAL-MART AS EXOGENOUS FORCE..... | 14 |
| 2.1.1 Community Food Fight: at the intersection of economics, grocery and labor | 16 |
| 2.1.2 Footprints on the land: spats over sp(l)ace..... | 19 |
| 2.1.3 Choosing communities..... | 21 |
| 2.2 DATA COLLECTION..... | 22 |
| 2.2.1 Triangulation..... | 22 |
| 2.2.2 Ethnographic Framework..... | 23 |
| 2.2.3 The Interview Process..... | 25 |
| 2.2.4 Sampling Method | 28 |
| 2.2.5 Documenting additional sources of data..... | 31 |
| 2.2.6 Historical data collection..... | 31 |
| 2.2.7 Coding and analysis | 33 |
| 2.2.8 Limitations and Concerns | 34 |
| 3.0 OHIO RIVER COMMUNITIES: PROTECTING THE IMAGERY, REALITY AND LOCALITY..... | 36 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 3.1 | TRACING COMMUNITY HISTORY | 37 |
| 3.2 | IMPACT OF TRANSPORTATION..... | 41 |
| 3.3 | CURRENT ROAD TRIP | 43 |
| 3.3.1 | Separate and not equal to the others- Bellevue and Avalon communities 43 | |
| 3.3.2 | Co-exisiting for the sake of the children- Ben Avon and Emsworth..... | 54 |
| 3.3.3 | Benefiting from its neighbors- The community of Sewickley | 62 |
| 3.3.4 | Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard- Sea of businesses, houses, cars... and Glenfield | 68 |
| 4.0 | IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER | 73 |
| 5.0 | COMMUNITY RELATIONS AS AN ELEMENT OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER..... | 76 |
| 5.1 | IDENTIFYING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT | 76 |
| 5.1.1 | Material Characteristics..... | 78 |
| 5.1.2 | Characteristics of Social Practices | 80 |
| 5.1.3 | Symbolic Characteristics..... | 83 |
| 5.2 | CONTEMPORARY PLACE CHARACTER..... | 84 |
| 5.2.1 | Consumer Space (Material Characteristics) | 84 |
| 5.2.2 | Sidewalks (Characteristics of Social Practices)..... | 90 |
| 5.2.3 | Community institutions and rituals (Symbolic Characteristics) | 93 |
| 5.3 | CONCLUSION | 97 |
| 6.0 | CONSUMPTION AS AN ELEMENT OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER | 98 |
| 6.1 | LOCAL RETAIL DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONSUMER..... | 99 |
| 6.1.1 | Local response to retail development..... | 106 |
| 6.2 | THE SYMBOLIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES 111 | |
| 6.3 | THE MATERIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES 115 | |
| 6.3.1 | Traffic..... | 116 |
| 6.3.2 | The Big Box Store | 122 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|------------|
| 6.4 | THE PRACTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES | |
| | | 124 |
| 6.5 | CONCLUSION | 131 |
| 7.0 | CONCLUSION..... | 133 |
| 7.1.1 | Role community played in resident responses..... | 133 |
| 7.1.2 | Utilizing sociology of place | 135 |
| 7.1.3 | Contributions to a sociology of place | 136 |
| 7.1.4 | What future studies could do..... | 137 |
| APPENDIX A | | 139 |
| APPENDIX B | | 142 |
| APPENDIX C | | 146 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | | 148 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1. Formal interviewee information characteristics | 28 |
| Table 2. Ohio River communities incorporation dates | 37 |
| Table 3. Population totals for ORC communities, selected years..... | 38 |
| Table 4. Percent of ORC homes with nine or more rooms. | 59 |
| Table 5. Allegheny County population totals between 1970-2000..... | 100 |
| Table 6. Comparisons of educational attainment..... | 108 |
| Table 7. Typology of ORC orientation and perspective on Kilbuck Wal-Mart development..... | 134 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1. Location of Ohio River Corridor communities | 40 |
| Figure 2. Entrance to Bellevue along Ohio River Boulevard. | 44 |
| Figure 3. Community sign for Bellevue. | 45 |
| Figure 4. ORC community household income below \$50,000..... | 47 |
| Figure 5. Chain stores mix with small businesses on Bellevue's Lincoln Ave..... | 48 |
| Figure 6. Home ownership rates in ORC communities. | 50 |
| Figure 7. Activity and inactivity mix along Avalon's business district. | 52 |
| Figure 8. Signs of life along Avalon's California Ave..... | 53 |
| Figure 9. ORC community housing built prior to 1939..... | 56 |
| Figure 10. Ben Avon's community business district..... | 58 |
| Figure 11. Emsworth's business district on Center Avenue..... | 61 |
| Figure 12. Entering Sewickley on Broad Street..... | 63 |
| Figure 13. Sewickley's small business district..... | 66 |
| Figure 14. Shoppers and shops along Beaver Avenue in Sewickley..... | 66 |
| Figure 15. Glenfield and its neighbors the railroad line and Route 65. | 69 |
| Figure 16. Communities First! billboard image..... | 109 |
| Figure 17. Major roads and commercial retail development in Ohio River Communities..... | 119 |
| Figure 18. Aerial view of Dixmont Hospital showing proximity to Ohio River, railroad and Route 65. | 143 |
| Figure 19. View of main hospital buildings..... | 143 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was a teenager, I stumbled upon this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson- “Our chief want in life is someone who can make us do what we can.” That quote stuck with me and I use it to reflect on the people who influenced me on this life journey. I say life journey because completing this dissertation represents the culmination of moments, actions, and decisions that started long before I ever embarked on this research.

I strongly believe that completing a dissertation is not a measure of intelligence. Instead it is an indication of unrelenting drive, personal dedication, self-motivation and a willingness to sacrifice. Those personal characteristics are not discovered in adulthood, but developed, shaped, and challenged throughout life. In that vein, I thank all my “teachers” in and outside a classroom for sharing their time, talent and effort. I take this opportunity and space to thank only a small representation of these individuals.

I thank my parents for being my first teachers. I thank my extended family, through blood and marriage, for their gracious support. I thank my grandma, Stephanie Reinke for nurturing my soul as only a grandmother can. I thank my circle of friends, Amber Stack, Maya Mackowiak, Erin Seaverson and Carrie Lloyd for their life-long friendship as we continue to share our lives across the miles. I thank Roberta Hudak, Kate Follett-Flynn, Dr. Catherine Fobes, and Dr. Linda Morrison for kindness, guidance and help in immeasurable ways.

I thank Dr. Kathleen Blee for guiding my graduate career as my advisor and, as my chair, managing my dissertation research into a tangible end product. The shared relationship between each student and his/her advisor is unique, with various ebbs and flows and it takes skill for an advisor to effectively read the needs of each student while providing opportunity for individual growth and discovery. I appreciate Kathy for giving me enough intellectual space to pursue my thoughts and ideas on the topic, but providing a framework to ensure that I did not get lost along the way.

I thank the many members of Kathy's advisor group for their thoughts, suggestions and support as I turned this idea about Wal-Mart into a completed dissertation. I especially thank Lisa Huebner and Melissa Swauger for our unique friendship and sisterhood. I thank my committee members, Dr. Patrick Doriean, Dr. Cecilia Green and Dr. Sabina Deitrick for their service and guidance that helped pushed this research to its final form.

I thank my supervisors, co-workers and management at the Pittsburgh Research Laboratory for their support and assistance as I moved through the various stages of my graduate education. In addition, Michael J. Brnich, Dr. Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, Dr. Launa Mallett, and Dr. Charles Vaught, all have served as mentors guiding me through this process. My skills as a social scientist only benefit from their mentoring through guidance, intellectual curiosity, and friendship.

Most importantly I thank my husband, Andrew Willmer. Our relationship succeeds because we give each other the love, encouragement, and space to pursue our individual dreams within the contours of this combined life. The last ten years have challenged us to handle life's rhythms with acceptance, determination, and grace, but we have come this far because we know our past and current efforts build the foundation for the next stages of this shared journey. I am so proud of you, me, *us* and what we accomplish together.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Community members across U.S. municipalities grow more vocal in their concerns about how outside corporations shape local community life. Over the past 20 years such opposition has emerged in U.S. suburbs, cities and small towns. Residents in some communities are raising concerns about the impact of retail superstore sitings by global retail companies. The way these residents respond to nation-global corporations, and the way they make arguments about what it means to live in their community, is an interesting social phenomenon. From a sociological perspective these concerns can illuminate the material, social practices and symbolic characteristics that define a community.

1.1 THEORETICAL ROOTS

This research uses community response to a proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter as an analytical lens to study the ways people think about their community, what Krista Paulsen describes as “place character”. Paulsen (2004) defines *place character* as the result of the confluence of distinctive characteristics of a community (geography, history, economy, demography, politics, organizations, culture and aesthetics) and how “these elements and their meanings together shape the tone of local life, encouraging or discouraging different patterns of action” (p.245). Paulsen (2004) details the process of identifying place character as having two parts. She contends that researchers need to “uncover just *what* constitutes place character by identifying understandings associated with specific locales and the social and material realities that provide bases for these understandings” (p. 246, emphasis in original). Also, researchers need to examine “*how* a place’s character matters—how it shapes local action” (Paulsen, 2004, p. 246 emphasis in original). Examining community response to a proposed Wal-Mart development reveals place character

elements in material form, social practices and imagined reality. Material examples include the construction, design, and planning of the community. Housing design and street grids represent material examples that construct a place and ultimately create place character (Paulsen, 2004). Traffic patterns, local business structures and locations are sites for social practices that construct a place as well (Paulsen, 2004). The symbolic examples of place character are the ways a community's image is created and in turn how that image is drawn upon to shape perspectives about the community (Paulsen, 2004). What makes a place desirable, distinctive and unique vary, but may include such things as local businesses districts, sidewalks, or parades.

I use theoretical elements from social geography, economic globalization studies, consumption research, and other areas of sociology to construct a "sociology of place". In the present, there is not an agreed upon nexus of ideas and meanings that defines this sociology of place, although Thomas Gieryn has led the way in defining what the parameters of a "sociology of place" must include. He contends there are three required elements for space to be identified as a place: it must have a geographic location, a material form, and be invested with meaning and value identified or represented by members of that place (2000).

Gieryn's argument for including place in sociological research is a response to the historical emphasis in sociology on studying the impact of class or community on social life (Agnew and Duncan, 1989). As John Agnew and James Duncan contend place has been rendered invisible in sociology by these focuses (1989). Historically, sociologists studied community, understood as what linked people together based on similar morals, values, ideals and social relations in a discrete geographical setting (Agnew, 1989). This was associated with the social ecology approach developed by the "Chicago school" of sociologists in their research about the urban environment (Park, 1936; Wirth, 1939). Over time, researchers changed to focus on how people identify with aspects of their community that do not necessarily involve geographical location, such as class, race, and gender. Using this definition of community helped to challenge social, political and economic inequalities created by societal or national practices and policies (Agnew, 1989). Class-based research by Marxist political economists and sociologists further removed place from its geographical roots. As Karl Marx writes, in a capitalist based society, technological innovation and geographic expansion are necessary to capital accumulation (1967). Even though people and their labor power are commodities that challenge the capitalist system in their work-*place*, the historical research focus of Marxist research was on class relations

associated with the practices of commodification and resistance against capitalism, ignoring the geographic or place elements of this relation (Agnew, 1989). While the elevation of class and community by social scientists limited the use of place as a site of analysis, it was still of interest to geographers. Geography researchers have long utilized the geographic setting of space, but added “place” to their research vernacular in the late 20th century to study the transformations of local “places” as a result of globalization processes, such as those associated with consumption (Hubbard et al., 2004). Since that time, there has been much debate about what constitutes the distinctions between space and place (Hubbard et al., 2004). Driving the distinction is a split in geographic studies, those that explore the role of culture in “making spaces of domination and resistance” from researchers that study how places are made with the focus on “the ways life [is] inscribed on the landscape” (Hubbard et. al., 2004, p.6). But whether studying the social world with a focus on “space” or “place” geographers acknowledge that these units of analysis are in constant transformation and impacted by power relations (Hubbard et al., 2004).

My sociological definition of place, built on Gieryn’s three elements, aligns with the efforts of geographers “to ‘ground’ analyses of social, economic and political phenomena in their appropriate geographic context” (Hubbard et. al., 2004, p. 6). I do so by using Paulsen’s idea of “place character” as an analytical tool to reveal *local* community elements. The visual and imagined understandings about a community’s material, practical and symbolic construction, and their continuous reconstruction over time, form the basis of its place character. This is consistent with the assertions of geographic theorist Doreen Massey that studying how people *process* social, economic and political changes in the local setting is as important as examining the impact of the resulting changes (1991). Different places are likely to experience and process structural changes differently, she argues, because “people in different parts of the country [have] distinct traditions and resources to draw on in their interpretation of, and their response to, these changes” (Massey, 1991, p. 269). This aligns with Paulsen’s contention that “We find character in the ways these elements combine and endure, and in the salience and meaning that locals and outsiders give them... [and in] the tone of local life, encouraging or discouraging different patterns of action.” (2004, p. 245).

A short retrospection on particular aspects of how place is contextualized by social researchers in the disciplines of sociology and geography illustrates the theoretical context for my use of place character. A number of scholars have noted that studying the spatial aspect of

sociology can be a means to link micro and macro levels of social analysis. As Anthony Giddens (1984) recognized, places are made through human practices and institutions even as they help to make those practices and institutions. For example, the accessibility of natural resources such as coal and water shaped Pittsburgh's development as an industrial city in the 1700s and 1800s. In turn, residents who profited from the coal built industries that continue to shape the economic landscape (in steel, coal and banking) of Pittsburgh today. According to Agnew and Duncan a place provides people with "something to hold on to" and serves as a constant as social, economic and political change occurs at the national and global levels (1989). When Pittsburgh lost much of its steel industry jobs in the 1980s due to economic globalization of the industry, the practices and institutions that defined the corporate center in city's downtown "Golden Triangle" did not shift in the same way that the deindustrialization dramatically reorganized communities and residents' ways of life along Pittsburgh's Monongahela Valley (Haller, 1998).

In the lived experiences that make up local communities, places also are organized through the language and production of particular imagery about meanings and values associated with that specific place. Gieryn (2000) notes the imagery that creates a "neighborhood" is not inherent in any arrangement of streets and houses, but is always evolving based on how people live in and talk about a community. The language used to describe a place can become real as practices and experiences become part of the built environment. Richard Shein (1997) refers to places as examples of a "discourse materialized." In his study of how Ashland Park, Kentucky is defined as a "suburb," this discourse is revealed in the landscape architecture, historic preservation, neighborhood associations, insurance mapping, zoning and consumption that create a specific place (Shein, 1997). While the material discourse that develops a place can be constraining, these structures are countered by the agency of community members (Shein, 1997).

Individuals develop a sense of identity and the awareness of opportunities to express their agency within the contours of a place. Individual identity and agency often are revealed in social practices of lived experiences. As Dolores Hayden (1995) notes, people's knowledge and experiences in particular landscapes intertwine the sense of place with the politics of space. Studying the built urban landscape in Los Angeles, Hayden traced the struggles and responses for racial, ethnic and gender equality in housing options, involvement in the workforce, and places of work. Other scholars, too, have shown how the politics that defined particular community spaces influenced the perspectives of people both directly and indirectly involved in

struggles over their social and political control (Keith and Pile, 1993). For example, resident opposition to redevelopment of London's "Docklands" boroughs in the later 1980s- early 1990s was shaped by the lack of local representation in the decision making processes (Keith and Pile, 1993). With its location directly on the Thames River, Dockland community groups organized a People's Armada with barges that visibly conveyed that residents were economically and culturally connected to the area and challenged their lack of inclusion in decisions about redevelopment (Keith and Pile, 1993).

My utilization of place character fits into the sociological literature on place because of its focus on the meanings and actions that create the specificity of a distinct locale (Paulsen, 2004). While there is a growing body of research examining response to "big box" retail development and its economic impact at levels ranging from the national to the local, this research has not utilized a sociological/geographical analytical framework. Even the research examining community reaction and opposition to retail store development has virtually ignored how community members identify with, respond to, and use community place to articulate their response to "big box" retail development. My research fills this gap by identifying how a community's place character informs community members' responses to Wal-Mart store development. Additionally, my analytical lens is enhanced by connecting local place character elements to aspects of national and global economic networks. The following sections provide explanation for the theoretical groundwork that informs my sociological imagination about the relationship between the global-national consumption based economic system and my research design and analytical efforts.

1.2 LOCAL-GLOBAL CITIZEN

This research utilizes globalization studies to assist in identifying the impact of economic globalization at the local level of lived experiences. Most research examining the impact of globalization focuses on large cities. I use globalization research to support the study of the political response to "big-box" retail development in the suburban community, which provides a different discourse of local place character.

Globalization is fundamentally altering all forms of human interaction in the 21st century. David Held and Andrew McGrew (2000) contend that globalization enhances the economic, political, and social relationships among countries. The current trend of globalization is one of increasing magnitude and intensity in which “states and societies become increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interaction” (Held and McGrew, 2000, p.3). This magnitude and intensity of global connections is most evident in the claim that “the constraints of social time and geographical space no longer appear to impose fixed barriers to many forms of social interaction and organization” (Held and McGrew, 2000, p.3). Examples like the increase in material trade, capital output, and movement of people across the globe at greater volume and speed show how the barriers of space and time have been greatly reduced. The role of the local in this new globalized world is of particular interest to researchers. David Harvey (1989) asserts that capitalists use the changing role of spatiality to increase the attractiveness of local places to attract highly mobile capital. This leads to new competition among local places (i.e. Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Boston) not just among states, regions or nations. Moreover, local places, particularly large cities, have become sites for the centralization of global economic power no longer limited by the fixed barriers of nation-states. Saskia Sassen (2001, p.6) notes that global cities such as New York, London and Tokyo are “where the work of globalization gets done”. These spaces are where the discourse of globalization is being produced, contextualized and interpreted in the economic, cultural and political experiences of everyday life (Isin, 2000; Sassen, 2001).

The reordering of social life along larger scales uncovers tension over individual rights afforded by citizenship, democracy, and identity previously defined by nation-state boundaries. Some researchers contend that scales are part of a static, hierarchical framework for structuring the world into local, regional, national and global levels. Scales are socially constructed and “a contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents...around relations of capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption” (Martson, 2000, p.220-221). These differing scales produce sites of contestation and reveal the spread of globalization not just in economic engagements, but also in political and cultural forms. The scale of the city (or local community) stands at the point where these political and cultural rights are now fought for, articulated, and denied as citizens are disconnected from the nation-state (Isin, 2000). Global corporations with locations in local communities can serve as

the symbolic representation of the influence of global commerce at the local scale of lived experience. Evelyn Ruppert (2000) writes that these organizations have the power at the local, national and global scales to engage in tactics and strategies that bypass democratic procedures, institutions, and traditions.

Despite the power of global corporations, local citizens have started to engage these corporations in dialogue and struggle over issues related to consumption. This struggle is not just over the purchasing of specific products but is related to a general issue of “what, where and how we consume” (Cohen, 2003, p. 91). Taken as a whole, consumption is very much tied to the organization of a city (community) and is part of what organizes the meanings, identity, and forms that define citizenship in that community.

1.3 SHIFTING SANDS: THE U.S. SOCIAL-ECONOMIC COMPACT

Community residents are affected by social, economic, and political activities that take place at larger national and global scales. Ultimately these actions manifest themselves at the local scale of lived experience. People define their community based on the social and structural realities at the level of the individual, or human scale. In recent history, U.S. communities were organized around a social-economic compact developed in the post World War II era that “promot[ed] maximum employment, production and purchasing power” (Cohen, 2003, p. 118). Elizabeth Cohen notes this confluence of economic, political and social integration around consumerism defined the post-WWII U.S. as a “consumer republic” because of the “consensus among business leaders, government policy makers, and organized labor, that had major consequences for how Americans made a living; where they dwelled; how they interacted with others; what, where and how they consumed; and the political authorities to whom they felt accountable” (Cohen, 2003, p.91).

Economic growth in the late 20th century was based largely on providing a critical mass of people with houses, roads, cars, furniture and appliances. This economic philosophy of consumerism was expected to lead to a more prosperous and equitable society through greater consumption of U.S. goods and services (Cohen, 2003). With manufacturing based on mass consumption and large scales of production as the leading economic sector, there was a

pronounced orientation toward the production of housing, roads, shopping centers, new schools and other components of suburbanization (Sassen, 2001, p.337). These components accompanied the rise of a middle class who worked in the industries that built and purchased products thereby driving a rise in consumption (Cohen, 2003). The historical forms assumed by economic growth in the post WWII era—notably capital intensity, standardization of production, and suburbanization-led growth—contributed to expansion of a middle class (Sassen, 2001). This consumer’s republic impacted social, political and economic structures at all levels from the nation down to the community level, to the benefit of many—but not all—individuals. Between 1949 and 1973, the median and mean family income doubled (Cohen, 2003). Although specific proportions of the population—particularly racial and ethnic minorities—did not share in the post-war economic boom.

Since the 1970s, post-industrialization and a re-organization toward a global economy has created an important, but critical shift in the U.S. “consumer’s republic”. The socio-cultural practices associated with consumption have become further embedded in the local, lived experiences of most U.S. citizens, while economic and political structures have shifted from a national unit of manufacturing and production to a global unit. In addition, as Saskia Sassen contends, there has been a shift in national economic focus from manufacturing to services, especially finance and producer services (2001). This move to a global economic system has consequences for a U.S. economic system founded on a mass consumer-middle class structure:

New growth rests on the decline of what were once significant sectors of the national economy, notably key branches of manufacturing that were the leading force in the national economy and promoted the formation and expansion of a strong middle class... Today growth is based on an industrial complex that leads not to the expansion of a middle class but to increasing dispersion in the income structure and in the bidding power of firms and households (Sassen, 2001 p.338-339).

As U.S. national economic power is more embedded in the global economy, U.S. communities and their residents are further disconnected from economic and political systems that impact their existence (i.e. local job creation and community economic development). The vestiges of the consumer’s republic, its socio-cultural practices and spaces associated with the activities of consumption, are now the focus of economic growth and community identity for many localities (Zukin, 2004). In the post-industrial, service based global economy, this consumption philosophy has coalesced around the practice of shopping. Sharon Zukin notes that

in the U.S. “shopping has come to define who we, as individuals, are and what we, as a society, want to become” (2004, p. 8). The practices associated with shopping are now infused with political, social and cultural representation of individuals and communities. The organizational elements of shopping, such as material structures and consumer practices, serve as a site for political and societal debate based on the structuring and restructuring of built environments towards the ever increasing scale of shopping spaces. In this vein, local residents with varying views of “big box” retail development utilize aspects of shopping and consumption to shape their definitions of the local community as well as the subsequent response to the proposed retail development.

1.4 CONSUMING IN THE LOCAL

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the influence of consumption on U.S. society has interested social theorists of U.S. capitalism. The economist Thorstein Veblen discussed “conspicuous consumption” to describe how citizens of all social classes aspired to emulate the standards of elite society through personal displays of wealth (1899). After World War II, social researchers and public critics continued to study the impact of mass consumption on U.S. society (Cohen, 2003). John Kenneth Galbraith challenged the focus on individual private consumption at the expense of support for public services and institutions (1958). In the 1950s and 1960s, David Riesman contended that affluence and personal wealth were changing the relationship between the individual and society. Of note, Riesman focused on how consumption was shifting an individual’s orientation towards his/her respected peer groups and outsider expectations (1950; 1964). In the 1970s, David Bell returned to the concern that the focus on personal consumption was undermining the needs of the public good, particularly by straining social solidarity (1976).

In the mid-20th century, as social theorists studied the political, economic and cultural aspects of the U.S. consumer society, the spaces to participate in the growing mass consumption were increasingly moved from urban, center city areas out to the expanding suburban communities. The U.S. consumer society was one built on political and economic support through the growth of the suburban type of decentered, automobile-bound city (Zukin, 1998).

New spaces of consumption were built in these suburbs in the form of the shopping center. “This period’s archetypal consumption space is the shopping centre—a multipurpose, greenfields development that maximizes rentable retail space in large clusters in large clusters of stores surrounded by fairly homogeneous residential communities” (Zukin, 1998, p.828).

Like the urban shopping districts preceding them before WWII, suburban shopping centers relied on innovations in transport, building, and display to increase their growth (Zukin, 1998). The first shopping centers, developed in Kansas City and Los Angeles, were built as amenities to attract affluent residents to buy homes in new communities (Longstreth, 1997). The suburban synthesis of mass consumption and family-focused lifestyle provided a cultural context for ever more rapid suburbanization (Zukin, 1998). Suburban communities are now the site of retail growth occurring in strip malls housing national chain businesses and stand-alone “big box” stores situated along transportation corridors of consumption. These communities still hold the vestiges of past U.S. consumption patterns, such as large retail malls and smaller strip malls with spaces leased by locally owned businesses. Yet, today these forms of retail are challenged by the stand-alone “big box” stores that offer everything from toys, electronics, and office supplies to hardware.

Historically, consumption spaces were more than “places to get stuff; they were places to meet, places to go, places in which to define your aspirations and to learn how to behave” (Hine, 2005). Consumption spaces thus include a geographic element. Consumption involves spatial relations of place that impact a symbolic sense of community, social practices, individual identities, and political claims (Williams et al., 2001). Consumption is in the sense that, as Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde (2001, p.3) argue, it “is better understood for its symbolic and communicative significance than for its capacity to meet practical needs”. Consumption shapes routine, everyday practices such as food purchases, which are impacted by the store location and product selection of local grocery stores (Miller et al., 1998). As Miller et al. remark, consumption choices and their relations to particular places also influence individual identity since “the material culture that is a shopping site becomes itself a form through which the nature of such identity is discovered and refined” (1998, p.187). Further as Nestor Garcia Canclini (2001) notes, the constructed nature of consumption and the interactions surrounding consumption can be politicized. “To consume is to participate in an arena of competing claims for what society produces and the ways of using it” (Canclini, 2001, p. 39). The politics of

consumption transform ordinary consumers into citizens seeking identity and voice in the arena of global economic activity experienced at the local level.

In this research, I examine geographies of consumption at the community level as these are shaped by both macro-societal and micro-individual levels of interaction and response. In general, social geography and consumption research focus on either the macro (structural) or the micro (individual) level of social experience. I explore macro and micro processes as they affect the level of the community, providing additional evidence of how place shapes social experiences. This research examines how “big box” stores disrupt and, thereby reveal, the material, symbolic and practical elements of suburban communities. This redefinition occurs around issues of community identity, individual affiliation to the broader community, and engagement in the larger U.S. consumer-based society.

1.5 ALL TOGETHER NOW

While my research focuses on one particular local response, this is a kernel in a larger social movement against “big box” retail development, particularly Wal-Mart, and against excess consumption. Research on community opposition generally focuses on the community where a proposed Wal-Mart will be situated (Halebsky, 2004). This research is unique in that it captures the response to a proposed Wal-Mart not just in the community where it will be physically sited, but also in communities that physically and symbolically border the area.

This research adds to the sociological bridge, built by Gieryn, into the geographical sphere of social analysis. By studying community response to “big box” retail development I hope to answer the question: how does a geographic location become ascribed with a definition of community? Utilizing Paulsen’s place character element as an analytic tool to understand a local response to potential development of a Wal-Mart Supercenter, I examine definitions of community as they relate to issues of consumption practices and community relations. The following chapters detail this analysis. After describing the research design and methodological framework for this study in Chapter two, I present my research findings in three chapters. Chapter three is an ethnographic and GIS description of the local communities in my study. Chapter four explains the analytical framework of place character which is elaborated in Chapter

five for community relations and Chapter six for consumer practices. In the conclusion, I explain the implications of my findings for a sociology of place in the contemporary U.S.

2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

My research design explores place character, drawing on a research strategy proposed by Krista Paulsen (Paulsen, 2004, p.243). Focusing on the intersection of culture and locality, she challenges social researchers to examine how the local context of community is articulated and identified. Paulsen proposes varied techniques for identifying “the seemingly ephemeral stuff that place meanings are made of and for observing character in action” (Paulsen, 2004, p.246). I utilize two of her suggested methodological strategies: studying local response to an outside element or exogenous force and learning from local accounts, in order to understand place character in a set of communities.

First, I study community response to an exogenous force to view “the way locales respond to events and entities...[which] reveals how residents understand what is and is not appropriate for a place” (Paulsen, 2004, p. 257). I use the Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck township as an exogenous force to see how residents identify and understand the place character of their communities. A proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter development has attracted media attention in the Pittsburgh area because of the opposition from residents in surrounding communities. These communities, along with Kilbuck, I collectively term the Ohio River communities. Such massive development portends change in both physical community environments and socio-cultural practices and generates substantial public discourse on what a community is and should be (Paulsen, 2004). As Paulsen notes, the history of cities and communities carry physical and symbolic details of how places were altered by individuals, technological advancements and industrial elements (2004). While current interest in community response to big box development centers on the potential negative impact on communities, it represents the latest incantation of how communities battle so-called progress and growth in the name of community character and lived experiences.

Second, following Paulsen's suggestion, I use local accounts gathered in interviews with Ohio River community residents to assess the meanings that they give to their communities. Local accounts reveal the meanings that residents give to the material and lived realities of their communities (Paulsen, 2004). I interviewed residents about their sense of the physical location, their emotions and feelings about the community, and their view of local activities which reinforced the community's interpersonal relations. I supplemented this with historical accounts found in media sources and promotional materials, such as advertising for housing plans. These gave me information on the historical legacies of ideas, social practices and actions in the communities.

Third, in addition to Paulsen's strategies, I also assessed the place character of Ohio River Boulevard communities by conducting a limited observational and visual ethnography of the area from May 2004 to July 2005. I spent mornings, afternoons and evenings in the local areas. I did not live in the communities, but spent enough time over the course of one year to feel the ebbs and flow of local life as spring days stretched into the lazy activities of summer, and then the movement of school kids and sporting events in the fall, to the stark quiet in the winter months. I purposefully kept a "visitor/outsider gaze" on the communities in order to notice elements that build community life, but often fade into the background of a local person's vision. Elements like the colorful banners hung above Beaver street proclaiming the fall harvest festival in Sewickley, posters stapled to telephone poles in Ben Avon announcing a community 5K run, or the community notes housed in a weather resistant announcement board in front of the Emsworth borough building all served as opportunities to identify and attempt to capture a community's place character.

2.1 WAL-MART AS EXOGENOUS FORCE

In both academic sources and the popular media, charting Wal-Mart's impact on community landscape and the local economy is a growing venture. Thus, it is likely that media accounts shaped resident perceptions of the company's impact in the Kilbuck area. When residents identified issues such as changes in local traffic patterns, shopping habits of local residents, utilization of community business districts, or support of local grocery stores, these issues were

likely framed by larger understandings of Wal-Mart as a company. In the following sections I examine media accounts of Wal-Mart, highlighting the company's impact on the U.S. grocery industry. The company's expansion in this particular sector has promoted a re-organization of the industry at all levels, from the grocery employee to the competing grocery companies.

Compared to other retail companies, Wal-Mart has received the most opposition to its choices for store locations across the country, although there are no exact statistics on how often particular Wal-Mart superstores have faced organized opposition. Too, it is difficult to obtain the exact number of places where Wal-Mart has faced community opposition, because these controversies usually occur in small towns and cities where media outlets are limited (Halebsky, 2002). There are two sources of information about the extent of community opposition to Wal-Mart. One study found that "grassroots organizations in close to 100 communities across the country have mounted campaigns to keep Wal-Mart out or to get the company to modify its design or consider a downtown location" (Muller and Humstone, 1996, p.3). And an international organization, Sprawl-Busters, which serves as a clearinghouse of information on community opposition to retail sprawl resulting from superstore development across the U.S. and Canada, claims that as of February 2006, 277 communities in the U.S. and Canada had defeated the development of a superstore in their community (Sprawl-Busters, 2006).

Sam Walton opened his first Wal-Mart Discount City in Rogers, Arkansas (Ortega, 2000). Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s he located stores in small Southern towns (Ortega, 2000). Communities welcomed Wal-Mart because of the perception that it would bring economic growth and marketed themselves for consideration as a location (Ortega, 2000). Wal-Mart representatives, starting with Sam Walton, secured concessions from communities in order to build. These included breaks on property taxes, use of tax-exempt bonds to finance construction, infrastructure subsidies, and rezoning (Ortega, 2000, Good Jobs First, 2005). Even in the early years of company growth, Wal-Mart analyzed data to determine just "how many miles away each store could draw customers, and just how densely the company could saturate and area with stores (Ortega, 2000, p.166). The focus was on towns where Wal-Mart could control the local community market (Ortega, 2000).

2.1.1 Community Food Fight: at the intersection of economics, grocery and labor

Wal-Mart is the nation's leading discount department store chain and the model to follow as a superstore retailer. Over the past 30 years, it has grown from a small chain of stores in Arkansas to the world's largest company with \$295 billion in annual sales (Bernhardt, et al. 2005). This accounts for 2 percent of the U.S. GDP (Zakaria, 2005). In 2002, 82% of American household made at least one purchase at a Wal-Mart store (Business Week, 2003). For the fiscal year ending January 31, 2006, the company earned over \$11.2 billion in net income (Wal-Mart Annual Report 2006). In 2004, Wal-Mart imported \$18 billion dollars worth of merchandise from 6000 suppliers in China, (Zakaria, 2005) which ranks it as the sixth largest export market behind Germany (Elliot and Powell/Shenzhen, 2005). Wal-Mart accounts for at least 10% of China's exports to the U.S. and one percent of the country's GDP (gross domestic product) (Cohn, 2005). Wal-Mart is the largest company in the world and, if it were a country, its GDP would rank 22nd in the world-just behind Belgium, Sweden, Turkey and Austria (Cohn, 2005).

Wal-Mart has become a major provider of grocery food and retail department store products in the international economy. As of January 2006, the company had 2285 stores located in ten countries (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). In some countries Wal-Mart acquires competitors, as in Brazil, or holds a majority interest, such as in Sieyu, a Japanese retail chain with 398 stores (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). In contrast, in China, Wal-Mart is building its own stores and has opened 56 in the country (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). Wal-Mart has its greatest concentration of international stores in Mexico with 774 stores (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). Worldwide, more than 100 million customers visit Wal-Mart stores every week (The Economist, 2004).

Since the early 1990s Wal-Mart has shifted its focus from building discount retail stores to building "Supercenter" stores. Since opening its first Supercenter in 1988, Wal-Mart now owns a 79% share of the U.S. Supercenter retail store category (Business Week, 2003). As of January 2006, Wal-Mart operates 1,980 Supercenters out of a total of 3,856 stores in the U.S. (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). A Supercenter consists of a regular Wal-Mart department store and a full-line grocery. A Supercenter may also include banking, video/DVD rental, fast food restaurants, dry cleaning, optical services, portrait studios, hair salons and income tax preparation (Graff, 1998). An average Wal-Mart Supercenter contains about 170,000 sq feet with about one

third of the space devoted to groceries (Graff, 1998). Wal-Mart stores collectively total 459.2 million square feet of retail space in the U.S. (Wal-Mart Annual Report 2005).

With its combination of retail and grocery products, Wal-Mart Supercenters greatly impact grocery store retailers. A UBS Warburg survey found that Wal-Mart's entry into a local community grocery market means consumers see overall food prices drop by 13 percent (cited in Lindeman, 2003a). While Wal-Mart strives to keep its costs low, particularly to compete on food prices, retail analyst Steve Baumgarten claims that "Wal-Mart's whole purpose in food is not to make a ton of money on food. It's to bring people into their stores more often" (quoted in Lindeman, 2003a). While this means more in the pockets of consumers, it costs local grocery stores profits. For example, when a Wal-Mart opened in Cross Lanes, West Virginia it cost the local Kroger \$100,000 in weekly income, which was between 33 and 50 percent of the store's income (McCormick, 2003). Since 1992, 13,000 traditional U.S. grocery stores/supermarkets have closed (Business Week, 2003).

Grocery closures have been attributed not only to the aggressive pricing strategies at Wal-Mart but also to the pay disparity between Wal-Mart and grocery stores that have a unionized workforce. Union stores on average, pay their workers 30% more than Wal-Mart (Business Week, 2003). Increasingly Kroger stores and other national chains cite competition from big-box stores moving into grocery sales as a reason to hold or lower labor costs (McCormick, 2003). With health care coverage and pension benefits, unionized grocery workers cost their employers more even if their hourly wage is similar to that at Wal-Mart. For example, a study by Strategic Resource Group found that Kroger stores in West Virginia pay workers an average of \$6 an hour more than Wal-Mart (cited in McCormick, 2003). In other parts of the U.S this difference can run as high as \$10-14 per hour for unionized grocery workers, compared to Wal-Mart workers. (McCormick, 2003). This translates into a huge percentage of a grocery store's operating costs. A 2002 Food Marketing Institute study estimated that 15.7 percent of average grocery stores sales and more than 50 percent of gross margin went to pay salary and benefits for employees (Lindeman, 2003a). A study by Retail Forward contends that the disparity in labor costs between Wal-Mart Supercenters and traditional grocery stores means that for every Wal-Mart Supercenter that opens in the next five years, two grocery stores will close (Schneider and ElBoghdady, 2003). Over the next five years, the grocery industry could lose 2000 more stores or about 400 a year. The resulting industry shift could allow Wal-Mart to

capture 35 percent of grocery industry sales and double the number of Supercenters to 2250 by 2007 (Schneider and ElBoghdady, 2003).

Wal-Mart employs 1.6 million workers, which makes it the largest private employer in the U.S. (Wal-Mart Annual Report 2005), with more employees than GM, Ford and IBM combined (Zakaria, 2005). But this organization experiences a lot of turnover in its workforce. In 2003, 44% of Wal-Mart's 1.4 million workers left the company, meaning that 616,000 workers had to be replaced (Business Week, 2003). Some of this turnover can be attributed to the company's low wages. The company's full time hourly wage in 2005 was \$9.68, which is 37% lower than the national average of \$15.35 for production and non-supervisory workers (Anderson, 2005).

With such a large workforce, Wal-Mart has enormous influence over local labor market conditions. When Wal-Mart enters a local economy, it reduces local grocery wages by as much as \$8 an hour (Rodino, 2003). A 2005 Global Insight report found that when Wal-Mart enters a community, jobs decline in the market, grocery, and wholesale trades, but they increase in general merchandise for an overall net gain. This net gain is often attributed to the fact that Wal-Mart, a general merchandise store, employs more workers than the competing small businesses in the area.

According to Christopher Briem (2004), Walmart is the largest private employer in Pennsylvania. The state is currently home to 139 Wal-Mart stores, with 70 of these as Wal-Mart Supercenter stores (Wal-Mart annual report 2006). In the southwestern Pennsylvania region the local economy and unionized workforce have felt the impact of Wal-Mart's Supercenter growth. To better accommodate its expansion in the region, in 2003 Wal-Mart built a new distribution center in Steubenville, Ohio, making use of state and local incentives including highway and sewer improvements, job creation tax credits, and tax exemption for equipment (Lindeman, 2003; Good Jobs First, 2004). When the jobs were advertised for the center, 10,000 applications were received, 2,700 applicants were interviewed, and 389 people were hired for jobs starting at \$12 an hour (Lindeman, 2003).

Building a Supercenter in Kilbuck Township aligns with Wal-Mart's desire to build stores in small cities of 100,000 to 200,000 people and sell merchandise to a mass middle market (Helyar, 2003). A grocery industry trade journal, *Market Scope*, reports that between 2001 and 2003 Wal-Mart grew from 4 to 13 grocery-equipped stores in the Pittsburgh area (Copeland,

2004). In this time period its share of the grocery market increased from 2.7 to 15.1 percent while Giant Eagle, the Greater Pittsburgh region's leading grocery chain, shrunk from 52 to 44 percent (Copeland, 2004). As of November 2005, there were 14 Wal-Mart Supercenters within a 30 mile radius of the city of Pittsburgh. Giant Eagle has 69 grocery stores in the same radius (Giant Eagle corp., 2005). In the Pittsburgh region, all Giant Eagle corporate stores are unionized by Local 23 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union and it is estimated that 35 to 40 percent of all grocery stores in the Pittsburgh region are unionized (Lindeman, 2003a).

2.1.2 Footprints on the land: spats over sp(l)ace

A physical description of a superstore is necessary to understand its spatial impact on communities. Superstores, also known as megastores or big box stores, are retail establishments that sell general merchandise but are significantly bigger than the same general merchandise stores built twenty years ago. Today there are many types of superstores, including drug stores (e.g. Rite Aid, Eckerd), hardware and supply stores (e.g. Home Depot, Lowes), toy stores (e.g. Toys-R-Us), office supply stores (e.g. Office Depot, Office Max), and discount department stores (e.g. Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Target). Superstores, especially department stores, have historically been built on the fringes of small towns and cities or as part of retail sprawl indicative of suburban areas. Superstores range from 10,000 square feet for drugstores to between 100,000 and 200,000 square feet for Wal-Mart and other discount department stores. The construction of these stores follows a similar pattern: single story, windowless, box-like buildings with a minimum of decoration, landscaping, or architectural style. In addition, acres of blacktop parking surround each superstore. The largest (in terms of profit and number of stores) are all part of regional, national or global chains.

Citizens in U.S. communities, big and small, have challenged the development of big box stores for a variety of reasons. In his book *Slam Dunking Wal-Mart* (1999), Al Norman cites various concerns associated with the impact of increasing retail store development in communities across the U.S., including:

- Disruption of a community's way of life
- Shift in a community's identity to something not accepted
- Decline in locally owned businesses
- Increased road congestion, traffic patterns, use of automobiles
- Homogenization of places, with a loss of a sense of place
- Money spent at stores does not circulate in community
- Increase in low paying service jobs

From a sociological perspective these concerns reflect the material, practical and symbolic characteristics that define a community. These characteristics motivate local ordinances and referendums to limit business size, the percentage of retail space available for groceries, rezoning property, and create aesthetic requirements. “Battles with it (Wal-Mart) will not subside as long as there is a conflict between residents’ desire to balance jobs, housing and commercial development on a scale that supports their quality of life, and a Wal-Mart business model that demands huge commercial developments that ripple through local economies” (Karjanen, 2004).

U.S. communities are fighting back in an effort to maintain their town’s character. While not all is specifically directed at Wal-Mart, the backlash is against chain stores that create homogeneity and disrupt the unique characteristics that make a community. “The reaction is largely driven by sameness,” says Dick Outcalt, a partner in Outcalt & Johnson Retail Strategies in Seattle. “The populace is more empowered protecting the feel of a community because they realize that commercially, aesthetically and from the property-value standpoint, uniqueness has value” (Quoted in El Nasser, 2004). Community leaders in Bristol, Rhode Island passed an ordinance stating that chain stores can not fill more than a 2500 square foot storefront unless they apply for a special-use permit from the zoning board, get a “certificate of appropriateness” from the Historic District Commission, and meet appearance standards. These regulations forced a Dunkin’ Donuts franchise owner to change the traditional pink and orange logo to gold leaf letters on the outdoor façade to better blend in with colonial architecture on the community’s main street, Hope Street (El Nasser, 2004). Larger cities have also worked to regulate chain stores. San Francisco passed a citywide ordinance to regulate formula retail—defined as chains of 12 or more stores. “We don’t want San Francisco to look like Trenton, N.J. or Topeka, Kansas,” says Ed Bedard, vice president of the Hayes Valley Neighborhood

Association. “Part of what is so lovable about Hayes Valley is that there is no Starbucks here” (Quoted in El Nasser, 2004).

Historically, it was not the company’s political goal to fight communities that do not want a local Wal-Mart. In his autobiography, Sam Walton, Wal-Mart’s founder, stated “we have almost adopted the position that if some community, for whatever reason, doesn’t want us in there, we aren’t interested in going in and creating a fuss. I encourage us to walk away from this kind of trouble because there are just too many other good towns out there who do want us” (Walton, 1992). Walton’s words are not heeded by the organizational leaders who succeeded him after his 1992 death. Even growing local restrictions have not stopped Wal-Mart from working to locate stores in new communities. The company has turned to building locations in more urban areas, like Chicago and New York City and also locating Supercenters in California. Between 2000 and 2005, Wal-Mart spent over \$4 million to defeat community referendums developed to disrupt/stop the company’s Supercenter growth in California communities (Shameless, 2005). Wal-Mart won 22 of the 27 referendums. One of the five that Wal-Mart lost was over development in Inglewood. The company used a referendum in Inglewood to try to have voters approve the project, which was the size of 17 football fields (Shameless, 2005; Karjanen, 2004). The company spent more than \$1 million in support of their efforts to try and overturn a city council ruling and exempt the project from an Environmental Impact Review or a public hearing (Shameless, 2005; Karjanen, 2004). “I have not witnessed the kind of bullying that I saw in Inglewood by any other corporation or business that wanted to come in” said Rev. Norman Johnson, Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Los Angeles (quoted in Associated Press, 2004; Shameless, 2005). On April 6, 2004 residents voted down the initiative 7,069 to 4,575 (Karjanen, 2004).

2.1.3 Choosing communities

In most research on community opposition to Wal-Mart, the community where a proposed Wal-Mart will be situated is the location studied (Halebsky, 2004). Opposition to the proposed Kilbuck Wal-Mart, however, occurred not just in Kilbuck community where it is being built, but also in towns, villages and boroughs up and down a 10 mile stretch of Route 65, also known as Ohio River Boulevard in some communities. Community members in Leetsdale,

Osborne, Bell Acres, Sewickley, Edgeworth, Glenfield, Emsworth, Kilbuck Township, Ben Avon, Avalon, and Bellevue believed their lives would be impacted in various ways by the potential Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck Township. People in these communities raised concerns about the potential impact of the Wal-Mart development not just in their community, but in those around them. Asked how she identified her community, an interviewee responded as the “river valley community that stretches from Ambridge to Bellevue”. This response, coupled with knowledge about the membership of an opposition group, Communities First!, led me to identify the communities between Leetsdale and Bellevue as Ohio River communities.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

2.2.1 Triangulation

I chose multiple qualitative methods to obtain a more robust understanding of the issues related to community response. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, visual ethnography, and content analysis of printed materials are data collection techniques appropriate for capturing the varied elements that shape local place character. The use of multiple methods is termed triangulation. It is a valuable technique in qualitative studies since each approach allows me to examine the concepts from a slightly different perspective (Janesick, 1994). The use of multiple methods also helps to secure an in-depth understanding by bringing together data from the spoken word, written documentation, observed social activity, and visual imagery (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). My efforts are rooted in what Donald Altheide and John Johnson describe as analytic realism. They contend that the social world is interpreted by both the subjects and the qualitative researcher (1994). Analytic realism also is based on “the value of trying to represent faithfully and accurately the social worlds of phenomena studied” (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p.489). I tried to synthesize a representation of the social reality experienced by both myself and the subjects whom I engaged during this research.

2.2.2 Ethnographic Framework

My core data collection efforts were rooted in an ethnographic framework. There are multiple definitions of ethnography, but from a practical setting I draw on Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley's (1994) description of ethnography as having "a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomenon, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them; a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data... that has not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories; analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most" (p.248, bulleted list in original). I drew on these characteristics of ethnography for much of my data collection efforts. For example, the place character elements shifted and changed as I conducted interviews with community members positioned at varied relations to the potential Wal-Mart development. The varied positionality of these individuals exposed me to different themes and ideas. The recurrence of particular ideas, themes or examples served as the foundation for further analysis and understanding. If I had entered the research field with a predetermined set of analytic categories, my findings would be limited and not reflective of the distinctive elements that build social reality in the Ohio River communities.

I also gathered data using participant observation, visual ethnography, and content analysis of printed materials. I spent a lot of time in the Ohio River Boulevard communities. I traveled to the area for interviews, to take pictures, or just observe a couple times a week. As a participant observer I knowingly walked a fine line between participating and observing in both my interviews and my experiences spent in the communities. As a participant observer, I wrestled with how much information to disclose about myself while conducting research and how to engage in field events and activities which would locate me in relation to various group memberships (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). To capture the visual images that define the sociological makeup of the area, I spent time walking the streets of neighborhoods, taking time to notice how people utilized their community places. One hundred year old houses,

neighborhood sidewalks, empty storefronts, Starbucks outdoor tables, and brick paved streets were all parts that built the collective visual experience. I tried to be an explorer of the area, looking at the local landscape considered ordinary by the residents, for its extraordinary characteristics. As James Stillgoe challenges humans to see what lies outside:

“The whole concatenation of wild and artificial things, the natural ecosystem as modified by people over the centuries, the built environment layered over layers, the eerie mix of sounds and smells and glimpses neither natural or crafted—all of it is free for the taking, for the taking in (Stillgoe, 1998, p.2).

I spent time driving my car in the area. I drove Route 65 through the communities, as well as residential streets into the heart of the areas. I learned community landmarks and got lost on roads with names of historic individuals who built and shaped the economic and physical landscape of the Pittsburgh region. The last names of Mellon, Frick and Scaife, who shaped the development of the Pittsburgh region and local communities through their wealth, power and influence, are found here as well as present-day holders of social, economic and cultural power.

While not ethnographic in the truest sense of the term, I used visual methods to enrich my analysis. Thomas Gieryn (2000) contends that a place-sensitive sociology should also include a visual component. Examples of “maps, photographic images, bricks and mortar, landscapes and cityscapes,” he argues, are useful for interpretation and analysis (Gieryn, 2000, p.484). These visual materials are incorporated into the ethnographic description and analysis of the Ohio River communities in Chapter three.

I also collected demographic information using community level data from the 2000 U.S. Census. Information included racial diversity, home ownership rates, housing stock age, income statistics, educational achievement, and residents’ professions in the Ohio River Boulevard communities. This statistical information was integrated into the software program ARC GIS 9 (Geographic Information Systems). This program overlays demographic data on community maps creating a spatial analysis of demographic trends and information. I used the community level findings to confirm and contrast the visual ethnographic information I collected. The GIS data are presented in chapter three and provide a more complex picture of these Ohio River communities than does the visual representation captured through observation.

2.2.3 The Interview Process

My first interview was with an Emsworth community member. As a member of the opposition group, Communities First!, this individual made me aware of a community effort against the proposed Wal-Mart development. I was informed that the proposed site for the Wal-Mart development was in Kilbuck, an adjacent community to Emsworth and that Communities First! drew its membership from communities along the Ohio River Boulevard corridor. This interviewee led to other informants who lived in communities along the Ohio River Boulevard.

My initial interviews were with members of the Communities First! group from Sewickley, Glenfield, Allepo, and Bell Acres. I also had informal interviews or conversations over phone and email with Communities First! members from Sewickley and Avalon. In total, I collected data from eight members of the Communities First! group. These interviews provided me with an understanding of the opposition to the Wal-Mart development that expanded my initial sense that the concerns only involved increased traffic and environmental impacts. The interviewees also articulated concerns about community identities, excess consumption, the politics of shopping, and small business ownership which provided a framework for my analysis.

In addition to speaking to Communities First! members, I also believed it necessary to capture the perspective of small business owners. Of particular interest were small business owners in the area who sold products and services that directly overlap Wal-Mart's offerings. I also talked with community members who had knowledge or experience in community history, economic development, local business ownership, and political representation.

Along the ten mile stretch of Ohio River Boulevard, there are businesses directly on the boulevard in Bellevue, Avalon, Ben Avon, and Emsworth. These businesses include fast food chain restaurants, gas stations, a motel, small service-oriented businesses, and thrift stores. Additionally, Sewickley and Bellevue each have a central business district located off of Ohio River Boulevard. These business districts, each a couple of blocks in length, are located on the historical traffic artery of the communities in this area. This road, originally an old Indian path and part of the Conestoga Wagon trail, serves as an additional connection road among communities and is utilized mainly by local residents to avoid the traffic of Ohio River Boulevard. This road has different names in the different communities. The central business

districts in both Sewickley and Bellevue maintain small businesses that include independent grocery stores, restaurants, and antique stores.

I had my greatest success obtaining interviews with small business owners by walking into their stores. It was hard to say no to me when I was standing right in front of them, as opposed to over the phone. I secured all of my small business owner interviews in this manner. Two individual owners rejected my request for interviews but spent time talking about the issue to the point that I was able to take notes on their perspective. I focused most of my efforts on small business owners in Sewickley because it has a central business district in close proximity to the proposed Wal-Mart development. In addition, my interviewees indicated there was more concern about loss of potential business in the Sewickley business district. I was unsuccessful in securing interviews with business owners in Bellevue, but interviews with residents led me to believe there was not as great a concern about impact to these Bellevue business districts as in Sewickley.

Over the course of my data collection efforts, I interviewed community residents who owned businesses in product and service categories that would be directly impacted if Wal-Mart located in Kilbuck. I conducted formal interviews with store owners in the sectors of groceries, electronics, video/DVD rental, party supplies, and children's toys and games. I also had an informal conversation with an independent bookstore owner. I conducted additional interviews with small business individuals whose product and service categories do not directly overlap with Wal-Mart's items such as homemade gifts, small business services, and theatrical equipment. In total, I interviewed nine people with small businesses in Sewickley, Emsworth and Ben Avon. I also had conversations with three additional small business owners in Sewickley. With the exception of one, these owners also lived in the communities I was studying. These owners lived in Leetsdale, Bell Acres, Sewickley, Kilbuck Twp., Emsworth, and Ben Avon. Their dual identities as small business owner and community residents served me well to develop a richer understanding of community reaction to the proposed Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck.

I also wanted to capture the response of local residents who wanted the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck to proceed. Making connections with these people required me to draw on my own personal connections, as well as some ingenuity. I was able to utilize co-worker and friendship connections to create a sample of Wal-Mart supporters. I snowball sampled within

this group of respondents and was able to connect with additional community members. I interviewed ten community residents who were supportive of siting the Wal-Mart Supercenter in Kilbuck including some who supported the development, but with reservations. My attendance at a Communities First! press conference enabled me to meet the land owner, who is in contract with a development firm to build the Wal-Mart on his property in Kilbuck Twp. After a few emails, I was able to obtain his perspective on the issue through a formal interview. I interviewed residents from the communities of Osborne, Ben Avon, Ohio Twp., Kilbuck Twp., and Sewickley for this particular aspect of my research.

To get a better sense of how Wal-Mart works as an organization in relation to other organizations, I also talked with an individual whose company served as a vendor/supplier to Wal-Mart. This interview gave me the back story into Wal-Mart efforts to offer its customers “Always Low Prices”. Another part of this back story involves organized labors’ efforts to unionize Wal-Mart’s workforce. As was presented above, the entrance of Wal-Mart Supercenters in the Pittsburgh region has created challenges for the region’s other grocery store chains. My attendance at the aforementioned Communities First! press conference led me to a representative from the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). This individual served as a labor representative to a grocery store that would be most directly impacted if the Kilbuck Wal-Mart Supercenter was built. This interview provided me a clearer picture of UFCW’s efforts to organize Wal-Mart stores as well as how they participate in opposition to proposed Wal-Mart development.

During my data collection efforts, I conducted 27 formal interviews (see Table 1). These interviews were held at multiple settings in Ohio River Boulevard communities. Upon securing permission to interview community members, I always gave each individual the choice to determine the interview location. With the exception of my interviews with small business owners, all interviews were held in the homes of interviewees. Interviews with business owners occurred at their particular business locations. Interviews varied in duration from 25 minutes to 90 minutes in length.

Table 1. Formal interviewee information characteristics

| Respondent Relationship to Research Interest | Range of Years in Community | Number of interviewees | Communities represented |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Communities First! members | 4 years to 40+ | 8 | Allepo, Avalon, Emsworth, Glenfield, Sewickley |
| Small business owners | 20 to 50+ | 9 | Bell Acres, Emsworth, Ben Avon, Leetsdale, Kilbuck, Sewickley |
| Community Members | 2.5 to 50+ | 10 | Bell Acres, Ben Avon, Osbourne, Kilbuck, Ohio Township |

Note-four additional formal interviews were conducted with people not living in Ohio River Boulevard Communities.

2.2.4 Sampling Method

I used snowball sampling and location sampling to obtain interviews. I interviewed members of the Wal-Mart opposition group Communities First!, small business owners, and community residents who supported the Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck. I asked if the interviewee knew anyone who was aware of the proposed Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck and would be willing to talk to me about their perspective. For the remainder of my structured interviews, I used this type of snowball sampling in an attempt to draw respondents from personal networks. I probably missed certain perspectives since my contacts grew out of particular relationships. This likely created a bias, based on the personal connections and network size of my sample (Heckathorn, 2002). Even though my initial access point to community participants revolved around the community opposition, I was determined to find individuals in support of the proposed Wal-Mart development. To counter the potential bias of the snowball sampling methodology, I also utilized a location sampling since the target population, Ohio River community members was geographically concentrated (Heckathorn,

2002). I used location sampling methodology to reach community members in support of the proposed Wal-Mart development. These respondents were drawn from my ethnographic travels in the community and included community residents and business owners. Qualitative researchers acknowledge explicitly that each individual's interpretation of a social experience is created and given meaning through her particular understanding of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). I stopped sampling respondents when I reached saturation through repetition and confirmation of ideas, thoughts, and perspectives on issues addressed in the interview guide (Morse, 1994). This saturation of ideas does not imply a distribution of ideas through the community, only through my sample. A larger study, conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly the chain referral system of respondent-driven sampling (RDS), would provide greater understanding of the larger community perspective (Heckathorn, 1997).

I used an interview guide to collect the accounts and experiences of community members (a copy of which is included in the Appendix). I used a semi-structured interview structure to capture "the respondent's experience and interpretation of reality... in their own words rather than the in the words of the researcher" (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p.92). The information collected by using the semi-structured interview guide create an account of the respondent's experiences as they relate to the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck. "An account is the personal record of an event by the individual experiencing it. Fundamental to the philosophy of an account methodology is the recognition that people can and do comment on their experiences, and that these commentaries are acceptable as scientific data" (Brown and Sime, 1981, p.160). First, I asked about perceptions of the community and their connections to the community through activities and organizations. Then I asked about shopping practices and their knowledge and actions about the proposed Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck Twp. Some people said they had little information about the proposed development, so I did not ask them the questions in the second half of the interview guide. Consistent with semi-structured interviewing, I varied the interview structure in order to capture a respondent's perspective, since "ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words" provide a greater level of detail for analysis (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p.93).

I made it a point to inform all respondents that I was not a long term Pittsburgh resident, nor a resident of this particular Pittsburgh area. I used this outsider status to ask more in depth

questions about community development and community identity. Someone might say “Well you know what Sewickley is like”? I would reply “No, I am not from around here, what do you mean”? In past research projects with wives of locked out steelworkers in Ravenswood, West Virginia, it benefited me to speak of my working class roots and my identity with my hometown, Detroit. I used the description of my hometown affiliation to better identify with small business owners who talked about “just trying to make it”. But, there were times during this research that I tried to downplay my class background. While interviewing residents in wealthy communities, I consciously wore nicer clothing (which still wasn’t quite in-style enough) to the interview and stopped my verbal biography after saying I was Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pittsburgh.

I struggled with the decision to let people know my perspective on Wal-Mart. If an individual was supportive of Wal-Mart, chose to shop there, or was in favor of building a Wal-Mart in Kilbuck, I did not say anything. If someone expressed concern about Wal-Mart’s business practices, did not shop at Wal-Mart, and/or was not in favor of building the Kilbuck Wal-Mart, I did reveal myself as an opponent of Wal-Mart. I am not a blank slate on this issue; I am doing this research because of my concern for local communities and about Wal-Mart’s excessive growth. My interview guide covered Wal-Mart development issues in the second section of the guide, so by the time I got to these questions I usually had a good sense of their shopping habits. I knowingly stated my perspective on Wal-Mart to those individuals who were members of Communities First! early in their interviews. I made the assumption (and continue to believe) they were more willing to express their “true” feelings about Wal-Mart because we created more of a conversational interview, covering all my topics, but with more of an activist participatory tone from both the individual and myself. I do not know if people who were supportive of Wal-Mart would have changed their comments or perspective had they known my thoughts. I thought I would capture their “honest” feelings if they were not trying to connect them with mine. I am sure the opposite is true as well. I think I was successful with this approach because upon completing one of my last interviews, a Wal-Mart supporter and shopper asked me “So what do you think of Wal-Mart?” After telling him my perspective, he commented “wow, I didn’t get that from your comments during the interview.”

2.2.5 Documenting additional sources of data

This research effort would not be complete without chronicling to some extent the economic, social, cultural and political impact of Wal-Mart. During the course of my project I attempted to understand Wal-Mart's growth and business practices. I collected information about the company's social and cultural influences from watching and reading media reports on the company's actions and practices. PBS' Frontline newsmagazine produced a documentary in 2004 on Wal-Mart and the impact of its business practices on U.S. and Chinese companies. I also observed a local protest at a recently opened Wal-Mart in the Pittsburgh region in February 2004. The protest organization, Raging Grannies, held an event where they sang political protest songs with lyrics challenging the labor and buying practices of Wal-Mart. I observed and took notes while the women, dressed in flamboyant hats and boa style scarves, serenaded Wal-Mart customers and store representatives at the entrance/exit points of the store. My observation of the event was noted by the local media. My quotes and comments about the fact that I was conducting research on community response to Wal-Mart development became part of the story published in the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* the next day.

Local coverage of the issues surrounding the proposed Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck was of greatest interest to me. Both major Pittsburgh newspapers covered the issue, with the Pittsburgh *Tribune Review* providing more consistent coverage than competing daily newspaper, the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette*. I also collected materials from state and regional news sources and national media outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *MSNBC.com* and *CNN.com*. Collectively this information provides a glimpse into what is the economic, cultural and spatial impact of Wal-Mart on the U.S. and abroad.

2.2.6 Historical data collection

A final piece to my research puzzle included capturing a historical perspective of how the Ohio River Boulevard communities were created. Researching the historical development of these communities provides a stronger foundation to build an analysis of community resident's actions and responses, since Harvey Molotch et al. note "that social structure does not stand distinct from human action but itself arises through human action, including mundane practices. ...

humans draw, per force, from existing conditions—that is, from the structures resulting from their prior actions” (2000, p.793). Community identities reflect past experiences. Pittsburgh’s historical identity as the “smoky” or “steel” city or Detroit’s as the “motor” city shape current economic and cultural realities for these cities.

Archives at the Heinz Regional History Center, the Pittsburgh History archival website found on the University of Pittsburgh’s Digital library and the personal collection of a community historian in Ohio Township serve as primary sources. Two Allegheny County published histories form the basis of my historical narrative content. Some but not all of the Ohio River communities were noted in *History of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Including its early settlements and progress to the present time; a description of its historic and interesting localities; its cities, towns and villages; religious, educational, social and military history; mining, manufacturing and commercial interests; improvements, resources, statistics, etc. Also portraits of some of its prominent men, and biographies of many of its representative citizens.* 1889 and *History of Allegheny County, PA* by S.W. Durant 1876. Inclusion or exclusion of particular communities resulted from whether the community was incorporated or carved out of surrounding townships prior to printing of these local county histories. According to Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves in their book, *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, the production of U.S. state, county and local histories was very popular during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1997). Published histories were often available at local public institutions for viewing by residents (such as libraries, churches and schools) (Heinz History Center researcher, 2006). While the publications focus on documenting the development of local communities in Allegheny County, they also include biographies of county residents. Szucs and Hargreaves contend that individuals paid a subscription to be included in the local histories. These individuals varied from the most prominent in the community to immigrants “who considered it a mark of success to be included in the typical local histories” (Szucs and Hargreaves, 1997, p.458). While I utilized these documents for their narrative descriptions of community formation, it is interesting to note the variations in community descriptions, particularly discussions related to residents who settled communities, started local businesses or organized community institutions like churches, schools and the post office. These historical data sources do not provide an exhaustive account of any community’s formation, growth or evolution. Given another time and another interest, my selection and interpretation of materials

would likely be different within these sources. Even with these qualifications, my analysis can provide insight.

2.2.7 Coding and analysis

I recorded interviews with a digital voice recorder. The digital interview files were downloaded into Voice Studio software on my home computer and converted for download into Adobe's Audio software program for transcription. After transcription, files were imported into NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing), a qualitative data analysis software package for coding. I created codes ("nodes" in NUD*IST terminology) based on my inductive reading of themes in the data such as "neighborhood description", "concerns about growth", or "education and community". I also built nodes deductively around ideas from secondary literature, such as shopping habits, Wal-Mart opinions, and small business support practices. After spending some time with this coded data, I became frustrated with the level of parsing of interviewee's thoughts, words, and experiences into smaller and smaller phrases and individual sentences. While NUD*IST was useful in organizing the data, the coding effort relied on my ability to identify the codes and analyze the respondent's comments and I was worried about losing the connection of larger meanings and ideas to the secondary literature and my observations. So I took the time to reread the interviews intact to think about words, description, and experiences in a more intact structure. During this process, the larger themes became salient. These included discussions of what builds definitions of communities, the practices, politics and the meanings that make up the experience of shopping, and the construction of public and private spaces in communities. These codes served as the building blocks for my themes and analysis of place character and how it was revealed in community members' responses.

Data gathered through other collection techniques were coded and analyzed along with the interview material. The process of drawing information from the different methodological techniques was an iterative one. The notes, comments or ideas from my participant observation data pushed my analysis of the interview data. At the same time I compared the visual imagery and ethnographic descriptions of the neighborhoods to historical materials documenting the growth and development of the same communities. This concurrent, iterative process of coding

and analysis enabled me to draw connections across images, practices, and ideas that would not have been possible otherwise.

2.2.8 Limitations and Concerns

Of critical import for qualitative researchers is the ability to prove that their research efforts are valid and reliable. Limitations are inherent when choosing a particular research design over other alternatives. In general, reliability describes the tendency of a measuring procedure to behave in a consistent manner each time it is applied. Qualitative research can improve reliability by “documenting his or her procedure” (Kirk and Muller, 1990, p.121). The previous sections of this chapter document my efforts and provide a roadmap that other researchers could follow in an effort to understand place character in other studies.

Validity describes whether or not a procedure measures what it is supposed to measure. In qualitative research the expectation is that the empirical measure will reflect the real meaning of the concepts under consideration (Babbie, 1998). In this research, the question can be asked “how do I know I fully measured ‘place character’?”. In qualitative studies, the fundamental tools used are a researcher’s powers of observation and/or an ability to ask appropriate questions at the right time (Vaught et. al., 2000). As discussed earlier, I used multiple data collection techniques in order to build a collective understanding of local place character elements. These multiple techniques helped me identify these place character elements in written documents, the spoken word, observation of social activity, and visual imagery. I take comfort in the fact that I told more than one interviewee about a community activity, event or shop and received a reply such as “I was not aware of that, I usually don’t go there.” I think I was crossing community boundaries (spatially, culturally and politically) with such regularity that I did not realize that the actual community members do not normally do the same.

Utilizing multiple qualitative methods to gather an understanding of the issues related to community response helped me capture the varied elements that shape local place character. While my data came from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, visual ethnography, and content analysis of printed materials, other researchers can apply other methodologies including focus groups and survey research. Even though I used varied methods for my data collection effort, I worry about what could have been done, what was actually done,

what I missed, and how I influenced this social world. I interviewed 27 people and talked to many more, but I am sure different perspectives on this issue may yield a different analysis. Even within this repetition of ideas, some bias is likely. I cannot ignore the interplay and influence of race, class, gender, and cultural positions of both myself and my respondents on this research (Denzin, 1994). My positionality shaped thoughts and opinions that guided this research. I have the financial means to make a political statement through my shopping habits. I believe many, but not all, of my interview respondents can make consumption choices not directly tied to financial situations. While my analysis provides insight into community resident response to an exogenous force, the findings can not necessarily be generalized to communities with different configurations of race, class, gender, and nationality. My sample is a product of my connections and also relations to the group opposed to Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck. Among these respondents, there was class and gender variation. There were differences in cultural influences based on class distinctions as well as longevity in the Pittsburgh region. My sample lacks racial diversity, due in part to my sampling methods, but more importantly, to the extremely low proportion of racial and ethnic minorities in these communities. Thus, my findings may not hold true in more racially diverse communities. For example, the successful political efforts in 2004 to stop Wal-Mart development in Inglewood, California, likely involved a different racial and ethnic configuration of participants. My research findings may not be directly applicable to all situations, but should add to the discourse and debate on community identity and planning, local social movement opposition to global organizations, and the politics of shopping.

3.0 OHIO RIVER COMMUNITIES: PROTECTING THE IMAGERY, REALITY AND LOCALITY

Of the data collection techniques employed to discover the place character elements of Ohio River communities, visual ethnography, is used to describe a “road trip” through the communities. As I traveled through these communities I observed visual variations in economic, spatial, and structural forms. As an outsider in these communities, I was aware of the diversity of socio-economic characteristics in this area. At first glance, the area presents as older, established communities with homogeneous middle class populations. This perception of a homogenous area is also expressed by many residents in my interview sample. However, with my “outsider” gaze, I could see the subtle but important social, economic and cultural distinctions in these communities.

The following sections provide an ethnographic journey through the Ohio River communities. This description helps to situate the physical and symbolic perceptions of the communities that underpin local definitions of place character. Included with the ethnographic account are demographic data presented through GIS graphs. GIS graphs provide additional knowledge about community descriptors by displaying demographic data in a spatial format. Coupling the GIS data with ethnographic community descriptions reveals distinctive sets of community arrangements. Particular communities along the Ohio River maintain similar socio-economic characteristics where they share community boundaries, while other neighboring Ohio River communities show interesting disparities in housing structure and overall community organization. These characteristics help contextualize the varied response of Ohio River communities to the proposed Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck.

3.1 TRACING COMMUNITY HISTORY

The growth and development of the Ohio River Boulevard communities is intertwined with the economic, political, and cultural activities that shaped Pittsburgh’s development. What would become Pennsylvania and one of its major cities, Pittsburgh, was shaped by both the battles of the French and Indian War and then the Revolutionary War. After the Revolutionary war the Pittsburgh area was settled by Revolutionary war veterans paid in land instead of money because money had no value (Phillips, 1992). The land was divided into districts and each district was named after the surveyor who laid out his district into lots of approximately 300 acres (Phillips, 1992). Some of these original names still remain, such as Leetsdale, founded by Daniel Leet in 1792.

Table 2. Ohio River communities incorporation dates

| | Year Incorporated into Borough/Twp |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Avalon | 1875 |
| Bellevue | 1867 |
| Ben Avon | 1892 |
| Emsworth | 1896 |
| Glenfield (originally Camden) | 1876 |
| Kilbuck Twp. | 1869 |
| Leetsdale | 1792 |
| Sewickley | 1853 |

Source: Phillips, 1992

As the United States industrialized, it benefited from resources of the Pittsburgh area. During the mid-1800s communities along the Ohio River were inhabited by various numbers of farmers and small merchants. Sewickley was already a small village, serving farmers and travelers (both by land and rivers) going to Pittsburgh and points west (Hardie, 1998). In July 1851, the Pittsburgh-Fort Wayne, IN-Chicago railroad line was laid through the Ohio River communities (Van Trump, 1975). This modernization paved the way for Pittsburgh residents to move away from the city. As a growing industrial center, Pittsburgh contained residents who lived with the byproducts of coke, iron and steel production. The use of coal to power the city’s industries covered the city in smoke and pushed many wealthy residents to look for a way out.

The population of Sewickley doubled between 1850 and 1860. This growth likely resulted from the ability to travel between Pittsburgh and Sewickley on a 30 minute railroad trip (compared to 4 hours pre-railroad) (Hardies, 1998). Other communities along the Ohio River corridor experienced population growth from 1890 to 1940, but all started to decline after 1950. Table 1 shows U.S.census data from various years for these communities.

Table 3. Population totals for ORC communities, selected years.

| <u>Years</u> ORC Communities | 1890 | 1900 | 1910 | 1930 | 1940 | 1950 | 2000 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Avalon | 804 | 2130 | 4317 | 5940 | 6155 | 6463 | 5294 |
| Bellevue | 1418 | 3416 | 6323 | 11604 | 10488 | 10252 | 8770 |
| Ben Avon | | 859 | 1828 | 2565 | 2516 | 2186 | 1917 |
| Emsworth | | 958 | 1510 | 3128 | 2765 | 2709 | 2598 |
| Glenfield | 718 | 905 | 984 | 870 | 911 | 950 | 228 |
| Kilbuck | 2143 | 1295 | 1331 | 1520 | 1772 | 1651 | 730 |
| Leetsdale | | | 1904 | 2411 | 2332 | 2774 | 1232 |
| Sewickley | 2776 | 3568 | 4479 | 5836 | 5614 | 5599 | 3902 |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of the Population: 1940 and 1950. U.S. Census Bureau; Census 2000, Summary File 3 (SF 3).

Sewickley and Bellevue were the earliest established communities along the Ohio River. Through their initial formations, each community built up a town center. In Sewickley this town center stretches along Beaver Street. The communities to the east of Sewickley, Osborne and Allepo continue along Beaver street as well. In Bellevue the town center formed along a street called Lincoln Avenue. Lincoln Avenue serves as the main artery in the town and a historical location for the collection of community focused businesses and institutions like schools and churches. With Pittsburgh on its east boundary, communities built up west of Bellevue. As Avalon, Ben Avon and Emsworth organized into communities, similar community businesses and religious institutions were based on the street extending from Lincoln Avenue in Bellevue. Passing through these communities the street name changes from Lincoln to California to Church to Center based on the specific community boundaries. Running parallel to the

community centering streets of Lincoln/California/Church/Center and Beaver are appendages of a more modern highway system. The development of Ohio River Boulevard in the 1920s and its linkage with Route 65 in the 1950s physically connected the Ohio River communities from Bellevue through Sewickley and towns further northwest of Pittsburgh. Ohio River Boulevard/Route 65 runs approximately 10 miles between the Bellevue and Sewickley. Figure 1 shows the Ohio River community boundaries.

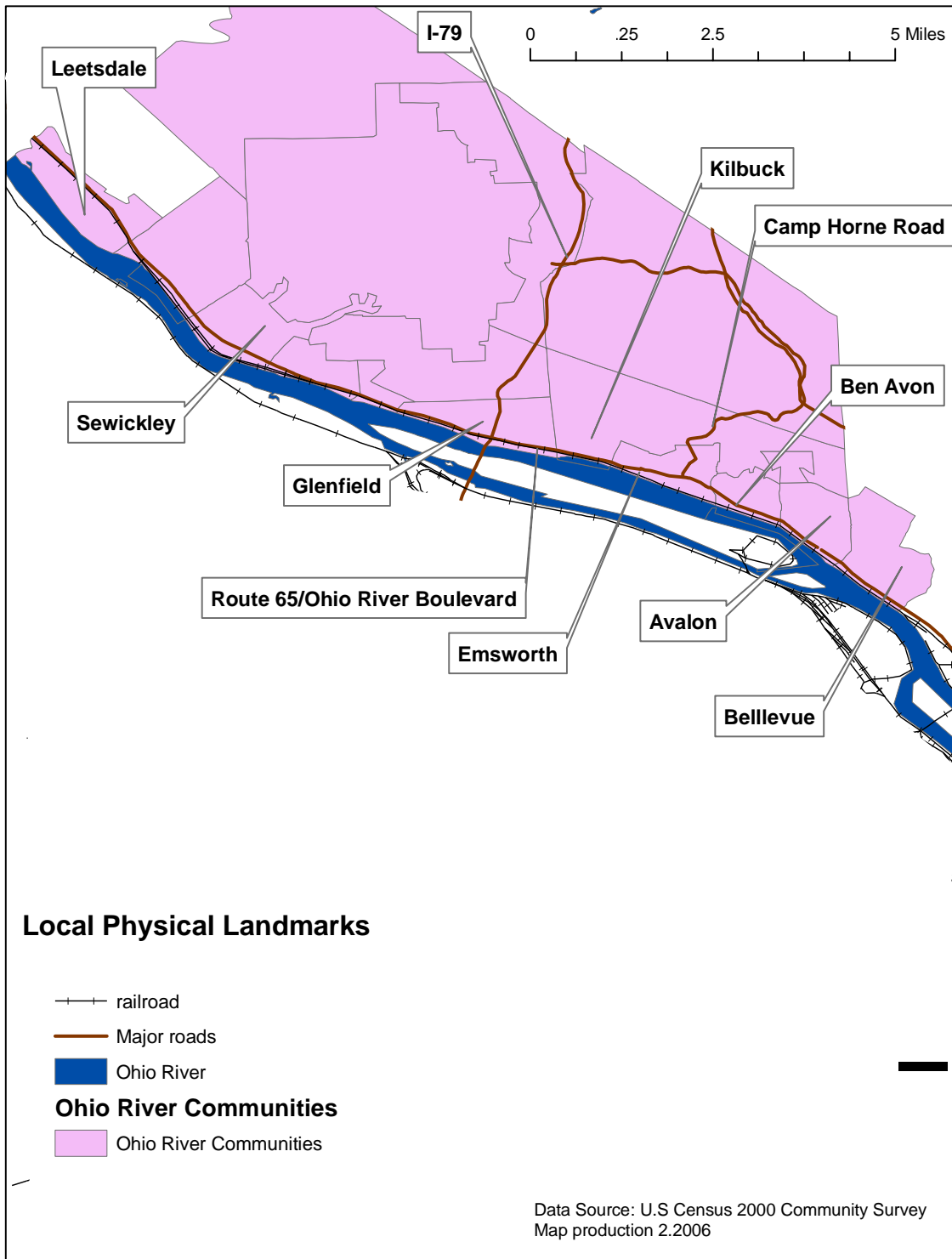


Figure 1. Location of Ohio River Corridor communities

3.2 IMPACT OF TRANSPORTATION

The introduction of mass produced automobile transportation in the early 20th century enabled additional community expansion away from the city centers. Automobiles provided suburban residents the ability to commute to and from home and work locations in cars instead of trains or trolley. The growing need to provide faster, limited access roadways led Allegheny County to design and build a county road system in the 1920s. In 1924, Ohio River Boulevard was proposed as part of the Allegheny County Highway System. The plans for the limited access, high speed highway would link the northern neighborhoods of the City of Pittsburgh up through the communities of Bellevue, Avalon, Ben Avon and Emsworth. The Boulevard would link to a new bridge the McKees Rocks Bridge. Taken together these two new transportation elements would address “the expanding needs of car traffic, but also manufacturing industry requests for easier access across the Ohio River between Point Bridge and Sewickley Bridge” (Brown, p.6, 1931). In 1926, a coalition representing the North Boroughs, those communities north of the Ohio River, organized the North Boroughs Associated Councils to promote “the idea of constructing a high speed boulevard from the west Allegheny County line to Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle” (Schmidt, p.8, 1931). Initial plans for the Boulevard utilized secondary streets in the communities in order to avoid congestion on main business streets in Emsworth, Center Ave.; Ben Avon, Church Ave; Avalon, California Ave.; and Bellevue, Lincoln Ave. Concerns for additional delays, traffic backups and accidents on community secondary streets shifted the Boulevard design to land adjacent to the Pennsylvania Railroad on a bluff overlooking the Ohio River (Schmidt, 1931). Opened August 19, 1931 to the public, the Ohio River Boulevard cost \$12 million. The Boulevard is 5.5 miles and includes 10 bridges to cross the ravine expanses on the bluffs. The largest bridge spans 800 feet across a ravine. “Nowhere in Western Pennsylvania is there a scenic route comparable to the Ohio River Boulevard... The magnificence of the Ohio River and its valley are in view at practically all times” (Schmidt, p.8, 1931).

Over time, the changes in transportation have shaped and structured access and lived experiences in communities along the Ohio River, --physically and symbolically--with Glenfield particularly altered by these forces. Glenfield is one of the smallest Ohio River communities in both population and physical space. In 1925, the main road, Beaver road (which once directly

linked the communities of Allepo, Osborne and Sewickley, and runs parallel to the Pennsylvania Railroad) was moved from the one side of the railroad to the other. This eliminated railroad crossings, but created displacement in the town (Van Trump, 1975). A more extensive community shift occurred in 1953-54, when the Ohio River Boulevard was widened and relocated from its initial endpoint in Emsworth through Glenfield, creating the present day Route 65. "The road provided quick and easy access for many growing communities along the Ohio River at the expense of Glenfield" (Van Trump, 1975, p.5). The redevelopment of Ohio River Boulevard and the development of Route 65 cost Glenfield 28 properties including its Post Office and 15 homes.

Twelve years later in 1966, Glenfield residents were informed that the development of Pennsylvania Interstate 79 would have an interchange at Route 65 directly in Glenfield's town center. Residents protested the proposed highway and attempted to provide alternative plans to reroute the highway or attract new economic development to the town center. Neither plan was successful and major demolition started in 1972. In developing the interchange for I-79 and Route 65, 93 buildings were removed, leaving 95 buildings in Glenfield. Many of the small business and community buildings were removed including two churches, a school, a restaurant, a Post Office, the Fire Hall and Borough building and a barber shop. This second major transportation project in 15 years displaced 300 residents and by 1970 the community's population stood at 425, down from its 1950 population of 870. Only houses and a few businesses, such as a marina, remain on a narrow strip of land between the railroad and river, approximately 1.65 miles long. "Glenfield residents no longer have a small shopping area in which to buy groceries, they now longer have a Post office; instead they must travel to Sewickley to buy their groceries and pick up their mail" (Van Trump, 1975, p.8). One Glenfield resident linked these earlier forced community adjustments to Glenfield residents' current concern with Wal-Mart development in Kibuck Township:

Glenfield's actually a very quiet, small community, mostly elderly...We got wiped out by [Highway] 65 and then about 30 years ago, we got wiped out by [Highway] 79. That took out a lot of Glenfield. And one of the things I, even not being a resident of this town all my life, it really bothered me that Glenfield always seemed to be getting in. And then when this Wal-Mart came in and I realized we were going to get it again.

3.3 CURRENT ROAD TRIP

The 10 mile stretch of Ohio River Boulevard/Route 65 and the community centered streets of Lincoln/Church/Center and Beaver provide a kaleidoscope of visual images that reveal varying perspectives of community growth and development. An ethnographic tour of these two roads situates the subsequent analysis of community place character and how they are revealed by the Wal-Mart development. I pattern my ethnographic gaze after the work of Elijah Anderson in his study of the social and cultural dynamics of interpersonal violence in inner city Philadelphia (1999). His examination of inner city life is contextualized through an initial description of everyday life along Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia (1999). As opposed to “looking” in order to describe social life along Germantown Avenue, his ethnographic description “moves” along the blocks of the street, passing through neighborhoods of varying racial, ethnic and economic make-up. I use this same idea of movement by centering my ethnographic description of Ohio River communities based on the travel of the area’s two main roads. Detailing local business districts, the business district’s physical organization, and the practical utilization of spaces, streets and buildings along these roads in the respective communities is the focus of the ethnographic lens on this road trip. These business districts anchor and shape community identities based on their consumption opportunities (or lack thereof) and are integrated into residents’ larger definitions of both their local community and other Ohio River corridor communities.

3.3.1 Separate and not equal to the others- Bellevue and Avalon communities

This tour of the Ohio River communities travels on both Ohio River Boulevard/Route 65 and the community streets of Lincoln/California/Church/Center. The first two communities on the trip, Bellevue and Avalon, share visual and demographic similarities and their socio-economic characteristics separate them from the other communities along Ohio River Boulevard. GIS data for home ownership rates, income levels, and resident educational attainment indicate these are working or lower middle class communities. These communities are struggling or in a state of transition when compared to other Ohio River communities. This is most evident through a description of their local business districts.

Leaving the city boundaries of Pittsburgh on Ohio River Boulevard we enter Bellevue, according to the faded wooden sign posted next to the four lane road. Various locally owned car shops appear, offering repairs, parts or used cars for sale. There is no aesthetic organization to building design and the cars that amass outside the different automotive businesses provide a changing multi-colored landscape. Interspersed between the car businesses are local sites for national chains of fast-food restaurants and national brand gas stations. Some of these national chains are housed in a typical homogenized building structure specific to their company (i.e. McDonald's, KFC). Others are the latest tenants in a structure. The mass of varied businesses in this area provides the first indication of a lack of a cohesive vision for the economic development along Ohio River Boulevard in both Bellevue and the other communities traveled. The first major intersection, a three way stoplight, across Ohio River Boulevard provides travelers access into Bellevue. This intersection is marked by the national branded signs of gas stations and fast food restaurants and pizza shops, but it is also home to a community symbol. A community sign for Bellevue is located on the right side of Ohio River Boulevard. (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. Entrance to Bellevue along Ohio River Boulevard.

This is the only sign along the Boulevard that welcomes drivers and non-residents into any of the communities along the Boulevard. Upon closer inspection, the Bellevue sign welcomes drivers to enter the community and participate and support local pursuits (See Figure 3). The community sign marking the official non-resident access point into Bellevue's community directly notes the practices affiliated with community identification: "live, worship,

shop.” Behind the sign, housing units show consistency (and close proximity) in building design structure.



Figure 3. Community sign for Bellevue.

Driving up the residential road left of the Bellevue sign leads travelers to the intersection with Lincoln Avenue. There is a marked ascent up this residential road towards Lincoln Avenue, but upon reaching Lincoln the area is of similar elevation. The businesses district is right of this intersection with community churches, single home residences, and a local school to the left. The Bellevue sign with its phrase “Live, Worship, Shop” accurately denotes the activities that structure community here. Turning towards the business district, the two lane road provides a multitude of shopping options along an approximately two block expanse. The varied business signs compete for the traveler’s attention as does the multitude of business structures. A stand-alone local grocery store dominates a corner with its white painted box structure and large parking lot, while down the way a national video/DVD rental store dominates another corner with its asymmetrical, one story building and its large blue and yellow sign. Competing with

these business are the street-level shops housed in structures of varying ages and stories (up to three levels).

Bellevue's business district is home to a mix of business structures. The historical "main street" buildings with street-level shops and residential or smaller business space on higher floors show different ages based on updated brick facades or other rehab efforts. Wedged in between these buildings are non-descript strip mall style shops likely built in the last two decades to replace older "main street" buildings deemed inappropriate for restoration. There are also additional stand alone buildings that were likely built with some architectural style, just not a style similar to the surrounding business district. Lighted professionally-designed signs compete with wooden-lettered or canvas signs for the traveler's or shopper's attention. There are a variety of businesses, from the local grocery store previously mentioned to a national pizza outlet, car dealership, medical, dental and legal offices, florist, local restaurants, pizza shops, bars, two bakeries, a national chain dollar store outlet, independent pharmacy, consignment shops, check cashing outlets, local video stores, hair salons, and barber shops. There are also stores selling gifts and trinkets. Sprinkled among the shops are a few empty storefronts. Previous store signage has been removed, the windows are papered over in some store fronts, and there is no rental information posted in the windows. The on-street metered parking on either side of the business district is full of cars. Looking in the store windows, there are store patrons participating in various consumption exchanges such as getting a hair cut, buying flowers, picking up a prescription, or eating at a local establishment, but the sidewalks are surprisingly clear of pedestrian traffic. The mix of local and national chain businesses, empty storefronts, and limited pedestrian traffic indicate a struggle for continued growth and maintenance of a strong customer base. Local dollar stores and thrift stores suggest that a percentage of the local community is on a limited budget. Figure 4 shows over 70% of residents in Bellevue make less than \$50,000 a year.

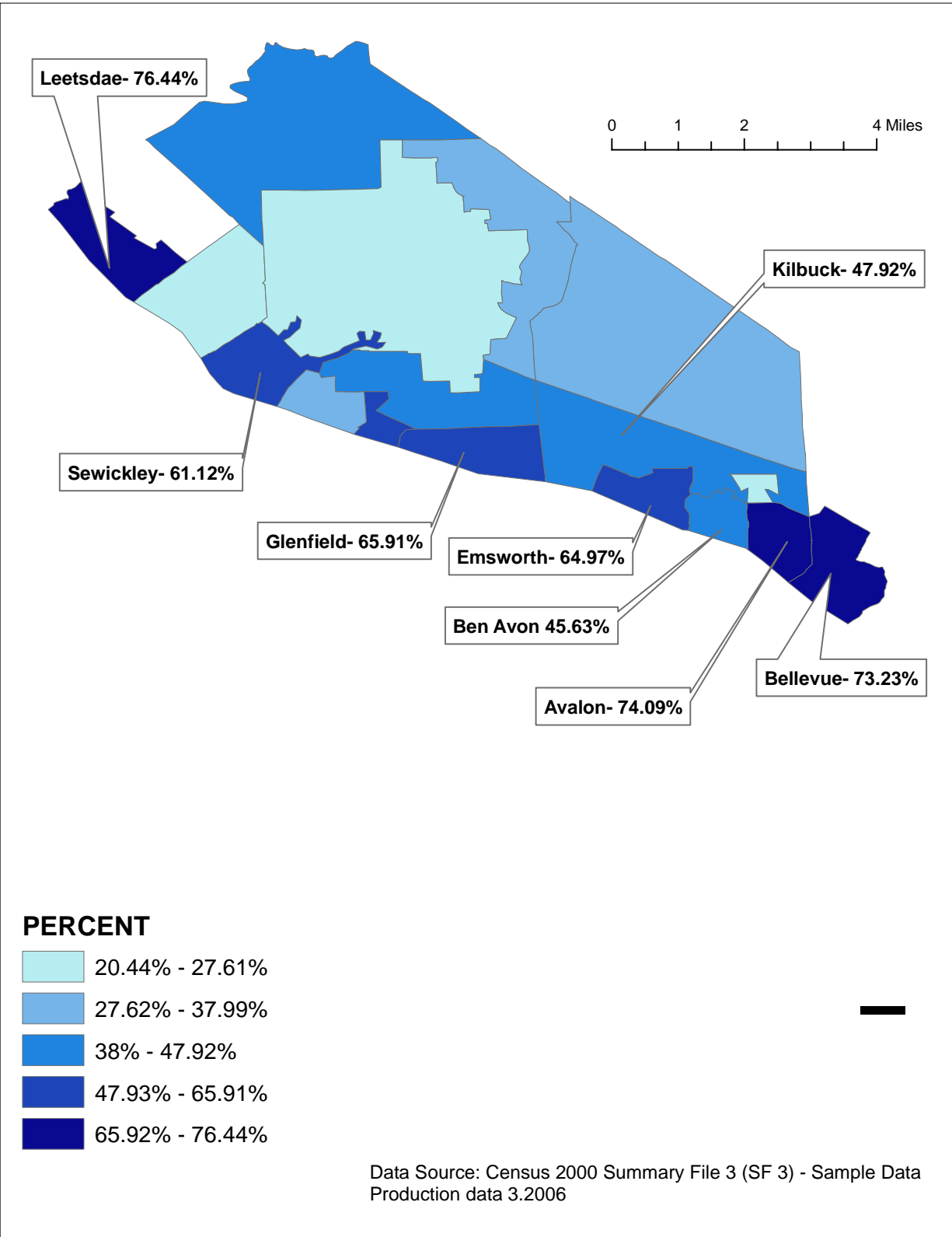


Figure 4. ORC community household income below \$50,000.

The lack of foot traffic on a typical shopping day, a Saturday, suggests that Bellevue residents do not support the area for their traditional shopping needs. The only store that is busy is the large local grocery store, with its half full parking lot, that sits on the corner that starts Bellevue's business district. The variation in upkeep and maintenance of existing storefronts hints at a financial balance between keeping businesses open and trying to improve the aesthetics of the area. In Bellevue national chain stores mix with small businesses along the varied storefronts. Utility poles and low-hanging electric lines criss-cross Lincoln Avenue. There are updated street sign posts on one side of the street. These modern posts provide a small modicum of visual consistency on the street (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. Chain stores mix with small businesses on Bellevue's Lincoln Ave.

Turning around and heading back west on Lincoln Avenue, I note the absence of residential housing units in Bellevue's business district. The houses are on the blocks directly behind either side of the business district. Houses are two and three story structures that look mostly well-kept. Driving back through the business district and towards Avalon, the small businesses give way to single residential structures of varying architectural character. Historical church buildings and a local school line either side of Lincoln Avenue. Rehabilitation and maintenance of local historical housing structures is evident on Lincoln, but there are also some houses that are in various states of disrepair or have been subdivided into apartment units. Some large housing structures have been converted to office space or house small professional businesses. Bellevue's housing structures indicate that the population has little disposable income to maintain or renovate buildings. Figure 6 indicates only 39 percent of the homes in Bellevue are owner occupied.

The community of Bellevue appears to be fighting a battle to maintain its community identity. Historically it was a community with a large population and a business district with goods and services that met community needs. A sign still welcomes people to the borough, as a place to "live, worship and shop", but the area is struggling to fulfill that mantra. The various levels of maintenance and transition of older, stately homes into subdivisions for apartments indicates an area with a declining percentage of homeowners. The increase in rentals leads to a larger percentage of the population who are not tied to the community. The vacancies interspersed between active businesses in the commercial buildings along Lincoln Avenue further indicates that previous businesses did not meet the needs of local residents or that the residents were not "shopping the community first". In addition, the community has shopping opportunities to serve both local residents and others that pass through the area, but there is no unified aesthetic vision for the business districts on either Lincoln Avenue or Ohio River Boulevard.

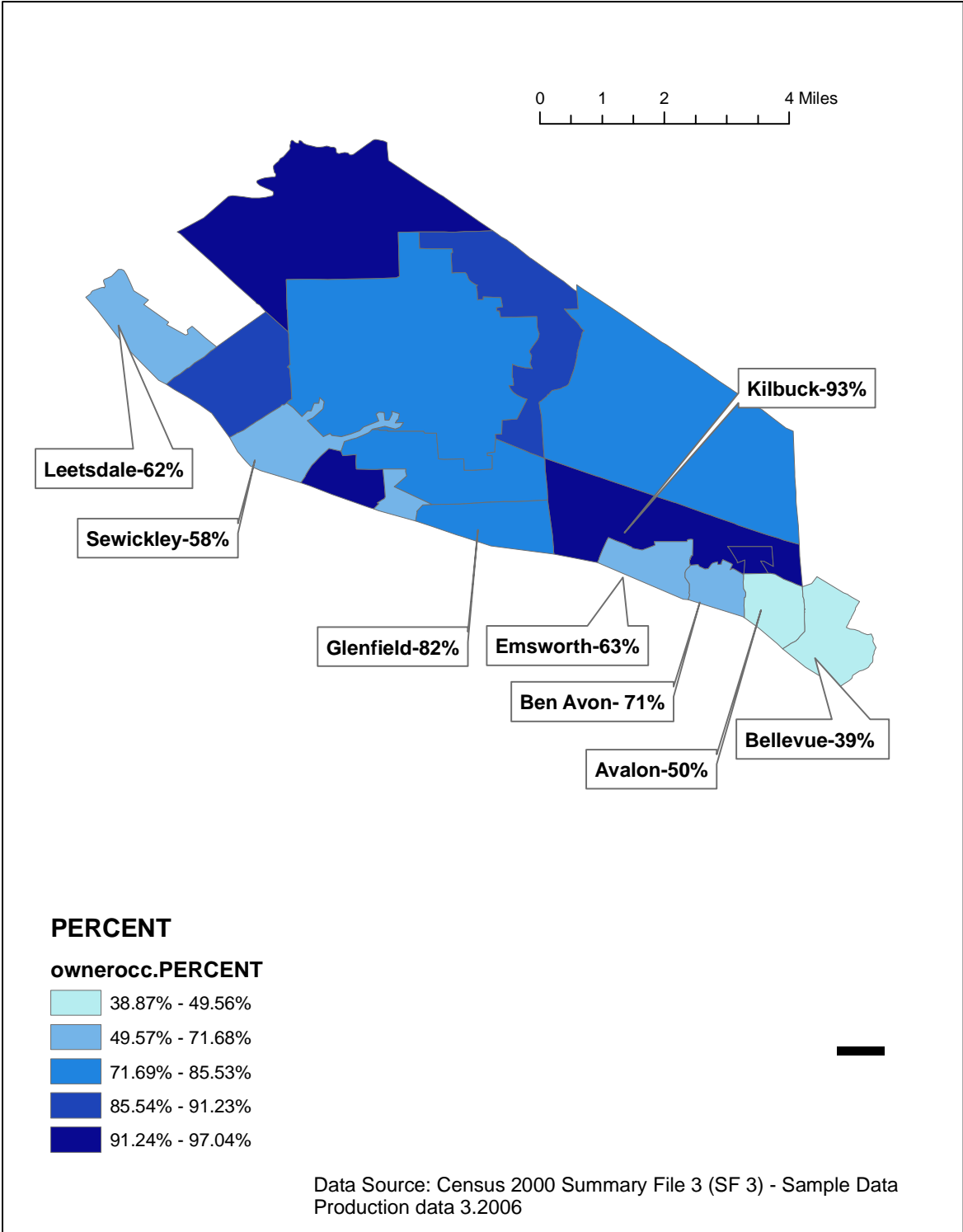


Figure 6. Home ownership rates in ORC communities.

Without an official physical marker or sign post, Lincoln becomes California Avenue and the traveler has now entered Avalon. Historically detailed houses mix with smaller brick housing and multi-story apartment complexes. Large stone and brick churches stand along California Avenue, but they are not quite as imposing on the community landscape as those in Bellevue. The mass of churches along Lincoln/California indicates the historical importance of religious institutions in structuring life. These churches have built dates, noted in stone markers in the foundation that date from the 1890s to the 1920s. But it is clear that the community members do not support the churches at historic levels. One beautiful, large black stone church sits empty on California Avenue. The office part of the church building houses an antique type shop. Row-style three story houses line California Avenue, leading to the business district. Parked cars sit on the street likely owned by the residences of the houses on the street because there are no driveways leading to the houses. These houses, in close proximity to each other, show varying states of maintenance. There is less brick and more aluminum for both siding and awnings. The housing structures were likely built later than Bellevue, but over a longer period of time. Additionally the styles and materials used to build housing along Avalon's main street indicate less financial resources than what were available when Bellevue's housing community was formed. Less than two miles from Bellevue's business district, Avalon's small business district appears in fits and starts between some residential structures.



Figure 7. Activity and inactivity mix along Avalon's business district.

Avalon's main business district stretches for about two blocks. While the buildings appear slightly more modern and better maintained than those along Bellevue's Lincoln Ave., there are only a couple of active businesses along California's commercial district. Trees, Victorian-era lights and street signposts provide some visual appeal and consistency to the street, compared to Bellevue's district (See Figure 7). The main business district of approximately 20 buildings is situated around the community's borough building. With the exception of a local bank branch and an auto repair/used car dealership, the business district is housed within "old main street" style building structures. There is less visible contrast between the store buildings when compared to Bellevue, but that is likely a result of the smaller number of stores. In stark contrast to Bellevue's shopping district, vacant, empty storefronts dominate Avalon's streetscape. It is hard to distinguish between storefronts that are home to active businesses and those that are empty. Remodeling and rehabilitation efforts of a few store fronts are evident, but the appearance of some buildings and store signs show the process is uneven. There are a few

businesses such as a barber shop, a local pizza shop, convenience store and an independent pharmacy. While the metered on-street parking along the business district is filled with cars, the sidewalks lack any semblance of pedestrian traffic. The only sense of activity in the business district comes from the construction of a new borough building.



Figure 8. Signs of life along Avalon's California Ave.

There are multiple storefronts along Avalon's California Avenue with "For Rent" or "For Sale" signs in the windows (See Figure 8). The visual and economic emptiness of the business district stands in stark contrast to the activity levels in Bellevue's business district. It appears that local residents travel elsewhere to shop for basic goods and services. The small scale of Avalon's business district when compared to Bellevue's may be a historical artifact. Avalon's population may have traveled to Bellevue to shop, resulting in a smaller main street shopping district, but now community residents travel outside the local area. When looking at current population sizes of the Ohio River communities, it is clear that Bellevue dwarfs its local Ohio River community neighbors. Table 3 shows the differences in community population. Interestingly, the two communities with active business districts, Sewickley and Bellevue, have two of the largest community populations, although Avalon has the second largest population.

Continuing past the business district on California Avenue, the community appearance transitions back to single residence housing structures. The houses look less maintained and some are in various states of disrepair or even vacant. The population of Ohio River

communities indicates the greatest population size in those communities closest to the city of Pittsburgh. Community housing development and current housing stock in Ohio River communities help to maintain these differences in population (Table 3). This part of Avalon appears in great transition when compared to the rest of Avalon and Bellevue. It looks like a dying part of the community. As California Avenue rolls toward the community of Ben Avon there is additional strip of historical “main street” businesses. It appears that this strip once housed between four or five storefronts, but now is dominated by a ministry organization.

The community of Avalon is in transition. There appears to be a struggle to stop the spread of vacant and dilapidated residential and commercial buildings from overwhelming the still active and occupied businesses and homes in the area. GIS figures 4 and 6 depict this struggle, illustrating that over 70% of residents in Avalon make less than \$50,000 a year and 50 percent of the homes are owner occupied. This visual struggle is on greater display in Avalon than in Bellevue, but in reality the communities’ futures are very much tied together. Their young residents attend the same schools (Northgate School District), supported by residents’ property taxes in both boroughs. The sheer proximity of the two means the decline of one community will eventually impact the other. Bellevue’s business district likely benefits from a lack of competition in Avalon, but both ultimately are suffering from the fact that local residents do not consistently shop in the area.

3.3.2 Co-existing for the sake of the children- Ben Avon and Emsworth

As the road trip continues, the neighboring communities of Ben Avon and Emsworth appear visually and socio-economically distinct from Bellevue and Avalon. These two communities share community boundaries and send local children to the same school district (Ben Avon and Emsworth partner with Kilbuck Township, Ohio Township and Ben Avon Heights to form the Avonworth school district). While local tax revenues support the community schools, the physical organization of the communities present differences in historical development, which continues to impact both communities. Ben Avon is completely residential while Emsworth struggles to fill its near vacant business.

While there is no visible dividing line on Lincoln/California Ave to distinguish between the communities of Bellevue and Avalon, there is physical and spatial division between Avalon

and Ben Avon. As detailed earlier, the construction of Ohio River Boulevard included bridges to cover the expanses between various ravines that separated some of the communities. These ravines are also crossed by the main community street that links Avalon, Ben Avon and Emsworth. Lincoln Avenue becomes a bridge that crosses a ravine separating Avalon from Ben Avon. Upon crossing the ravine, the street changes its name, now to Church Avenue. A metal post holds two rectangular signs, one states “Ben Avon Borough” with a separate “Neighborhood Crime Watch” sign affixed below the borough sign. This sign is of interest after seeing the decaying section of Avalon on the other side of the just crossed bridge. The distance spans half a mile or less between the struggling Avalon section and this markedly different residential community. Upon entering Ben Avon, I find houses of similar architectural style, age and size to those in Bellevue are situated on larger lots. Down Church Avenue the houses become much larger and more architecturally distinctive from one another. The close proximity of housing seen in Avalon and Bellevue is replaced with large shade trees and a greater expanse of green lawns and landscaping. The majority of housing appears to be situated on lots that are at least a half acre. The housing materials and styles show that the historical development of Ben Avon was rooted in a wealthy population. Figure 9 illustrates the percentage of community housing built before 1939. Sixty-six percent of Ben Avon’s housing stock was built before 1939 and is distinctive from the housing found in the neighboring communities of Avalon, Emsworth and Bellevue. With around 50 percent of their housing stock built prior to 1939, both Bellevue and Avalon share similar aesthetics in housing style and community organization. Two-thirds of Ben Avon’s residences were built before 1939, in stark contrast to Emsworth, with only 33% of its housing built in the same time period.

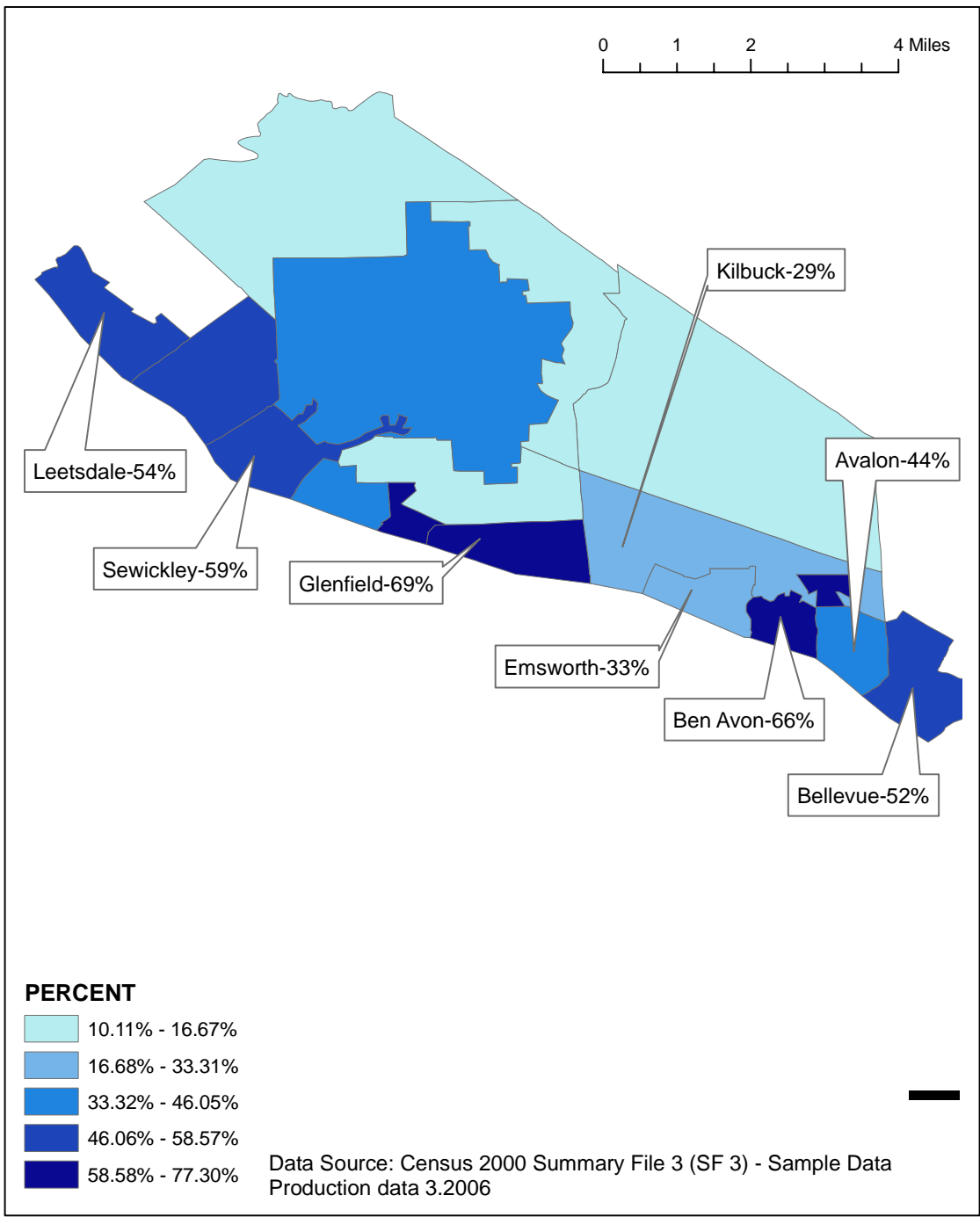


Figure 9. ORC community housing built prior to 1939.

An extremely large stone church is situated on Church Avenue. It is the most grand and imposing church of the many seen on Lincoln/California/Church. It likely influenced the decision in naming Ben Avon's main street Church. If it was not for the appearance of Ben Avon's two story brick borough building, a traveler could almost pass through the community's business district without noticing it. Next to the borough building are three "old main street" style business structures. Across the street there are two additional business structures. With the exception of a dry cleaning business and an antique bookseller, with by-appointment only hours, there are no other commercial businesses along the street. Medical and independent professional businesses are located in the other business structures (See Figure 10). Ben Avon's business district is anchored by the two-story, columned borough building. A covered public transportation structure (the first one along the street stretching from Bellevue) is located just left of the borough building. Street lights, with single lamps, rise to nearly single-story building height along the business district. The business district appears as an afterthought in the planning of the community and is not a central focus, like the churches on the same street.



Figure 10. Ben Avon's community business district.

While Ben Avon was founded in the same time period as Emsworth, it is clear that Ben Avon has long differed in social and economic characteristics from its neighboring communities. Table 4 shows that nearly 25 percent of Ben Avon's housing structures have nine or more rooms. In its neighboring communities of Bellevue, Avalon and Emsworth, seven percent or less of their housing structures have nine or more rooms. The social and economic distinctiveness of Ben Avon continues to this day with 70 percent of its housing owner occupied and only 45 percent of its population earning less than \$50,000 a year.

Table 4. Percent of ORC homes with nine or more rooms.

| | % of homes with nine or more rooms |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Avalon | 6.08% |
| Bellevue | 7.42% |
| Ben Avon | 24.48% |
| Emsworth | 5.21% |
| Glenfield | 5.32% |
| Kilbuck Twp. | 12.46% |
| Leetsdale | 5.67% |
| Sewickley | 12.62% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Census 2000, Summary File 3 (SF 3); generated by Dana Reinke; using American Factfinder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>; (7 September 2006).

Ben Avon stands apart from its neighboring boroughs. As compared to the other boroughs, the community is not centered by a commercial business district, but by homes. Local residents must go outside of the community for their shopping needs. In addition, the borough has a much greater percentage of older, larger homes owned by local residents with incomes much higher than those in Ben Avon and Avalon. This distinction from its neighboring communities continues with another adjacent community, Emsworth.

Continuing on Church Avenue the houses start to return to the architectural style of those in Avalon and Bellevue, but are better maintained than those found in the other two communities. Less than one-half mile from Ben Avon's business district, another sign appears noting a community boundary. Another post holds multiple metal signs, but the top one notes "Emsworth", and includes details about weight limits on the borough streets. The bottom metal sign commemorates 100 years of service (1905-2005) by Emsworth's local Volunteer Fire Company (VFC). A short stretch of less than twenty two- and three-story houses line either side of what is now called Center Avenue. The age, style and architecture of these houses are similar to those located in Bellevue and Avalon. A bridge appears in order for a traveler to cross another ravine and continue further into Emsworth. Just prior to this ravine sit two large stores on the right side of Center Avenue. Unlike previous business districts, these two stores are separated from the street by a slight elevation in the land and a large parking lot. The steel-structured building is divided into two storefronts. The larger of the two storefronts sits empty with two

“for lease” signs affixed to the store’s exterior wall and glass fronts. The store marquee holds a sign noting a former local grocery store business. Next to the empty store front is an active business, a national chain dollar store. A few cars are parked in front of the dollar store, but the parking lot is built to hold many more cars.

Crossing over the ravine by bridge, it is evident that the traveler has been at a slightly higher elevation because most of Emsworth is visible and Center avenue appears to descend into the community. Two and three story houses, situated on small rectangular lots, are staggered on “hills” on either side of the street. In the previous communities, home entrances were nearly level with the street. In particular a few houses in Bellevue and Avalon had a short flight of stairs leading to front porches or front entrances, but many homes along Emsworth “rise” above the street and are accessed by longer flights of stone or cement steps. There are also fewer cars parked directly along the Avenue. Approximately two blocks after crossing the bridge, the Emsworth borough building appears on the left. Similar to Ben Avon and Avalon, the Emsworth borough building location physically marks the “official” start of business district. While it appears to be an older but renovated two story brick building, there is a modern municipal garage right next to it. The garage has a similar brick style to the borough building, but it is pretty clear that decades separate their construction.

Like in Ben Avon a traveler could pass through Emsworth’s business district and not notice any local businesses, if not for the borough building. Businesses appear on the same side of the street as the borough building and occupy less than one block (See Figure 11). There are just two or three single story buildings that look like they have housed local businesses. A dry cleaning business presently occupies one structure. The only other active looking business is a hair salon, but it is in the first level of a renovated two-story residential structure. Again, just like Ben Avon and Avalon, in Emsworth distinctive street lamps and with flame-style lights and updated street signage line the business district side of Center. The three story modern stucco style apartment building located just past the business district appears more distinctive than the few businesses. This building stands out because of its difference in architectural style, size, and age from the single residence structures on the street. The houses along Emsworth’s main street seem to be of similar age, but there is less uniformity in their styles than those seen in Avalon and Bellevue. Spanning approximately three more blocks, Center Avenue continues a gradual descent and curves towards its end at Ohio River Boulevard. Another active business, a family

style restaurant sits on the curve prior to the intersection of Center and Ohio River Boulevard. Emsworth's business district runs about two blocks on one side of Center Avenue.



Figure 11. Emsworth's business district on Center Avenue.

Emsworth developed a small business district, but similar to Avalon, it is now mostly vacant. Even so, the lack of activity along the business district does not visually distract from the community, as compared to Avalon. While Avalon appears to be struggling economically, Emsworth appears more financially solid even though over half of its residents make less than \$50,000 a year. Its housing stock, is similar to Avalon's, but better maintained. There are signs of home improvement in older homes, compared to vacant residential buildings in Avalon. Like its neighbor, Ben Avon, there is a higher rate of home ownership in the community (over 60 percent), compared to Bellevue and Avalon (less than 50 percent).

3.3.3 Benefiting from its neighbors- The community of Sewickley

From a demographic perspective, Sewickley is similar to the already mentioned Ohio River communities. Its socio-economic characteristics are similar to those of Emsworth, Bellevue and Avalon, but it does not physically or culturally resemble the Ohio River communities closer to Pittsburgh. There is a separation, stemming not from the physical distance between Emsworth and Sewickley, but from its historical prominence as an affluent suburb of Pittsburgh. Sewickley is part of a larger grouping of communities all identified as the Sewickley area. Those surrounding communities of Bell Acres, Edgeworth, Allepo, Osborne, Sewickley Hills, and Sewickley Heights share marked social, financial, and cultural similarities. The GIS graphs in this chapter show Sewickley as demographically distinctive from to its surrounding neighbors. Symbolically, the community of Sewickley gives these surrounding communities their identity as “the Sewickley area” and also provides the area with a business district and other community institutions, like schools, library, YMCA and churches. While Sewickley is diverse in socio-economic terms, the visual reality and symbolic perception of the area is one of upper middle class to elite. The following description of the community business district portrays the Sewickley area as upscale, separate, and distinct from other Ohio River communities.

Turning right onto Ohio River Boulevard, a driver heads down the road towards Sewickley. It is along this stretch of road that Ohio River Boulevard become Route 65. Physically this change is noticed because directly after the intersection of Ohio River Boulevard and Center Avenue, the four lane road separates into a four lane divided highway with an increased speed limit. This area is best described on the return trip from Sewickley, but it is important to note that there are no businesses or houses along this stretch of Route 65. A high face of various geologic strata hugs the right side of the road heading north. After an approximate two mile stretch of highway, houses start to appear on either side of the road. A two level office building on the left side indicates that the driver is now in Osborne because it incorporates the community’s name as part of the office plaza’s title, but on the right side of the road a large wooden sign painted in white and light blue indicates that the traveler has now entered Sewickley. Across the road there are a row of square two story brick housing all of the same age. Comparatively, the houses back on the right side of Route 65 are of various ages and

styles. Similar to the approach into Bellevue, there is a large intersection providing an access point into Sewickley at its town center. Instead of the gas stations and fast food restaurants found near the Bellevue entrance, there is an upscale foreign car dealership at the far left corner of the intersection into Sewickley. This four way intersection provides continued access north on Route 65 towards Leetsdale, a left turn onto the Sewickley Bridge to cross the Ohio River or a right turn into the village of Sewickley. The drive towards Leetsdale includes passing a vacant fast food restaurant building and a small shopping plaza. With the exception of one shopping strip, housing four small businesses, there are no Leetsdale businesses along Route 65. The large Norfolk Southern Conway railroad yard, a mass of railroad tracks, is a location where trains switch tracks as they travel to and from the east coast to destinations west of Pittsburgh. Besides the houses perched on the right side of 65, this railroad yard is the only visible element of the Leetsdale community along the road.



Figure 12. Entering Sewickley on Broad Street.

Returning back to the intersection of Route 65 and the Sewickley Bridge, taking the right turn onto Broad Street brings the traveler into what is called the village of Sewickley. Broad Street is a wide two lane street with an island division running about two blocks. This island physically separates the directional traffic flows and is landscaped with small ornamental trees and grasses with evenly spaced lamp posts that arch over both sides of the street. Single residential housing on Broad Street gives way to very distinctive houses that have been converted for educational, religious or other uses. In comparison to Bellevue, trees and landscaping are located in close proximity to the main roads. A church with an imposing spire sits on the left side of Broad Street leading the traveler into the business district (See Figure 12). The island disappears between the traffic flows and the two lane street is lined with small businesses in various forms of “old main-street” style building structures. Some of the buildings look like they are housed in converted residences and on the right side of the street, the branches of large trees hang over both the sidewalk and store signage. Businesses along this block include a national women’s clothing chain, bookseller, toy store, Chinese restaurant, and real estate offices.

Aesthetically the business structures in Sewickley are distinctive from each other, but provide an intangible quality of “quaint character” to the business district that stands in stark contrast to the business districts in Avalon and Bellevue. Sewickley’s zoning ordinance includes regulations related to building usage and signage in order “to foster effective and pleasant communication... which is to express the identity of the individual property and community standards overall” (Code of Regulations, p. 38, 1997). Where Broad Street intersects with Sewickley’s main street, Beaver, a traveler can turn left or right and travel two blocks in each direction past additional sections of Sewickley’s business district. Along the way, a driver passes multiple well maintained two story structures with various architectural details. Small businesses are located on the first level of updated and maintained two and three story buildings and sidewalks, with trees and inlaid brick, are lighted with large globed street lamps (See Figure 13).

The architectural mix and landscape style of Sewickley’s business district produces an aesthetic that appeals to a more affluent resident and shopper, in stark contrast to the business districts in other Ohio River communities. At street level businesses have large open windows that neatly display merchandise and activity. Their paint, lighting fixtures, banners, and window

panes make them seem much cleaner than those in Bellevue's business district. Along these two blocks there is a mix of local small businesses alongside national chain stores. National chains in the area include a coffeehouse, two upscale clothing stores, a bagel shop, a hair salon, and multiple regional bank branches. Store signage for these national chains follows company branding standards, but the size and scale of the stores fit within the building structures in the business district. Local businesses in this section of Sewickley's business district includes a bookstore, a seafood market, jewelers, two bakeries, a consignment shop, specialty clothing stores, a shoe repair shop, local restaurants, gift shops, a coffee house, and a gourmet cooking shop. Store signage includes waterproof fabrics with printed store names that overhang onto the sidewalk. These signs mix with brightly painted wooden letters and unlighted professionally fabricated name plates. There are also small businesses that spill over on the side streets that connect with Beaver. Besides other specialty houseware and clothing shops, there is a full service grocery store and an upscale foreign auto dealership. Metered parking on either side of Beaver is full of vehicles. Similar to Bellevue, there is some pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks in front of the stores, but people are walking in groups and carrying packages and products (See Figure 14). Sewickley's business district draws shoppers from outside the local community because of these visual characteristics and unique businesses, while other Ohio River communities appear to be drawing few from even their own communities.



Figure 13. Sewickley's small business district.



Figure 14. Shoppers and shops along Beaver Avenue in Sewickley.

It is clear that the Sewickley business district has a much more upscale clientele than other Ohio River communities. The goods and services available to local residents indicate an

upper-class area. Although there is a perception in the Pittsburgh area that Sewickley and its surrounding communities are home to upper class residents, some with roots in historical old money families and others with recent technology driven wealth (Shropshire, 2005), according to the GIS data, the Sewickley community is much more economically diverse than the business district would indicate. Figure 4 showed that 61 percent of its population earns less than \$50,000 and only 58 percent of residents own their home in the community. While the housing stock in the area indicates that the majority of houses are older, larger (nine or more rooms) homes, the majority of the community is home to a working and middle class population. The perception of Sewickley in both visual and symbolic imagery belies its current socio-economic characteristics.

Heading back toward the intersection with Broad Street, Beaver Avenue continues with more small businesses on either side of the street. Crossing through the intersection with Broad, there is a small public space on the right side of Beaver. This public space includes four large benches positioned to look onto the street or back towards the meticulously landscaped open space. A small wooden gazebo is included in this area as well as a monument to community military veterans. Mature trees provide shade to the street corner and this public space area. Continuing down Beaver an additional two blocks of small businesses line either side of the street. This side of the business district houses local restaurants, a floral/housewares design store, a few antiques stores, and art and framing stores. There is a small, gourmet grocery store, local sporting goods store, ice cream shop, and a movie rental/electronics store. The businesses in this area are housed in various building structures, but the area is broken up by a regional drug/pharmacy store with its own parking lot on the left side of Beaver street. A gas station/car repair business and its larger parking lot sit between groupings of small business stores on the right side of Beaver.

Residential housing quickly marks the end of the business district on both sides of Beaver. Residential structures along the street span many building styles. Lot sizes are larger than those found in Avalon and Bellevue, but the houses sizes are not much larger. Similar to Ben Avon, the houses sit back from the street and sidewalks, leaving room for landscape efforts and green space between houses and the street. Renovation and restoration efforts are evident on many single residences, but there are older looking brick apartment complexes mixed among some of the residences on the street. These residential structures are located within three blocks of the business district. A large stone church sits on another corner where a side street intersects

with Beaver. Traveling south on Beaver as the traveler moves away from the business district the houses start to get larger and more distinctive. The area becomes strictly residential with the exception of a local elementary school and its associated parking lot and play ground. Without a visible sign, Beaver street crosses back into Osborne and starts a descent back towards Route 65.

While the community of Sewickley is home to upscale shops, expensive foreign car dealerships, and a community art center/museum, the demographic profile of the community is more mixed with a majority earning under \$50,000 and 42 percent renters. In these ways, Sewickley's economic characteristics align more with those of Emsworth, Bellevue and Avalon, but it's older and larger housing stock creates an aesthetic similar to Ben Avon. What makes Sewickley different from the other communities mentioned is its Beaver Avenue business district. The visual and aesthetic consistency of the business district, coupled with the well-maintained homes, schools, and religious buildings in the surrounding area gives the area a certain quality of an upper class, affluent area. As noted in the borough's zoning code, the community works to maintain a consistent and particular "main street" aesthetic.

3.3.4 Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard- Sea of businesses, houses, cars... and Glenfield

The Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard is the route into Ohio River communities that the public or outsider uses to enter and travel to, from or around the area. The description of the Ohio River communities presented in the preceding sections is one visible to only those who travel into the local or community areas. Individuals/visitors/outsideers to the Ohio River communities pass a disjointed, unorganized mix of businesses, houses and vacant land along Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard. There are no clear physical or symbolic signs that delineate the communities on this road. It is my perception that the Ohio River communities present their front stage community image within the local community, to their private citizens, and present their back stage or "back side" image to travelers, or the general public, on Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard. The following description elaborates this lack of community distinctiveness along Route 65 and the visual cacophony of structures, business and residential, that leave this road disassociated from the local communities.

Turning left off of Beaver street onto Route 65, the driver starts to head south towards Bellevue and Pittsburgh. The approximately three mile stretch of Route 65 varies geographically from Ohio River Boulevard. Without houses or businesses, it looks similar to a typical interstate highway, except for the railroad tracks on the right and housing grouped to the right of the tracks. The stretch of housing is the community of Glenfield. Wedged in between the Ohio River and the railroad tracks, Glenfield is only accessible from the northern side of Route 65 (See Figure 15). There is an exit on south 65, but it crosses back onto an overpass to reach the Glenfield viaduct. The location of this intersection appears congested with its linking ramps and roads to Interstate 79.



Figure 15. Glenfield and its neighbors the railroad line and Route 65.

Although vastly different from its Ohio River corridor neighbors in population and geographic space, Glenfield is quite similar socio-economically. While it has the second highest level of homeownership rates (82%) among its neighbors, two-thirds of its residents have

incomes below \$50,000. Historic transportation developments have stripped the community of any business district, so residents must leave the community to shop. While other communities have sidewalks and streets that intersect, Glenfield's two remaining streets are separated by the intersection of Interstate 79 with Route 65.

Just prior to the Route 65 merge with Ohio River Boulevard in the community of Emsworth is the stretch of Route 65 that passes through Kilbuck. One community road, Toms Run Road, dead ends at Route 65. The edge of the former Dixmont State Hospital property reaches down to Route 65. This is the only community connection Kilbuck has to the Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard corridor. There are no businesses or houses on the road, just geologic strata. Returning to Emsworth there are a few private businesses on either side of the street. On the right side there are light industrial businesses, while on the left there are more car repair type shops. Mixed with the businesses are some single housing residences. These houses are of a different style and age than those in the community. They are larger and have a different architectural style, but they also vary in maintenance and renovation.

After about one mile, Ohio River Boulevard intersects with Camp Horne Road, which serves as an unofficial boundary between Emsworth and Ben Avon. At this intersection there is a cluster of businesses: a gas station, another car repair shop, an aquarium store, a dry cleaners, and an independent Chinese restaurant. Continuing past this intersection a large sports field appears on the left side of the road. It is a multi-purpose field with a sign noting it is part of the Avonworth school district. Passing this sports field, large old houses start to appear on either side of the road. These houses are as large as and of similar architectural style to those along Church Avenue in Ben Avon. These houses along Ohio River Boulevard are in the Ben Avon community and are the only structures that run the length of the Boulevard in the community. They are of distinctive architectural character from each other and sit on varying lot sizes. An intersection seemingly centered in this stretch of houses is the only stop in the community and provides access to Church avenue via a residential street. As the last of these houses appears the driver prepares to travel over another bridge. This bridge spans another ravine and upon crossing it, brings the traveler back into Avalon. Again houses appear on either side of the street and they are positioned to face either the boulevard or the side streets on the left side of the road. The housing seems slightly larger and older than the houses viewed along California Avenue in the community.

After about one block of houses, the road starts to offer more business options to the traveler. On the left side there are even larger, older houses “perched” at a slight elevation above the boulevard. Like the housing along Avalon’s California Avenue, some of these houses look occupied, but the vast majority are in some form of disrepair. On the right side there is a large open parking lot that precedes a two story motel. While the motel has a nice location, looking out onto the Ohio River, the structure looks like it has not been consistently maintained over the years. The motel’s parking lot is vacant with the exception of a few people waiting at a bus stop sign right next to the road. After passing the motel, a traveler finds many small businesses appearing on either side of the road. A mix of national fast-food chains, local restaurant chains, a gas station, dollar store, auto parts store, thrift store, and car repair shops compete for the traveler’s attention. The structures and building styles vary by shape and size and there is no architectural or aesthetic consistency. Many of the businesses have parking lots in front of their stores along the boulevard, so patron’s cars line either side of the road. In terms of commercial activity, this stretch of road supports local resident’s consumer needs. This business stretch ends with another bridge spanning a very small ravine. After crossing this bridge the traveler is back at the intersection that provides access to Bellevue’s business district. In the span of three miles the traveler has passed through four different communities.

Coupling ethnographic and GIS demographic data provides a rich, layered account of the Ohio River communities. As I descriptively “moved” through the communities, I gained new perceptions about the communities, especially about the organization, vitality, and activities in and around their business districts. In addition, when moving through a community, the variety, style and maintenance of residential housing provides much visual comparison across localities. Coupling this information with a spatial analysis (through GIS) provided both confirmation and contrast to my ethnographic perspectives. GIS maps confirmed by visual observation that the communities of Bellevue and Avalon are struggling economically. In contrast, GIS data show that the majority of Sewickley’s population earns less than \$50,000 a year despite its visual presentation as an affluent community.

These descriptions serve as a foundation for my analysis of community response to Wal-Mart development. The following chapters examine the place character elements of community relations and consumer practices through resident descriptions of material, practical and symbolic community characteristics. Chapter five details the characteristics associated with the

strengths and weaknesses of community relations. Chapter six focuses on residents' consumer practices and how these shape their relationship to, perception of, and support for local community business districts and ultimately their response to the Wal-Mart development.

4.0 IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER

The small town endures as the national attic of American social and spatial consciousness, a sort of frame through which further vistas are invariably viewed and twisted to fit.

John R. Stilgoe, Outside Lies Magic-1998

How does a geographic location with a built environment of homes, businesses, and a clustering of people become defined as a community? What are the unique characteristics that make a place distinctive or unique to the local residents and outsiders? Residents' descriptions of a community's distinctive material, practical and symbolic construction and their continuous reconstruction form the basis of its place character. People's sense of place character, because it is usually an assumption of daily life and normalized is not seen as a site for study, even though it can be. But when something threatens to disrupt or undermine an assumed element of place character, like the Wal-Mart Supercenter development, these assumptions become articulated and ripe for study. A disruptive event, such as big-box retail development enables an outsider to identify certain aspects of a community and its place character.

I identified two elements of local place character that shaped local response to the Kilbuck Wal-Mart Supercenter. Local residents framed their response to Wal-Mart development through their varied responses to its perceived impact on community relations and consumer practices. Residents describe community relations and consumer practices in material, practical and symbolic characteristics. Housing design and street grids are examples of the material characteristics that create place character (Paulsen, 2004). Traffic patterns and local business structures and locations are examples of the social practices—the practical characteristics—that construct place (Paulsen, 2004). Descriptions of the values and meanings of a community are examples of the symbolic characteristics that create place character (Entrekin, 1991). The

material, practical and symbolic characteristics of place character are common themes in interviews with Ohio River residents. Local residents point out material aspects of their communities such as school district boundaries, business districts and neighborhood housing stock to describe what they value or dislike about their communities. They highlight social practices associated with traveling (by car or foot) through the community and the social interactions between residents and owner-operated businesses--as practical characteristics—when they describe the social networks of community life. And they describe community rituals such as parades, home tours, and phone directories when they mention symbolic attributes that make a community desirable, distinctive and unique. As Krista Paulsen notes “We find character in the ways these elements combine and endure, and in the salience and meaning that locals and outsiders give them... [and in] the tone of local life, encouraging or discouraging different patterns of action.” (2004, p. 245).

In Chapter three, I used ethnographic description and GIS data to describe how I see the Ohio River communities. In the next two chapters I provide examples of how the local residents see their respective communities, drawing on interviews with community members and historical narratives of community formation and activities. I use these data to develop an understanding of perceptions of community relations and consumer practices that make up the place character of the Ohio River communities.

Krista Paulsen argues that it is important to “uncover just *what* constitutes a places’ character by identifying understandings associated with specific locales and the social and material realities that provide bases for these understandings” (p. 246, emphasis in original). I find this *what* of place character in discussions with residents about the material characteristics of their communities.

To uncover perceptions of place character, I asked residents questions about their community. Some examples include “When you say (named community) what words, images, practices come to mind? What are some positive characteristics? What are some negative characteristics or things that can stifle the positive characteristics? Do you frequent local businesses? Which ones? Why? Have shopping opportunities in the community changed over the years? Where do you shop for groceries? For clothing? For household purchases?” (See Appendix C for Interview Guide). During the interviews, residents described positive and negative traits of their community. Many also compared their particular community to

surrounding Ohio River communities. Those responses, describing both their own community as well as the neighboring Ohio River communities, provided data on perceptions of local place character.

I identified place character elements by repeated, specific references to community characteristics, especially those identified as drawing residents to the area and/or keeping residents in the area. This is consistent with Paulsen's argument that "[place] character cannot simply be declared or imposed. It must be hegemonic, representing agreement among a significant segment of the population" (Paulsen, 2004, p.250). I look for this hegemonic understanding in narratives about the Kilbuck Wal-Mart development with small business owners, homeowners, consumers, local political officials and members of an opposition group. Given another example of an exogenous force, such as freeway development, a tax increase proposal, or closure of a local venue, a different segment of a community's population would be selected and different place character elements identified.

5.0 COMMUNITY RELATIONS AS AN ELEMENT OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER

The connections that draw people together in a community can take many forms. This chapter will examine resident descriptions about interactions among community members. In this chapter, I analyzed the forms of community relations--material, social practices and symbolic characteristics—that emerge as consistent themes when people talk about what qualities of social interactions they value and which they dislike.

5.1 IDENTIFYING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

I begin with a description of the historical narratives that current residences draw on in discussions of their communities. History plays a significant role in shaping both how people talk about and how they experience their communities.

The geographic theorist, Doreen Massey, notes that the appearance of a static, unchanging place is the product of active investment in preserving specific local qualities (1994, p.169). This is evident in the narratives of Ohio River community residents' descriptions of their communities. Current residents draw on historical accounts of Ohio River communities as they recount their experiences of those locations now. During the interviews, I heard echoes of these historical accounts of community development in the ways that current residents described local places. Characteristics like proximity to the city, community centered business districts, diversity in housing stock, perceptions of the diversity of local populations and community self-sufficiency are still influenced by images of the community's past. But the past does not merely shape memory. Community amenities (housing stock, for example) are also a product of in decision making and community building in the past.

Looking for links between these current resident narratives and historical accounts of community development helps explain how “places achieve coherence and how that coherence reproduces itself” (Molotch et al., 2000). As Molotch and his colleagues found in their comparison of how two neighboring California cities, Ventura and Santa Barbara, were shaped by external development. In the face of additions of a freeway construction project and new oil development in both communities, the differing sense of community character and tradition, shaped the nature of the resulting development in each community (Molotch et. al., 2000). While politicians and residents of Ventura regarded these projects as beneficial for the community, Santa Barbara residents and politicians saw these as detracting from their community and its identity (Molotoch, et al. 2000). In the same vein, I present narratives of Ohio River community development from historical materials about the socio-cultural formation and material construction of Ohio River Boulevard communities to understand the historical context from which present-day assertions of distinct community character are drawn. These historical narratives enrich explanations of current place character elements, particularly descriptions of the local built environment (material characteristics), and the socio-cultural nature of local populations (social practice characteristics), and the sense of what the community *is* (symbolic characteristics).

An 1889 publication, *The History of Allegheny County, PA*, provides historical descriptions for many (not all) localities in the county. As mentioned in the methods sections, published U.S. local histories were popular in late 19th and early 20th centuries (Szucs and Hargreaves, 1997). Published histories were often available at local public institutions for viewing by residents (such as libraries, churches and schools) (Heinz History Center researcher, 2006). Some community histories included biographies of residents who paid a subscription to be included (Szucs and Hargreaves, 1997). The narrative of Sewickley described a local population of wealthy residents who were building a community that is separate and distinct from other nearby areas, like the city of Pittsburgh. Of greatest importance was the community’s organization as a “place of residence”. In the late 1800s community residents were described as purposefully limiting local business growth in the community so that the community could develop into an area “indicative of wealth and culture”. There was a distinct effort to separate work and its corresponding practices from home life and the community of residence:

The growth of the town has been influenced solely by its advantages as a place of residence, it being one of the most delightful suburban localities in the country. No effort has been made to introduce manufactures, and the local business interests are not extensive. A large proportion of the population do business in the city, and during the day the town appears almost deserted. A different aspect is presented as the evening train arrives. The general appearance of the town and its residences is indicative of wealth and culture. Many of the streets are wide, well shaded and macadamized, and the dwellings are generally of a character fitted to bear the closest scrutiny as to design, finish and surroundings. The hills in the background greatly enhance the attractiveness of the town as a whole
(Warner, 1889, p. 201.).

5.1.1 Material Characteristics

The social and economic capital of past Sewickley residents shaped its distinct built environment of housing stock and businesses district. By creating a place that provided a respite from the work world found in a city, its founders developed a community meant to “live in” not “work in”. The notion of a community designed for residential living, not for commercial, manufacturing or industrial work is found in how people talk about the town today, what is evident when a Bell Acres resident described the Sewickley area as “unique”, a “small community.” Such descriptors link back to the efforts of previous residents to keep out large scale businesses and build a suburban-style community that would be different from the growing suburban communities in the Pittsburgh region and particularly desirable to wealthy families.

The community’s built environment—its housing stock and business district-- are seen by modern day residents as creating a scale of life that connects them to each other, with homes and businesses in close proximity. The “pride” current residents feel about their local community can be traced back to the past efforts to build a physical environment that would shape further growth in the area. The area around Sewickley has not been altered much over time; residential and business areas are still in the basic footprint laid by its founders. This Bell Acres resident describes how the area, outlined by the boundaries of the school district, maintains its identity as “small” and “unique” through the maintenance and balance of the residential and business sections of the town:

Sewickley and Bell Acres... I consider them all the same community. It is all in the Sewickley area, Quaker Valley school district. I consider it as a very unique, very nice town. It’s a very great place to live, a great place to raise children. It is a

small community. The people that are here are pretty proud of that small community and everybody pretty much feels that it's very important to keep the small community alive and the business district viable.

Current discussions of place character elements in other Ohio River communities also rely on historical characteristics. The growth of suburbs around the Pittsburgh city boundaries is highlighted in 1880s and 1890s publications which describe Bellevue, Avalon, and Ben Avon as locations that are conveniently located away from the city, as places of residence. Just as in the Sewickley description, there is an effort to distinguish these communities as “residences” as opposed to places of work. These publications also note the proximity of these present day Ohio River communities to Pittsburgh. This distance is both far enough to create a different “residential” living experience from the city, but close enough to for communities residents to commute to work in the city:

Several suburban towns fed by Allegheny are prosperously advancing in improvement, among which are Spring Garden, Avalon, Bellevue and Ben Avon. They are delightfully located for residential purposes (1897, p.33).

Bellevue was formed from the southwestern part of Ross township, September 7, 1867. It is separated from Allegheny City by Jack's run, and is about four miles from the business part of the city by the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago railway. The most thickly settled part of the borough is along the Beaver road...The site combines healthfulness, accessibility and beautiful natural scenery. There are no manufactures, and the local business is very limited. It is a suburban village to the full extent of the term, and more convenient to the two cities than any other possessing equal advantages (1889, p.175).

Housing plan advertisements of the early 1900s also highlighted the physical location of Ben Avon and its distance from yet proximity to the city of Pittsburgh as a community attribute. A 1905 issue of *Suburban Life* newspaper included an illustrated advertisement for a Ben Avon housing development. This advertisement attempted to sell the community based on its proximity, but noted community institutions such as schools and churches, described as “unusually attractive features,” that combine the best of a city living experience in a residential location:

Other attractions of the borough were identified as “Good schools and churches close at hand. Best train services between Sewickley and Pittsburgh. ... The Avon Place plan of homes was described in the same advertisement as “A High Class Subdivision, combining all city conveniences with unusually attractive features”

(Phillips, 1992, p.28).

One hundred and fifty years later, community residents still point to proximity to the city as a positive attribute of Ben Avon. Implicit in current resident comments is that this community provides a “good location” to access city amenities, but at the same time is still a place of residence. As a resident notes, Ben Avon has:

Good location and accessibility to downtown for both sports and museums. We were 7 minutes from downtown where we lived before and now we are 12 minutes from downtown.

Another Ben Avon resident’s description of the community similarly draws on place character attributes of residence and proximity to the city to describe the community as a place where one feels connected to residents and the neighborhood:

I actually moved into the neighborhood in 1982. When I first bought this house I was looking for, really, the house itself. I was looking for an old brick Victorian and I just fell in love with the neighborhood. It’s small, quiet, it’s off the beaten trail yet it’s close to everything. I really fell in love with the neighborhood.

5.1.2 Characteristics of Social Practices

Residents who moved to Ohio River communities influenced the development and maintenance of its character. During the growth of these communities in the late 1800s, housing plan developers shaped community residential characteristics based on who they allowed to buy housing lots in particular developments. This created social class differences as those with financial means were able to purchase large homes further away from the Pittsburgh city center. In addition, housing developers shaped racial and ethnic demographics in Ohio River communities by favoring sales to whites, Anglo-Saxons, and Protestants. For example, the development of Ben Avon, incorporated in 1892, was based on borough ordinances. According to a Ben Avon community history document, the borough’s council passed 34 ordinances in its first two years (Phillips, 1992). Most of the ordinances focused on “housekeeping,” “indicating the time had come when each resident could no longer be permitted to operate as a homesteader according to his own wishes but rather as a responsible citizen of the borough” (Phillips, 1992, p.26). By 1906, the borough had 28 streets laid out and graded, and only a few additional streets have been added since then (Phillips, 1992). Advertisements for housing developments in Ben

Avon reveal how the community's growth was shaped by a desire for a particular type of resident who already had particular social and cultural resources. As the following advertisement explicitly notes, the financial resources of a potential homebuilder were not the most important criteria; rather it was whether they had the right character, likely in the form of the ethnicity, religion and race. Although it is unclear whether developers or the borough developed any written covenants that excluded potential residents by race, religion and ethnicity (Heinz History Center, 2006) this advertisement appears in *The Centennial History of Ben Avon 1892-1992*:

A 1905 issue of Suburban Life newspaper carried illustrated advertisements to attract new residents to Ben Avon. Described as a "Most Beautiful Place to Live." ... H.P. McCurdy, developer of the McCurdy Plan of 18 lots petitioned buyers to 'Secure a home in beautiful Ben Avon. What I want is to bring the proper 18 families in keeping with the rest of the community. If you have the cash and not good references, do not come. What I want is character not so much the rest of payment'

(Phillips, 1992, p.28).

The structuring of Ben Avon in the late 1800s, in both the physical organization and its social engineering, has bearing on who lives in the community today. The "high class subdivision" of the early 1900s with its unusual housing features has been maintained as elegant old houses to this day. Since most of the community was built before 1910, there is little room for new development. One Ben Avon noted that a strength of the community is the longevity of its residents, coupled with the reality that there are not newer forms of housing development that could cater to a more temporary type of resident. These community characteristics are viewed as a strength and are descriptors of what a "neighborhood" or "community" is founded upon. As a Ben Avon resident said, when talking about the positive attributes of the community:

A lot of the people once they move here they stay here. Ben Avon doesn't have a lot of condominium type housing or townhouses that support transients coming in. Most of the people they come in and they are here for a good long time. Which is how you can build that neighborhood and community.

Another Ben Avon homeowner was more explicit in his description of the socio-cultural characteristics of local residents. He made the connection between the cost of living in this particular community and the type of people who moved to the area. Echoes of the 1905 housing plan development advertisement are evident in his description of who comes to Ben Avon, the financial investment required to be in the community, and how once people are rooted in the area they stay:

A community strength is the things that don't change. The houses are priced to a point where it is going to keep people out, that the kind of people who move into this area want to tear apart the house and fix things up. You want to have people make the investment in the house. A lot of the people that move into the new houses are spending what they want to spend in moving into the new houses in terms of repairs and stuff so it attracts a certain kind of people. People who want to start families. We were, well not anymore, but we used to be the new people because everyone else had been here 15 years plus, 30 years plus. The people next to us have been here 30 years plus, although we would like them to be gone, but people here have been here forever. The lady who owned this house, her father lived two doors down and bought this house for her.

This homogeneity of community in both physical and socio-cultural form is seen as desirable by other current Ben Avon residents. It makes the community a comfortable place to raise a family with other like-minded neighbors. But this consistency of thought, action, and practice can be stifling. A Ben Avon resident describes the strength of the community, but also reflects on how this strength may be problematic through the reference to a pop cultural description associated with group-think, sameness, and homogeneity:

I think that it is pretty, in the summer when the trees come out, the gardens, the houses are really beautiful, old looking historic and well kept. It is almost like... an 'Edward Scissorhands' kind of a place... There are these soccer moms and nice families, older people.

The consistency of socio-cultural community elements can be traced not only through the visual elements of community structures, like residential housing, but also the shared spaces and institutions developed to support a community. Constraints on industries or activities that introduce non-residents to the area are historical attributes. As noted earlier, much of the Ohio River corridor communities were identified and purposefully developed as suburban residences, places to live life away from work practices. Narratives of that time describe suburban communities as places that excluded manufacturing or industry. The short community descriptions of Allepo Township, Kilbuck Township and Osborne borough in the late 1880s serve as examples:

Allepo Township

There are no manufacturers, coal-works, extensive mills, or villages. The country is settled principally by businessmen from Pittsburgh and Allegheny City. (p.165)

Kilbuck Township

Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, Chicago railroad line passes through with stations at Laurel, Emsworth, Clifton and Dixmont. The line of this road and of Beaver road is a continuous succession of villages and fine residences. (p.188)

Osborne borough

It adjoins Sewickley on the west, and in common with that place it is made up almost entirely of suburban residences. (P.192)

(History of Allegheny County, 1889)

Community formation is not just about keeping industry out, but also non-residents. The opposition to “public” businesses like hotels configures an area to address the needs of only local residents and not to travelers (such as those riding the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, Chicago railroad at that time period) or other outsiders. This 1889 narrative description of Sewickley implies the “beauty” of the area is not just the physical landscape, but the organization and structuring of the area by and for the engagement of local community residents:

There are few more beautiful places in the whole country than the borough of Sewickley. It is in one of the most favorable situations on the Ohio, and has been settled by wealthy families, who have united in making it an elegant suburban place of residence. For this purpose they have strenuously opposed all attempts to introduce manufactories in the place, and have even refused to give their support to such necessary institutions as hotels. Consequently, although it is a place of between two and three thousand inhabitants, there is at present not a single public house within its limits. It has a large and elegant school-house, seven churches, a post-office, a good country trade and many elegant residences (p.174).

5.1.3 Symbolic Characteristics

Current community residents identify the self-supporting quality of community life in Sewickley as a positive place character element. While they do not explicitly identify the historical basis of current community institutions, these institutions of churches, schools and recreational outlets are rooted in the past practices of building and maintaining an inclusive community for local residents. Interestingly current residents highlight some “public” institutions that are shared by residents as positive community attributes. These modern day institutions while public and potentially available to non-residents are used predominately by local community members.

(Sewickley)I think it’s a town that really has every benefit of a big community in terms of a hospital, a library, a post office and YMCA and what have you. It has a

lot of facilities. This is the town we grew up in. It's our base, our home base for our business...Sewickley is a nice place to live. And as you mentioned as a community, and there is a lot of community efforts that you see from the garden clubs, to the chamber of commerce to the YMCA all the different organizations around a very close community I think.

It is a self sufficient community. It has tons of churches It has its own hospital, wonderful libraries, excellent library. Good school system. Wonderful YMCA. People could really just stay here and not have to go anywhere else to find something to do, outside of going to the movies.

As Harvey Molotch and his colleagues contend, "given persistent hierarchies of wealth and ideological control in places, reproduction requires all local actors to make adjustments, drawing the configurations of place that have so durably come down." (2000, p.817). Historical accounts of community development are linked to current descriptions of material elements such as proximity to the city and community centered business districts. Residents linked the practical characteristics, like diversity of housing stock and neighborhood populations to historical community development. And residence perceptions of the symbolic nature of community, like its self sufficiency are linked base to its early days. Historical and present-day community descriptions are similar because present day perceptions reflect active engagement by community members with past narratives. In the next section, I draw on interview narratives to highlight other indicators of place character elements related to contemporary community relations. These include material characteristics like consumer spaces, practical characteristics like interactions on community sidewalks, and symbolic characteristics like community institutions and rituals.

5.2 CONTEMPORARY PLACE CHARACTER

5.2.1 Consumer Space (Material Characteristics)

When asked to describe the characteristics of their respective communities, nearly all interviewees included perspectives on their community's shopping opportunities. Comments coalesced around the themes of whether or not a community had shopping opportunities, whether those shopping options best served or represented the needs of the community, and how

shopping options had changed in the community. While interviewees may have provided these comments because of my research interest, consumer spaces are crucial to social relations amongst local residents. Timothy Landry and his colleagues find that a local retailer's value to consumers is dependent on the perception that the retailer serves as a place for community members to congregate and interact (2004, p.65). I analyze consumer patronage of small locally owned businesses versus national, chain stores in a later chapter. Here, I highlight how people use ideas of community consumption spaces in their definitions of community relations, how they interact with other community residents in these spaces, and how they use earlier shopping options to express concern about contemporary social relations.

Many social commentaries have discussed reasons for and implications of the demise of small town business district. Besides the idea that shopping opportunities have disappeared in particular communities, the unique and specific qualities that a Main Street shopping district brings to a local community are difficult for local residents to articulate. Analysis of Ohio River residents comments identify the following qualities of Main Street shopping districts as important to residents: providing a distinctiveness to the community, providing a human/interactional scale for the shopping experience, and saving time when shopping districts are in close proximity to residential living spaces. They identify local shopping opportunities as a major element of local place character since shopping links residents who are patrons to residents who are owners of community stores. Additionally, they see small businesses as providing unique products, services, and a particular aesthetic to a community. As this Sewickley resident notes, it would be difficult to replicate the essence of their local small businesses in other communities or parts of the county:

Something that is very important to me and is gradually disappearing in this country is that our town center still has a large proportion of small family run businesses and it is even in the five years we have been here, it is decreasing. Some of these storefronts are being bought up by larger chains. But I really feel that small family run businesses, they add a lot to a community. They are distinct. There are towns you go to now and somebody plunked you there and took you there, blindfolded you and plunked you down. You would open your eyes, you'd have no idea whether you were in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, California. I mean, they are all starting to really look alike. And I really like that we still have a real sense of place, a real sense of character. But there are other benefits of small family businesses and that is that those people often live in the community, they spend money in the community, they put back in the community.

Another quality of the “Main Street” imagery in resident descriptions is that small businesses help to create and maintain a sense of human scale in an area. The small size of the stores, the residents’ perceptions that they are locally owned, and the physical location of the store in the community are seen as ways that stores are integrated into the community, rather than dominate or disrupt it. Small business owners speak about this human scale in terms of an implicit trust between consumer and owner. Personal relations between a local owner and local resident/consumer, they contend, often only happen in an individual-owned shop. These personal relations are built on a level of trust that comes from being local, sharing similar everyday experiences, and being part of the community fabric of the local shopping district. An example of this trust is provided in a Sewickley business owner’s example of “parenting” community children, whether through disciplinary means or through assistance in purchasing products:

That is a small business. Suzie comes in everyday after school. And you see her mom comes in and you say ‘Suzie is the cutest little thing’. And it is that the parent is comfortable enough to let the child come in by themselves. Do you think you would want your child to run in Kmart by themselves? I like Kmart, I would mean Wal-Mart or another big box store. They (relating back to the hypothetical mom) ‘I’m Suzie Jones mom and I’m sending my two sons in with a check. I am sending my two sons in to buy a toy for a party. If they misbehave call me.’ Or their credit card I mean. A child coming in with a credit card, what store is going to take that? Not Wal-Mart.

Another small business owner provided subtle detail about the difference in customer service in a small local hardware store, when compared to a big chain store. Small businesses owners can share life experiences, such as providing explanations on how to build, fix or maintain particular items as opposed to pointing a consumer in the direction of a particular product. Even though the hardware store described is now closed, the comment by a Leetsdale resident articulates the relationship building that comes with patronizing a small business in her description of a simple purchase of nails:

It just closed, the last one closed this summer...Because people wouldn’t shop in it. Well again your chains, Ace Hardwares, your Home Depot, I mean it they basically have what you wanted but then there was always that one thing. ‘well I’m just going to go to Home Depot because then I can get it ALLLL.’ But you would walk in there and could you buy one nail? They [the local hardware store] would tell you what you needed to do for something. I mean that it just is what small business is all about. And it’s a lost art. It is.

Within these examples, the ubiquitous phrase “customer service” is grounded in a human scale of interaction. This interaction is built on shared values of trust and support that make a community feel “friendly” or like a “small town”. Inevitably, this customer service also comes with the perception of increased costs. Some consumers view small businesses as more expensive than big box chain stores, but they see customer services as compensating for the cost. A Sewickley small business owner (of a toy store) described an experience of a consumer asking the owners to wrap toys he purchased at a chain store. The owner related the experience noting that a big box store will not wrap items purchased, which is a service that would inevitably increase costs. While the consumer wants the best deal on toys he will respect “whatever you charge me (to wrap the toys).” The owner described consumer’s desire for low prices, but also the unique customer service associated with small business practices:

A guy came in and asked if we wrap and we said ‘yes, we do,’ and he said, ‘I have some packages that I need wrapped,’ and we said, ‘we will wrap them for you if you buy the wrap,’ and we charged him a fee and he carried in bags from Target.... **Of toys** (emphasis by interviewee)...But then again that is a service that he couldn’t have found at Target or at any of the big box. So, but it is interesting that people... view we have several people say ‘do you have this for me? Whatever you charge me I don’t care.’ I wonder do they go to any of the other gift stores and ask the same thing? I mean that’s fine but it interesting that they come in here and say that.

Some community residents spoke of their efforts to support the local businesses. Their comments on the perceived increased monetary costs associated with supporting small businesses are balanced by statements of the highlighted benefits of time saved because of proximity. These statements provide context to phrases like “unique community” and “comfortable,” used to describe the positive aspects of local community character. There is an implicit understanding that the proximity of local shopping options provides benefits that create a quality of life that is desired by local residents. These comments are found in separate descriptions by a Sewickley and an Allepo resident:

We focus on what’s here as we can here. Mostly more so, I mean that’s the way we were raised. As a business owner you realize more so the importance of that. I didn’t think of going to Giant Eagle. When we took this business on we said we have to support our own people. That is how we are going to stay here. You may pay a little bit more but I don’t have to get in my car, use my car, use my gas, use my time. People don’t understand that. Time is money. Well it’s a dollar more here. I’m running over to Kmart meanwhile they are spending an hour to get there because the bridge is all messed up.

The residents of these communities in the area are pretty invested. I mean they do take pride in it and they work hard to. I think many of them to shop at the local stores when they can to take advantage of what we have here.

Two Ben Avon residents describe how supporting local businesses is a show of loyalty for the community. The first narrative describes the decision making that goes into supporting local businesses instead of shopping at a big box store. They note economic distinctions between supporting big box or local businesses, but each understands implicitly that money spent in the community will circulate in the community through small business support of community organizations or activities.

We actually just started our own business in November, so the printing shop on the main street (in Ben Avon) we went there to get business cards. They gave him a real good price. Our dentist is down there too on the main street. Our pharmacy you know we could get mail order but we use the pharmacy in Avalon. We actually pay more to use the local but we do it ... He is a very good guy, he does a lot for the community, supports the community organizations. Its just, we just like the service. There is a certain loyalty that develops for the small business. Whenever possible, I support the local business. I mean, if it involves going up to the local hardware in Bellevue. I know if I need something, it is a lot harder for me to drive to Bellevue than to go up to Home Depot. A lot of times I'll just do that. You know, you end up paying a few cents more, but they've been there so I take my turns supporting you know whoever I think has what I need.

You know even the local florist right up in Bellevue, Dietz's. We use them all the time. My family uses them. They did our wedding. I mean, they're local. We like the work that they do, so we are going to give them the business.

The idea of convenience is also found in comments about supporting local businesses, as evident in the comments of a Sewickley and a Ben Avon resident about how people perform rituals like grocery shopping or weekly activities based on the opportunities found within community boundaries. They note the ability to walk while completing certain activities or access to a variety of products and services in a short distance as examples of that convenience:

Well we do it because of the local connection but it is also a convenience. You know our store is here, Saffrons (local grocery store) is here. And we could walk to work if we want to and Quaker Village where Giant Eagle is farther.

Every Saturday we take my daughter to swimming lessons at the Y and then if I'm along I usually poke my nose in one of the little stores and a visit to Starbucks is always in order there. Yeah we go out to eat there but it's handy enough. The same sort of thing with Bellevue, oh yeah we will go there and shop [for] gifts and other kinds of items. There is an antique store there and a pizza place, some good restaurants. It's building up pretty nicely.

Ohio River corridor community residents identified Bellevue and Sewickley as communities with local business districts. These areas were described in ethnographic detail in Chapter three. Residents in other Ohio River communities used the business districts in Bellevue and Sewickley to describe the quality of life in their *own* communities. An overarching theme of these comments was “there’s a lot that has gone out and not come back in”. Community residents in Emsworth and Ben Avon often defined problems in their communities based on their lack of shopping options:

(In Emsworth)Well there’s very few businesses there anymore. Apparently at one time and this was before our time there was a drug store. When we moved in there was a hardware store. There was a beauty shop. Donovan’s Cleaners is still down there. It’s just that Center street, it rolls through town.

On Church (the business district in Ben Avon) right around the borough hall. That is it basically. When you get outside there is the Mini Mart (on Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard), but that is basically it. But I mean it’s a dry community there are no bars, taverns, restaurants. When you get down on the Boulevard you get some businesses by the lock and dam some industrial but not so much to build a tax base.

Ben Avon doesn’t really have much commercial businesses associated with it. A lot of the other towns have commercial businesses to help support their tax base. Ben Avon is limited. There is one block on the main section of town that has the businesses a CPA, a printer and a barber shop. That is the business district.

Residents contrast their communities, like Bell Acres and Ben Avon, with Ohio River communities that do have shopping options. They describe a lack of local shopping opportunities to underscore their sense that their communities are lacking the elements that make a “real” community:

I would describe Bell Acres, it is an area that is just houses, so I would not consider us a place where people gather and [with] stores. Sewickley is a small town where like everyone knows each other and there’s a lot of community.

When you can walk around [Ben Avon], well it’s not a real commercial thriving district like you might have in Bellevue on California Avenue.

Consumption spaces shape local place character. They create a human scale of activity that allows residents to “save time” and create opportunities for local consumers and small business owners to interact. The human scale of interaction created by local community business districts extends into other community social relations, as discussed below.

5.2.2 Sidewalks (Characteristics of Social Practices)

A practical characteristic that builds the community relations in Ohio River communities is the simple, concrete sidewalk. Local residents identified the physical placement and utilization of sidewalks as a community strength and asset. Sidewalks stand at the intersection of public/private space. They reflect historical decision making that shaped community experiences for later generations.

Sidewalks help to build the social and cultural structure of urban communities based on the relations of non-related people who utilize this public space (Jacobs, 1961; Duneier, 1999). Similarly, in a small town community, sidewalks serve to increase the relations between community residents. The integration and intimacy between residents and non-residents on sidewalks is built on negotiated understandings of distance from, and surveillance of, each other (Jacobs, 1961; Duneier, 1999). Sidewalks help build the specificity of community place character by shaping patterns of social interaction between neighbors, business owners, and consumers.

The fact that communities had sidewalks was a draw for some residents to move into the area. A newer Sewickley resident (less than 8 years in the area) described how sidewalks create a closer knit community. She highlighted how sidewalks provide residents the freedom from using a car to move through the area. Additionally she pointed to the role community sidewalks played in determining where her family chose to live:

We moved here five years ago from Boston. And when we were moving here we contacted realtors and we said we only want to look at communities that have a defined town center because we like to walk, be able to walk, we don't want to live in a subdivision with no sidewalks where you have to drive to everything. And there weren't too many choices so we thought Sewickley was [similar to] a town we moved from which was Winchester, Massachusetts.

Other relative newcomers to Ben Avon community described how sidewalks create a livable scale for neighbors. They make reference to city living where residents interact in close proximity to one another. Sidewalks and the linear paths they draw between residents help keep residents from living on a "house on the prairie" where residences are separated by large yards:

One thing we liked about this area too was the hybrid. We didn't want to be in a pure suburban bedroom community without sidewalks and which is what you get further up or if you head up north... Something that has that sort of city

neighborhood feel. Having grown up in a city neighborhood myself and having lived in a city neighborhood on the north side, [here] the houses are a little bigger and further apart but you still have something of a feel of a community, as opposed to just large space and a ... a little house on the prairie kind of thing.

Community residents relate daily interactions that reveal the invisible but impactful ways that sidewalks shape their interaction with other community residents. The use of sidewalks shape how this Allepo resident integrates community places, from a local YMCA to churches and businesses, into her daily experiences.

I think what's desirable about the small town community I can't really... I feel like I can't put it into words. You can go down to Sewickley and walk the streets, you can go to church and see people you know. It's fabulous. You don't always have to get in your car either. You know we walk down to Sewickley from here (Allepo), have a cup of coffee and walk back. A lot of people do that.

The utilization of community amenities perceived as part of a livable scale of life enhances residents' positive feeling for their communities. A Bell Acres resident describes the ability to walk to particular community amenities as a strength, compared to a typical experience at a local shopping area where a mass of chain stores, a mall, and restaurants have conglomerated and can only be navigated with a vehicle:

It's just that you can come into Sewickley, I can go to work, I can get a cup of coffee, I can get clothes you know what I mean. You can park in one place and walk all through and everyone is friendly and the different stores. Whereas like Monday I needed to get a pair of jeans and I was in Robinson (a local major shopping center area) and I had to drive like through all this traffic and it was horrible and I had to get to work and I was in a hurry. I don't know there's just something nice about not having, it's just this little town it's not huge big area. I hate going out to the Pointe at Robinson. So I think that the strengths of Sewickley is that it's convenient, nice and everyone's friendly.

Sidewalks also shape how people interact with other residents and leads to a sense of involvement in the community. Talking about using the spaces of community through riding bikes or walking, two Sewickley residents describe a level of interaction and an implicit commitment to the community:

It's always been in that sense a community where you walk down the street and say hello to everybody, you know people's names, it's just very quaint little town.

I really like the fact that we live it's very tight knit. I mean there's small lots and some people like a lot of land, but we actually like the fact that we have, we're very close to our neighbors, at least I think that. Because of that, we walk and we see our neighbors a lot. It is that sense of community. People know each other.

The fact that people share the public spaces of the community changes the way they interact with neighbors. Residents in Sewickley and Ben Avon describe this social experience similarly:

For us you know it is very family friendly. When we moved here, we had a six year old and nine year old and we kind of worried how they were going to make the adjustment. And then they ran out the door the first day and became friends with kids in the neighborhood. So...they were happy. So, you know, it's a very close knit, family friendly community.

When we got married all the neighbors here knew [my husband] but all the neighbors made us feel so very welcome. A new couple moved in on the top of the hill. When we had our holiday get-together we were like 'come on down we want to get to know you a little better because you are a part of our community.' I think that makes a big difference.

The close interaction and daily engagement at such a personal level encourages neighbors to draw on each others' social networks and resources, as described by a Ben Avon community member:

A guy that we know a friend of our hairdresser, he did the air conditioning here. Now he moved in a few doors down so when we need anything he just walks a few houses up the street. I grew up in the suburbs of DC and ... , we knew the people in our apartment building and that was it. And now you just sort of feel like if you need help, one of (daughter's) friends live on the street, or I could go see (our neighbor) across the street.

Residents use sidewalks as a physical element in the continual negotiation of what a community means. They shape what the community is and may be by their daily engagements with one another on and through social interaction on sidewalks. They experience their communities, not from their cars, but in direct face-to-face interactions with their neighbors. As sidewalks enable people to navigate and lessen the boundaries of public/private space in a community, they also shape social relations. These social relations also help build the community's place character. Sidewalks help to break down social and physical barriers that can separate neighbors. They are a community characteristic that serves to enhance community social relations. As such they are identified as a positive characteristic of place character. Residents fear that these direct interactions would be lost if external growth and development at a scale larger than the individual or community level disrupts those daily patterns of interaction. This is the basis of concern about how a Wal-Mart would negatively affect their community's character.

5.2.3 Community institutions and rituals (Symbolic Characteristics)

Over time, as communities change and grow, the community institutions associated with educating the local residents' children served as the repository for community values, beliefs and expectations. Educational institutions transmit these socio-cultural community characteristics to the next generation. In the communities of study, there are three separate school districts spread among the 10 communities. A Bell Acres resident defines his local community according to the school district boundaries. He notes that the school district is the "core" of the community and serves as a symbolic glue that pulls together the different communities from Leetsdale to Glenfield:

(How do define your community?) Probably the Quaker valley school district, which supports 11 communities. There are 11 of them. And they are all supportive of the community. You know that is where most of ...that is the core of what makes all the communities work.

School activities and events draw not just the school-age local residents, but their parents and family members as well. The never-ending stream of sporting events, choir concerts, school plays, art shows, debate tournaments, science fairs, quiz bowls, and fundraising activities create a myriad of opportunities for local residents to interact and engage with one another. Each of these activities and the resulting resident support through time, talent, and financial resources are used in resident narratives to describe what they value and find important in their community. As one Allepo resident notes, these school activities are foundational elements of a close knit community. Active participation in school related activities translates into active participation in other community activities which further links community residents to one another.

When there is something going on in Sewickley in the village, everyone participates and everyone knows everyone because they all go to school together. And even the Sewickley Academy students who are going to a private school, they all know the students in Quaker Valley because of sports. They are interchangeable, the soccer and the hockey, different sports that they play together. It's just a nice close community that really makes it nice.

For some residents, the role and influence of the community school system can sometimes be too strong or even in opposition to their socio-cultural beliefs. The priorities of a

school district can create the perception of homogeneity in education, cultural, and political values among community residents. There can be a push back by local residents when their particular priorities are not reflected in the actions of the local school district. A local Ben Avon resident describes frustration with the local school district's financial decision-making and how these financial decisions strengthen a community culture that she finds problematic:

Well philosophically we did not send our daughter to the schools here because they tend to be pretty, well let's put it this way, the year before she was to go they spent a million on the football field and could not afford a Spanish teacher... We have values that are a little more, a little less Republican. A little less suburban because it [the school] is like the suburban status, jock culture. The school is sort of geared to that.

Another Ben Avon resident in the same district acknowledges the delicate balance between the desire to project a particular community image and how that image can be stifling and limiting. In the end, though, he acknowledges his desire for benefits that come from conforming and maintaining projecting particular community socio-cultural values:

There's just the sense that sometimes it's laid on a little too thick that we are all about family around here and academic excellence. But there is something to it. The school district is really small. [Our daughter] if she graduates here will have 100 kids in her class and I like that.

Community rituals such as parades and community days also shape community organization (Tuan, 1991). These rituals draw residents together and help to build community relations through shared experiences. Many interviewees identified events that serve to strengthen their community. These rituals were based on organized groups, like churches and a women's community club. Ben Avon interviewees participated in events held by local community churches even when they were not affiliated with that church:

It [Ben Avon] has a Presbyterian church, yeah the church is by far the biggest, it's very tall and imposing and its very nice and friendly. I like the events I go to there. You see most of the people (from Ben Avon) go there. You don't see people from here go to our church [in Bellevue].

There were some Christmas things at the Presbyterian church that my daughter and I went to. The church has a theater. I saw 'Steel Magnolias' there and it was really good. The community players. I do stuff like that. Whenever they put up a sign on a telephone pole I read it and see if I want to go.

One group highlighted for its community efforts by Ben Avon residents was the “The Avon Club.” Residents described how this local women’s group tried to build community connectedness through rituals like parades.

I know there’s ‘the ladies’ in the community. You know I am not even sure how often they meet. But they do different things they put together the Octoberfest. It is like a fall festival and they do a street fair. So they do those types of community services.... So they just kind of try to keep that sense of community involvement.

The activities of this Ben Avon women’s group also drew people together on at a much more personal and private level:

They also do the Christmas house tour (this event was later described as a yearly event where residents can tour local houses dressed up for the holidays)

Every year they put together a community directory. They go around and put like the name your name, your children’s name, a little community directory. So that way, instead of the big phone book, you’ve got your little directory.

Sharing the private space of a home requires a comfort level with community residents based on everyday social relations that build trust, intimacy and a similarity in lived experiences. Participating in a community directory takes away a level of anonymity between residences and marks community membership. As opposed to a church directory that lists affiliated members based on their choice of worship, this directory links community residents based upon their choice of residence.

The close proximity of life’s activities also helps build a sense of connection that provides implicit trust and support as noted by a Sewickley resident:

I grew up in New York City in an apartment building, but it was a real neighborhood and I think I just like neighborhoods. I like places where people feel a certain unity and come together.

A Bell Acres resident describes how knowing people on a first name basis helps to build a feeling of community:

I go to get gas and I know the people and I know a lot of people that shop in here by name and their kids, Just like the whole culture of Sewickley, it’s really friendly it just makes it feel like community.

A description provided by a Ben Avon resident details a level of relation and trust that can allow neighboring adults to participate in raising other people’s children, whether it is assisting a hurt child or disciplining another person’s child for bad behavior:

I keep using a small town atmosphere, but that is what you get. I grew up in a small mining town in Fayette county and you get that same sense of community here that I did back there in that everyone knows everyone. The kids are around and if you see a kid doing something inappropriate you can say 'hey, don't do that.' And you know the parents they look out for the other kids. If a kid falls off his bike people are there to assist. Its not like you close your door and ignore people.

Another Ben Avon resident describes neighborhood gatherings:

We usually host the holiday party around new years. All the neighbors are invited. The neighbor behind us has a pig roast. We always have a bock party in the spring or fall.

As neighborhood gatherings or sharing parenting duties draw people into closer relations, they help solidify community level morals and values about child-rearing or home maintenance. These social practices teach new residents the socio-cultural practices and expectations of the community. According to a Ben Avon local, these same practices and expectations are what keeps residents from moving elsewhere:

You have a lot of people that went to school here that stayed here in the area. I graduated from Avonworth High School and that is where our daughter is graduating from you know you run into a lot of people that went to school here and always said 'oh it's this little small town I have to get out' and you see them years later that are raising their families in this area too.

The perception that people often return to the area or never leave as adults leads local residents to believe that the area symbolically draws people together. A Leetsdale resident believes this rootedness helps build community strength that can be drawn upon in times of personal need:

There are a lot of people who were born there, raised there you know there are generations of people who have lived in the same house. I have lived there for 30 some years but I just think it is awesome that they stay there. You know so and so is related to so and so and it's like everybody knows everybody and that may have a downside but more often than not it's just they look out for one another and know if something happens and they get on the phone and it's so in so is sick or so in so aunt died and everybody runs and bakes something or cooks something and brings it to the house.

While building this residential identity through artifacts like a directory, community residents also identified ritual events like parades and festivals that help to foster positive community relations. Examples were offered by both Ben Avon and Sewickley residents:

They have the parades here. I mean sometime there's the marching band, the fire trucks. It is just nice. You go down there and all of your neighbors are down there, on either side of the street with street food, the kids. Its almost like a throwback to the 50s you look at those kind of things and it is kind of neat.

I also think that there are a number of local groups that you know groups that put together local festivals, that is all very important because that it you know it gets people down to the enjoy the community and have a sense of pride. There are a lot of local events here. There is the Harvest Festival in September and there are parades. And you know it all sounds kind of corny but people love that. And people really come out for those events and I think those things are very important to bring people together and they do you know instill a sense of real local love and pride of community.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The material, practical and symbolic characteristics used to describe community relations can seem to paint an image of a “perfect” community. It may be “perfect” to the local residents, but just as they provide descriptions of desirable community attributes, they are also implicitly creating a boundary that suggests what would not fit. This boundary is built on current and historic understandings of community place character. For the residents I interviewed, issues of poverty, discrimination and daily struggle are seemingly non-existent. However, the GIS demographic data in Chapter three showed that this is not the reality and experience of a significant percentage of residents in these communities. Additionally the emphasis on Christian holidays like Christmas, or families with children, or face-to-face interaction with neighbors might signal a sense of what is normal/assumed for residents. It is questionable whether the community would be as welcoming to members of other religious faiths or ethnicities, to unmarried partners, lesbian and gay families, homeless individuals and/or families, residents in group homes, or individuals recovering from drug or alcohol addictions.

6.0 CONSUMPTION AS AN ELEMENT OF LOCAL PLACE CHARACTER

Responses of Ohio River community residents to the potential Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck township provide rich data on how residents identify and understand their community's place character. In this chapter, I examine varied responses to the proposed Wal-Mart development through resident descriptions of their consumption patterns. I focus on how residents articulate concerns about shifting consumer structures as they affect on the material, practical, and symbolic characteristics of place character.

Like the catalyst in a chemical reaction, Wal-Mart is a topic that elicits a unique discussion of community activities and personal consumption habits. Ohio River corridor residents, as expected, are for or against the proposed Wal-Mart development. An individual's primary orientation towards either personal consumption needs or perception of impact on local community elements frames their perspective on the potential Wal-Mart development. Those opposed to the Wal-Mart focus on the store's impact on local communities and the impending disruption of its place character. They highlight the demise of locally owned small businesses. With the exception of small business owners, who fear for their livelihood, the main concern of this group is the anticipated shift in their local communities' business district. Secondary to the impact on local place character is their frustration with the increasing scale and level of consumption in the area. They see a Wal-Mart Supercenter and a strip mall in Kilbuck as further encroachment into their lives and a limit on their control over the consumption experience.

In contrast, those who support the potential Wal-Mart development identify benefits for their personal consumption needs. These needs are associated with lower prices, specifically on groceries, and greater selection of goods and services as compared to current local consumption options, which they identify as local small businesses and the regional grocery chain, Giant Eagle. Additionally, they see an increase in job opportunities for local residents, the infusion of tax dollars into the communities, and a reduction in time spent shopping because of the store's

close proximity to residences as benefits of having a “local” Wal-Mart. Interestingly, those who support the potential Wal-Mart for the betterment of their personal consumption raise one concern about the potential impact on local communities: the effect of increased traffic. However, residents who support the Kilbuck Wal-Mart development trust that the traffic issues will be adequately resolved by local government officials and agencies and the site’s developers. They think that retail development would not occur unless such issues were effectively addressed and resolved by those in positions of power.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the relationship between local economic development, with its sole focus on commercial retail development, and local consumption. The next sections detail resident descriptions of symbolic, material and social practices around consumption that shape the perceptions of place character in Ohio River communities and response to the Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck.

6.1 LOCAL RETAIL DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONSUMER

The 10 communities along the Ohio River that are at the center of my study are located in Allegheny County in Western Pennsylvania. They are just a few of the 130 distinct municipalities in the county, the most per capita of any county in the U.S. (Bucsko and Blazina, 2004). A vast majority of these communities support their own municipal services such as police, fire, road maintenance, education, and fiscal and political management. This support comes in the form of property and income taxes garnered from local residents and businesses. Relying on these taxes is an even greater strain since more than one-third of the county’s 130 municipalities (46) occupy less than 1 square mile of land and fourteen municipalities in Allegheny County have less than 1,000 residents (Buckso and Blazina, 2004). In addition, this community reliance on population base is cause for concern when Allegheny County’s population continues to decline. Table 5 shows this decline.

Table 5. Allegheny County population totals between 1970-2000.

| | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Allegheny County Population | 1,605,133 | 1,450,195 | 1,336,449 | 1,281,666 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Census 2000, Summary File 3 (SF 3); generated by Dana Reinke; using American Factfinder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>; (6 June 2006).

Those involved in structuring economic development and growth identified ever increasing costs associated with meeting residential needs. I interviewed five individuals who served local communities either through elected positions or representation on local commissions. Two were elected officials, two were on planning commissions and another was a zoning officer. A planning commission member in a southern Allegheny county municipality noted the problems associated with working in a county with 130 municipalities:

That's a very big problem in Allegheny County. What it does is pit these little communities against each other for tax revenue. I mean, they are all responsible for providing services to their residents which is increasingly more and more expensive and yet when you have a municipality that is less than one square mile how much tax base can you have? So it puts them in a position of vying for tax revenue and the best tax revenue you can get is from industrial or commercial development.

Residents involved in local management identify the importance of commercial development for helping address the needs of local communities. But the focus on obtaining commercial development takes on the characteristics of a contest or race to obtain retail development among municipalities. One Allegheny county municipality zoning officer states:

The municipality that gets commercial development improves the tax base. We all need the tax base or we can't survive and it's getting more and more difficult every year. There are a lot of demands on the local government as well as state, county, federal. But most things start at the local level and a lot of people think that the local government can do anything or should take care of everything and that's not really the case so there is a great strain put on local governments...So the commercial aspect of the municipality does provide the municipality with a tax base. It provides the municipality with traffic flow people coming in and going out and utilizing other facilities such as gas stations and restaurants. It all helps the tax base.

For communities that capture retail development, according to one local official, commercial businesses do not put a great strain on local resources. The relationship is seen as a win for the local community because it is a revenue increase without additional output.

Describing how one southern Allegheny county community lost a large big-box retail development to another community, a council member provides this perspective:

So what do they [a big box retail development] do? They go about a mile away and reap a tremendous tax windfall for the borough next door to us. We would have loved to have the taxes...It's not like you're starting up some kind of a widespread business that will require you to maintain roads, build and plow and things like that. That's a self contained area where they [the big-box retail store] would have done all of the construction, cleared the land, constructed it, paved the land, maintained it and a really nice looking building that would have drawn a lot of people to the borough.

With each municipality working to improve its tax base, organization and planning for bringing in commercial retail development varies by the municipality's current state of development, the nature of its planning commission, and community response to the development. As a southern Allegheny county municipality planning commission member notes:

[Commercial developments] primarily want to locate along the most traveled routes. Businesses want to grow in the areas that have the highest visibility. They have spent a lot of money studying the highest travel routes in order to place their businesses along those routes. Some communities have economic development plans that show goals, outline and a plan for the development in the community. There is a logical order to it. We have a need, we have this land, let's get some taxes from that land. The public plays a role in reacting to it (commercial development), not really shaping it.

Commercial retail development can take many forms, but increasingly it is in the form of big-box retail. Yet, some local officials identify big-box retail as not true economic development. According to one official, this form of economic development is more like shuffling cards. In economic terms it just switches the municipalities where consumers go to purchase goods and services. Using as an example, a local retail strip development called Mt. Nebo, a Sewickley resident describes the concern of neighboring municipalities:

In other parts of the U.S ...[with big-box retail] there's population growth. While I am sure it [big-box retail development] does have an impact on the surrounding businesses, I can't believe it has such an impact as an area like this which is not growing. Not growing population wise, not growing in terms of economic strengths, purchasing power, so every time we open one of these new retail centers, we really do it's just pulling it away from older established areas. Mt. Nebo got TIF (tax increment financing) financing. A battle was waged over that one. There was some market research done on where would the business [for Mt. Nebo] come from and a very large percentage of it was coming from McKnight Road and the Ross Township supervisors passed a resolution that they opposed

this development because of the impact it would have on their township, their tax revenue and just that more and more abandoned store fronts would occur.

While communities battle over which specific locality receives the taxes from consumer purchases, local residents focus on a broader perspective; whether the Pittsburgh region can support the continued pace of commercial retail development in the area. A Glenfield resident makes the link between demographic and economic realities impacting the opportunities for growth in the region:

I look at this whole invasion in the Pittsburgh area of big-box. And I don't know if it's true anywhere else but let's be frank. Pittsburgh is not growing, it has really nothing to offer anyone and it's a perfect place to dump this sort of stuff on a community that's desperate. I've been in many meetings with county reps and state reps and I tell them. 'If it looks like development, it smells like development it must be development so lets build it. It's not true.'

Some residents identify the implicit relationship between a low wage service-based economy and having disposable income for extra consumption desires. Another Glenfield resident explains his understanding that increased retail development is a flash point for frustrations with the restructured U.S. economy:

There are only so many consumption dollars in Pittsburgh... I think they [big box retail] see us as a good place to unload... there's a saturation point and I don't know what whether they are just trying to beat each other to see whose going to win. I don't know whether it's Loews or Home Depot and Home Office against Staples... They know in a household if that both people work for \$7, \$8 an hour that \$16 bucks an hour and that's how their figuring it, the way I look at it. But \$16 bucks an hour is not that much. That's still not going to buy you a house these days, pretax.

The increasing focus on consuming, and how consumption structures U.S. society, are cited by some interviewees as a reason for opposing the Wal-Mart development. The vestiges of a consumer republic, its socio-cultural practices and spaces associated with the activities of consumption, are now the focus of economic growth and community identity for many localities (Zukin, 2004). This new form of consumption involves not just purchasing a product but also "what, where and how we consume" (Cohen, 2003, p. 91). In this new consumption society, Wal-Mart is the largest actor.

Some residents find that too much emphasis is placed on consuming, particularly its role in organizing human behavior. A Glenfield resident argued that U.S. national economic growth

and ever-increasing consumption practices undermines a basic human response to a national tragedy:

One of the dumbest things he [George Bush] said after 9/11 was ‘keep shopping.’ Don’t want to get into a war-time economy. We should be acting like we are in a war against terrorism, not racing to Wal-Mart after 3000 people got killed. Nothing changed. That’s the mindset of Americans. They got to come out of that store with a big box in their shopping cart. It’s consumption and look how much gets thrown out by the curb. It’s terrible.

Residents link underlying frustrations that accompany shopping experiences at big-box stores to the unbalanced power relationship between the individual consumer and big-box shopping. They believe there is a lack of individual control over the process, with the exception of the final decision to purchase a product. The whole consumption experience, from what product is available to the layout of stores, forces them to engage in a disconcerting process of tradeoffs, whether it is purchasing a non-preferred kind of baked beans or maneuvering a “swarm of people” to get a prescription filled. They note how this unequal power relationship between individual shoppers and the larger consumption experience likely shapes consumer desires for products, whether it is outdoor gear or guitars. One Glenfield resident is concerned about the control that big-box consumption has over consumer choices:

Now they are coming out with these specialty big boxes like Cabelas. They said there was a mass hysteria to get in down there [in Wheeling, West Virginia]. Now there are there’s a big box store for guitars. How many guitars are consumed in the U.S.?

As described by some local Ohio River community residents, the boundless opportunities for consumption can also become psychologically exhausting. Underlying this exhaustion is a frustration associated with utilizing big box stores for their consumption practices. The frustration comes from the emotional and physical toll that shopping at big box stores takes on consumers. Local residents described making shopping decisions based on preference and availability of particular types of merchandise but say that the psychological decisions of where to shop and what to purchase cause their frustration. Even with increased choices at big-box stores, consuming is time consuming, stressful, and not always rewarding. According to a Glenfield resident:

I’ve been in Wal-Mart and to go food shopping there it’s like a 10 hour trip... and if you are out shopping and want baked beans, you like Busch beans, you go to Wal-Mart you are going to get a heck of a deal on Campbells. Well you don’t like

Campbells so you are either not going to buy it or buy it. You can go to Wal-Mart every other week and there is a different bean there or a different jelly, it never stays the same.

[Shopping at the Giant Eagle grocery store on Camp Horne Road] I don't know where anything is, I had to find marshmallows once to bring in for school and I went down every damn aisle of the store. I had a prescription to get filled. And I had to wait and it was just a madhouse like people swarming around like bees. It's nice, it's clean, they have fresh produce, everything is there if you can find it, but I just sort of want to go in and out.

Some residents note the surveillance that occurs at big-box retail stores and how this creates a stressful experience. They describe how the combination of store layout, security cameras, and intercom announcements impact the shopping experience at some stores. Even when cognizant of these store practices and how they create an unpleasant shopping experience, some residents, like this Ben Avon local, state that they still choose to shop there:

The layout of the store-- they don't have someone breaking in on the music every five seconds to tell you 'blue light security in sector 5.' Wal-Mart they are always telling you their security cameras are on, so they don't trust you. They say something and it is probably completely meaningless but they say 'section 3 the security camera is on,' as if they ever turn them off. It is designed to scare you to make you not shoplift... But, it is just something you have to get through.

Others make different choices. As a counter to the unequal scales of experience with big box shopping and the lack of consumer control over the process, some spoke about their decision to use the Internet for shopping purposes. The philosophies vary among people as to why they shop online. For one Emsworth resident, it is to control the over-consumption that can occur when she shops at big-box stores:

I have found that I don't need it. You walk into those stores and you see stuff. It's hard to walk in and go I'm just going to buy this... because there is so much out there and the prices are so good that you end up spending more money than you actually intended to. And I have found that I just stay out of them . . . I do a lot of shopping online.

Others residents say that online shopping allows them to better control the shopping process. They describe how they control the access to potential products based on their choice of online searching. Online shopping increases the scale of potential products available, but allows the individual to control the experience, particularly the time it takes to shop. For those that shop online, they believe the ability to save time by shopping online or control the time spent shopping reshapes the shopping experience so it fits within their daily experiences, as opposed to

shopping at big box stores which controls their particular experience. One Emsworth resident describes her ability to control the shopping experience, which she believes stands in contrast to the typical American shopping experience:

I mean even the malls. I don't go to them. I know I am probably not the normal average American, but it had gotten to the point to where I was going out spending time looking for this stuff and I'm coming home and not finding it. Where I can get online and I can order school clothes

Another individual points to the time saved by controlling the shopping experience. Those who shop online describe a cost-benefit ratio between the costs associated with shopping online (shipping charges) and the time gained. The American phrase "time is money" works in reverse according to individuals who online shop. Like money, the newly available time gives a chance, according to this Ben Avon resident, to engage in life experiences not controlled by defined practices like work or shopping:

Anything I need [I try to buy online]. Sometimes if I don't feel like going out to Office Max, I may order paper from Staples and have it come because sometimes I don't feel like or I have time to drive all over the place. And I know that this might be pretty dumb to pay \$5 for shipping on 3 packs of paper but it is the convenience and the time because time is so limited you just want to work as long as you can during the day, enjoy your evening, sleep at night and get up and do it again the next day . If you have to drive to Wal-Mart that is 30 minutes, and then getting back. So you have lost an hour already. And then you are pounding your head trying to find whatever you are trying to find.

Concerns with the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck township are linked to larger issues associated with the economic, political, and socio-cultural realities of present day U.S. society. The expansion of big-box store outlets into more U.S. communities to increase their profits and market shares undermines the unique qualities that make distinct community places. As big-box growth merges with local community economic need, a Glenfield resident contends that a homogeneity of place occurs:

I use the word homogenize an awful lot anymore and that what I am afraid of. We are becoming homogenized. It's just no fun to go out and spend your money anymore. I just don't get a kick out of it. It's just the same anywhere. You could blindfold somebody, drive around in circles for ten hours, be in Chicago and take the blindfold off 'well where are you?' 'I'm in a Wal-Mart back home.' 'No you're not, you are in Chicago.' You never know the difference.

This discussion about community economic development links to community concerns about disruption of local place character with developments like Wal-Mart. As communities

draw in global, mass-market retail development to fill voids in local tax revenue, people fear a subsequent shift in community use patterns of local business districts and resident interactions. The scale of interaction that occurs in local business districts or town centers, to these interviewees, is something that creates strong social ties and provides balance to the consumer relations between business or service provider and consumer/local resident. A Glenfield resident uses the example of new mixed development that rebalances the scales of relations between consumption spaces and human interaction. By noting this new form of mixed development, her frustration with the potential Wal-Mart Supercenter in Kilbuck is further exemplified by picking up on the focus on developing main streets. The main streets create social and economic interactions that build desirable place character elements and are already available in communities like Sewickley and Bellevue:

I feel that in a little way they are trying. The developers are now trying to develop communities with little main streets, that's what they are trying to go back to. Well, why destroy our community with our main streets and 20-30 years from we are trying to get back to where we were. I mean we have it now, why give it up?

6.1.1 Local response to retail development

The most visible mode of community action developed in response to the proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter development is the organization Communities First!. Founded in February 2002, the organization was started by the mayor of Glenfield and includes residents from nine Ohio River corridor communities—Kilbuck, Allepo, Avalon, Edgeworth, Emsworth, Glenfield, Ohio, Osborne and Sewickley. The group's mission is to “enhance the livability and natural beauty of our Ohio River corridor communities.” (Communities First documentation, June 2004). Figure 18 shows the placement of the Wal-Mart Supercenter almost directly in the center of the Ohio River corridor communities.

Based on its mission, the group opposed the proposal for a 204,000 square foot Wal-Mart Supercenter adjacent to a 50,000 square foot strip mall on property that was formerly Dixmont State Hospital in Kilbuck. In order to best address its mission, Communities First! pursued three main goals in its fight against Wal-Mart. These were to “1.) raise public awareness about the proposed development and its likely impacts on the local communities and the way of life, 2.)

ensure that the developer strictly meets all local, state and federal requirements and take action if they are not, and 3.) create an alternative development plan for the Dixmont site which would promote sustainable development practices and conserve open space”(CF document, June 2004). An analysis of the efforts associated with addressing these goals points to ways residents draw upon the local place character qualities to oppose a particular exogenous element.

First, Communities First! worked for public awareness. Communities First! Members I interviewed spoke of the diversity of the group, based not on specific community membership, but on the implicit knowledge and social networks that were part of the group. These social networks and knowledge gained from varied educational backgrounds and career orientations of group members created a large pool of resources. A Communities First! member from Greenfield commented that their diversity created a more organized and multi-pronged opposition effort:

...we got together with people from different walks of life. We've got an English professor, well she's actually a lawyer. We have someone who buys up land for green space. A council woman from one of the communities. We had a couple of environmental people, no one real radical. Everyone pretty much down to earth. We just had people from different walks of life with different abilities.

These different abilities enabled the group to draw on political, social, economic and cultural diversities that strengthened the group's knowledge and resource base. For example, some members had backgrounds in local political government. Their understanding of local political fields and also their professional networks with other political representatives could be drawn upon to better frame political concerns with the proposed development. Other members had personal financial resources that enabled them to devote more time to support the group's efforts. These individuals were also able to spend time effectively articulating the group's efforts to local media outlets such as print reporters or at press conferences. For example, a reporter at one of Pittsburgh's major newspapers followed the Kilbuck Wal-Mart development and between January 2003 and December 2005 wrote 22 stories. Communities First! representatives were quoted in stories written between 2003 and 2005.

Second, Communities First! used legal action so that the developer met all local, state and federal requirements in regards to the development (CF document, 2004). Utilizing legal means of recourse, the group was able to slow the progression of action by the developer. Pursuing legal means to fight the proposed development required the resources of individuals with abilities to

navigate the legal system and challenge state governing agencies. As one group member from Emsworth noted, taking the legal route to oppose development was not particularly easy:

We are a group who has to go through litigation. A lot of groups want to stay away from litigation that's bad PR. And I can totally understand but that has to happen for us. That's how we have been able to delay this and we will continue to do that.

Group members spoke of connections to legal counsel, a landscape architect, and a traffic consultant who they utilized in various aspects of the opposition efforts. These connections represent an underlying knowledge base of educated community members. Table 6 shows the percentage of residents (over age 25) in Communities First communities that have a bachelor's and advanced degrees. These numbers are compared to residents over age 25 in Allegheny County, where the communities are located and Pennsylvania. The table shows that the communities where Communities First! drew its membership have residents with more education than the rest of the county or the state. The pool of educated individuals was larger, which Communities First drew its' membership.

Table 6. Comparisons of educational attainment.

| | % of residents with BA | % of residents with advanced degree |
|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Alleppo | 42% | 18% |
| Avalon | 19% | 5% |
| Edgeworth | 65% | 37% |
| Emsworth | 32% | 8% |
| Glenfield | 14% | 1% |
| Kilbuck | 34% | 16% |
| Ohio | 50% | 16% |
| Osborne | 60% | 20% |
| Sewickley | 45% | 19% |
| Allegheny County | 17.3% | 11% |
| Pennsylvania | 14% | 8% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Census 2000, Summary File 3 (SF 3); generated by Dana Reinke; using American Factfinder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>; (7 September 2006).

Although I did not ask members the details of the organization's structure, it is likely that highly educated members helped Communities First! in their efforts to obtain a 501(c) 3 non-profit status. I was informed that restructuring the group as a non-profit better positioned it for the purposes of obtaining grant and foundation money to help support the legal fight. For example, in March 2004 Communities First! received a \$25,000 grant from the Tides Center in Pittsburgh, a branch of Heinz Endowments Group, to help support their legal efforts. Additionally members spoke of the financial support they received from local community residents and businesses (160 separate contributions between February 2002 and June 2004). Moreover, as an organization with a non-profit status individual supporters were able to take a tax deduction, for their contributions according to a Communities First member from Sewickley:

we had people giving us thousands of dollars and not getting a write off and so when people are handing over money and they can't write it off on the bottom of a tax receipt you know the tax report.

Financial support from individuals and fundraisers helped Communities First! retain an attorney for their legal efforts and hire consultants to articulate arguments about traffic, development plans associated with grading, zoning and subdivision requirements, and environmental concerns related to asbestos, sedimentation and erosion, and sewage (CF documentation, June 2004). Financial resources also helped the group pay for an advertisement against Wal-Mart, like the large scale billboard advertisement placed along Route 65 (below).



Figure 16. Communities First! billboard image.

The combination of financial and knowledge resources was social capital that afforded Communities First! advantages not available to all community groups opposing economic development.

Third, Communities First! worked to develop an alternate plan that incorporated sustainable development practices and conservation of open spaces. (CF documentation, June 2004). One group member from Emsworth identified this goal as unique to their organization, but also vital to maintaining the scale and quality of life in the local communities:

If we're fortunate enough to win against a Wal-Mart we don't want to be fighting a Costco two years from now. So the idea is for us to follow through as a group to get a developer ... and put something different in there.

Another member discussed the importance of hiring a consultant in order to have a structured and organized alternative planned based on community needs and resources:

He [the hired consultant] is starting with phase one to do market research to see what will actually fly there what can you do there. But having dreams and actually being able to make this a reality are actually two distinct things. So we wanted to make sure that if we propose an alternative it has some sound bases...I think a residential development with some small what's called community serving retail. Nothing that would bring people from [a] huge radius, but rather something that would provide basic goods and services to that residential development and maybe a little bit to Emsworth because Emsworth doesn't have much... But we just don't know yet if there's really the market or capacity to make that a profitable development.

Developing an alternative plan and proceeding with the effort is something that only can occur if an organization is committed to a long term effort to shape the local community. All three goals point to different aspects of trying to maintain or shape local community character. Explicitly, Communities First! is trying to resist large scale retail development, but implicitly it is trying to integrate its perspective on community organization into future development plans. It wants economic development that is in line with the scale of activities in the local communities. The phrase "community serving retail" stands in direct contrast to 250,000 square feet of retail space that would be developed if the Wal-Mart Supercenter is built.

The group's efforts rest on the assumption that the communities along the Ohio River corridor are connected and that one community's particular action can have unintended effects on the other communities in the area. This realization underlies the group's philosophy, as noted by a member from Glenfield:

I think our main problem is that usually when you have communities against Wal-Mart it's the community that it is going into. The community it is going in to is for it because it is not affecting them. It's all the communities around it that are against it so they've got the community for it... We do have people from Kilbuck in CF but the majority of them, they [local Kilbuck politicians] have them believing that this is their God-send.

6.2 THE SYMBOLIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES

Superstore controversies highlight the increasing importance of retail development in general (Halebsky, 2004). The increased role of retail practices, the act of shopping and the process of consuming has altered the physical and symbolic landscapes of communities. Sharon Zukin contends that the processes associated with consumption have changed the very definition and identity of cities (1998). Retail chains, with their oversized scale and general homogeneity in architecture design, disrupt local identities and a sense of regional charm (Gratz, 1998; Hough, 1990). Residents in Ohio River Boulevard communities, on both sides of the debate about a proposed Kilbuck Wal-Mart, identify retail areas in metro Pittsburgh communities that serve as examples of what they support or oppose about the potential Kilbuck Wal-Mart. In particular residents identify the "Robinson" retail area in order to articulate their understandings of the relationship between the practice and placement of retail and activities of consumption. In detailing their views about consumption, they use the "Robinson" retail area as a symbolic contrast to desirable place character elements in the Ohio River communities.

The shopping location identified as "Robinson" is a combination of two main shopping strip centers and a mall area. Approximately 10 miles south/southwest of Pittsburgh, this area is connected to a major Pittsburgh highway that is the main artery to the Pittsburgh International Airport and serves as major commuter corridor for the suburbs and communities south and west of downtown Pittsburgh. Visually, the Robinson area appears on the landscape after a stretch of single-level manufacturing buildings, multi-level office buildings, and hotels. The architecture of these buildings represents regional development from the end of the steel industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s to the growth of information and service based industries from the mid-1980s to the present. These buildings now serve as sites for businesses like shooting practice and paintball games. They mix with office buildings of varying heights, with outer façades that

reflect images of highway traffic or the leasing availability placards of rival office space. Driving this highway provides a pseudo-archeological record of economic development in metro Pittsburgh. After these relics of previous economic efforts, the Robinson area presents itself with blue, yellow and red flags that run along the side of an Ikea store, with its iconic blue and yellow building skin.

The Robinson area includes two main shopping strip centers called “The Pointe at North Fayette” and “The Robinson Town Centre”. “The Pointe” is located in the municipality of North Fayette, approximately one-half mile from the Robinson Town Centre area, which is located in the Robinson Township municipality. In general conversation Pittsburgh residents do not distinguish between the different shopping areas but refer to the whole area as Robinson. The Pointe currently is home to 40 stores with room for more. The Robinson Town Centre strip has 57 shops. Just slightly separated from the strip malls, but on the same access road, Robinson Town Centre Boulevard, is a recently opened mall. Encompassing 200 acres, “The Mall at Robinson” opened in 2001 and is home to an additional 120 stores.

In the hilly geography of the Pittsburgh region, each strip seems to be carved out of the top or side of a small hillside, in as close as possible proximity to the cloverleaf design of roads leading back to the local highway system. Like an outlet strip mall poised at an exit on a U.S. national highway system, there are no signs of homes and community infrastructure in the area. Suburbs, schools and community buildings are separate from the shopping area. Each shopping strip houses a variety of regional and national chain stores and restaurants, with mid-price hotels in the vicinity. Stores include a Wal-Mart Supercenter; Target; Bed, Bath and Beyond; Best Buy; Home Depot; Lowes; Sam’s Club; Dick’s Sporting Goods; Barnes and Noble; Ikea; Max and Erma’s; Outback Steakhouse; Joe’s Crab Shack, just to name a few. Unlike shopping strip malls lining either side of a straight, four lane highway, the strips that make up the Robinson shopping area cluster around the cloverleaf access points from the highway. On Saturday afternoons, traffic backs up at just about every access point. There are no sidewalks to connect the separate shopping strips. The area is designed for car transportation and is very dangerous to walk between shopping strips. There is public transportation to the Robinson area, but the access points are on the roadways, requiring a slightly dangerous walk to the stores.

My description of the Robinson area aligns with statements made by residents of the Ohio River communities, both those who support and who oppose the proposed Wal-Mart in

Kilbuck. But they interpret these characteristics in very different ways. Those who support the Kilbuck Wal-Mart describe how the Robinson area provides shopping opportunities that can meet many consumers' needs. As one Ben Avon resident notes, the proximity of stores to each other provides a one-stop shopping trip since what once required trips to multiple locations or communities can be done in this one location:

We spend a lot of time out in the Robinson area. We can hit Wal-Mart out there, we can hit the mall (Mall at Robinson), we can hit Target. All basically on one trip. If you go down to McKnight road (a six lane local highway with strip malls and a regional mall) you can hit Kohl's there and you go up the road and hit the mall and then up the road to hit Target and then up to Cranberry (a community with multiple shopping strips) to hit Wal-Mart. So when Robinson opened we even took from McKnight Road because it is all in that general area and we can get anything we need right there.

In contrast, those who oppose the Kilbuck Wal-Mart talk with concern about such one-stop shopping, seeing it as the conduit for a larger congregation of mass merchandise retail. According to one Emsworth resident:

I think it's Wal-Mart, but it's more than Wal-Mart. They are planning Wal-Mart, a strip mall, plus there are additional development parcels. So what we see coming in there is more than a Wal-Mart. It's probably going to be, well I don't know how far it's going to go. There are 407 acres up there that could be developed. I fear a Robinson Town Center, which will really be the death of this area.

To those opposed to the Wal-Mart development, Robinson is a word loaded with symbolic characteristics that do not mesh with residents' perceptions of their communities. The Robinson area is in direct contrast to the qualities that make up desirable aspects of the local place character. Robinson's mass of big-box stores and lack of community focus create a scale of lived experience that stands in stark contrast to the character of the communities along the Ohio River, according to a Glenfield resident:

I know this sounds like a thing against Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is a big part of it but we started it (Communities First! group) because as a community we have beautiful little Sewickley village, Emsworth has some businesses, Bellevue has some businesses and we still have hills and trees and it's a beautiful area, a valley by the river. And the main thing we are against is not what Wal-Mart is going to bring in, it's mainly we just don't want the community to be like Robinson Township.

For those opposed to Wal-Mart, Robinson is a symbol of a place that is just a shopping location. Like a coal mining community which is stripped of its identity and used just for natural resources that lie beneath the earth, Robinson is used for its mass consumption opportunities. In this way, Robinson is not a place, but only a location. It is a location that is devoid of the symbolic, practical and material elements that combine to make a place. It does not offer the community spaces and interactional moments that build a community or social and personal connections among people. A Sewickley resident's comment about the potential for local mass retail and restaurant outlets raises this concern about a cascading effect on small local businesses and ultimately the social fabric of a community:

And then what I also fear will happen is that Wal-Mart will spawn additional development. They are planning to put a gas station up there with tire and lube um people speculated some of those other development, how all these malls are surrounded by other development big restaurants, these big chain restaurants, and so that will also start to threaten these businesses here. We have a couple of small gas stations and car repair, restaurants so all will start to cut in... as a few businesses go under and you start to get empty storefronts that starts to really detract from the town so people are less likely, lets say 'wow this is not very appealing anymore, I am not sure I really want to shop here anymore' and so I think it will have a gradual effect on all the businesses downtown.

The shifts in consumption practices and resident relations they feel will ultimately alter a community's character. As one Leetsdale resident explains her concern about the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck Township, she links it to the growth of retail development across the U.S. which she views as altering not only the physical landscape of local communities, but also the imagined landscape of the whole country:

Well, we already have 3 Wal-Mart's (Monaca, Cranberry, Robinson) in this area. I didn't really think we needed another one. And the fact that that is a very congested area also that was part of a tight community. How they [were] going to squeeze it in? I thought that [Kilbuck] was such a wonderful big chunk of property. ... it just bothers me. ...there's going to come to a point where it will be one shopping center coast to coast without a break. You can start traveling and never go home you can just keep going and going and going.

The place character elements that make locales across the U.S. unique, in her view, are undermined by the homogenized growth of big-box retail. Thus, the strength of local community town centers is undermined by such new retail development. A Sewickley resident identifies other U.S. communities where economic development maintains and strengthens the local

community elements, in stark contrast to typical economic behavior in communities in Pennsylvania:

When I moved here I had never seen these town centers that are mostly abandoned, I had never seen anything like that. In New York you have these bustling little neighborhood areas. And in New England there were town centers. Every town center was in pretty much good shape and serving the community. And then I came here and saw these ghost towns and I recognize that it is not totally a result of retail. It began when the steel mills closed, but what we are doing is just exacerbated by building these retail malls. I mean, we need to focus that investment on reviving those town centers. Provide more incentive for businesses to locate in those centers. Unfortunately, I see a desperation in this area where a lot of officials are willing to accept any development, anything, they don't care.

Town centers and the social and economic activities that occur within that community space, in her view, are critical to maintaining community character. These town centers also serve as the symbolic repository for perceptions of community place character. Local residents opposed to the Wal-Mart view big-box commercial retail development not as contributing to community character, only as disrupting it. They use the real landscape of the "Robinson" area as a symbol of their concerns about local disruption of consumer practices and consumer social relations. While the potential Kilbuck Wal-Mart development shifts residents' perceptions and understandings of local community character, the next section examines how the development is viewed as altering the material environment of the Ohio River community.

6.3 THE MATERIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES

Discussions about the potential Wal-Mart development also focused on material elements associated with the traffic in and around the Ohio River communities and the introduction of big-box retail. The following sections detail the varied responses to how the introduction of the Kilbuck Wal-Mart will alter the material aspects of the local community in both the physical movement of people and their shopping habits.

6.3.1 Traffic

Although residents disagreed on whether the Kilbuck Wal-Mart will damage local communities, all interviewees agreed that a Wal-Mart Supercenter will alter traffic patterns in the local area. The change in traffic patterns has the potential to change a major aspect of the built environment: how local residents move through their communities. Interviewees differed on their perceptions of this. One major division was over perceptions of how traffic will change on Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard if Wal-Mart is built. This road, used by 22,000 motorists a day, links Pittsburgh to all communities along the Ohio River (King Greenwood and Wills, 2006). It is a four lane highway through most communities, but becomes a divided highway just prior to the proposed Wal-Mart development. A Bell Acres resident used “Robinson” as an example of his concerns about traffic and congestion:

It will be 12,000 [additional cars a day] because right now the people that go to a Wal-Mart super-center say like in Ambridge are going to Beaver County. The one out there on Chippewa. So they're going to cut their trip time down and come out here this way. There's a lot of people who live in Franklin Park and Ohio Township that are probably going to the one in Cranberry. And everyone wants out of Cranberry, so they will start coming down here. And then they'll be some people that live towards the Robinson Town Center area that are sick and tired of that mess and are going to come over here. So we are going to get it from three or four different directions.

The increase in cars, waiting time at stoplights, increased time to drive local roads, traffic noise, and general activity underlies the comment “we are going to get it”. Those who support the Wal-Mart development understand that it is going to be congested, but they accept this as part of the cost of shopping. A Ben Avon resident comments:

Is it going to be tough going in and out of there [Kilbuck Wal-Mart]? My guess is yes, but then again most of the areas you go to, [like] Robinson, ... it is just as bad.

Because of the residential nature of the communities along the Ohio River, some residents worry that congestion associated with shopping center areas will affect their quality of life. One Emsworth resident notes that this retail development will bring more drivers on the road, which will alter her commute to and from work:

Right at the area they are planning to develop at it's been a big, pretty big wide four lane but on either end it kind of narrows and I think it is going to be a traffic

nightmare. And for many of us that travel that road frequently, many people commute in so anybody who lives above the site and commutes into Pittsburgh it's going to make a big difference in their lives particularly around the holidays. And you look at a place like Robinson that's right off Route 60 which is a pretty major highway and we just can't sustain that type of traffic.

Another Glenfield resident fears that increased congestion will make the road more dangerous. Historically, Route 65 has been a road where the posted speed limits are not observed. Again, interviewees made a connection to Robinson and the consumption practices that coalesce as a result of a grouping of mass market stores:

It's mainly we just don't want the community to be like Robinson Township or first of all this road up here can't stand it. It can't stand. They used to have bumper stickers that said 'Pray for me, I drive Route 65.' And they have been able to get rid of that over the years. But now it's just going to be back to that. And there's a beautiful piece of property up there that could be used for better purposes than a Wal-Mart that would not affect all the communities in the area. It wouldn't have the traffic, people getting killed.

Additionally, interviewees opposed to the Kilbuck Wal-Mart predict that once congestion occurs on the main roads, local and non-local drivers will look for safer, faster, or less congested alternatives to Route 65. They fear that road traffic will move onto the community roads now used mostly by residents. These roads, with their accompanying sidewalks, stop signs, and housing close to the street structure much of the movement and flow of the communities. With increased car traffic, the structure and flow will be altered, negatively reshaping community interaction and practices. An Allepo resident points to a concern with:

the spillover traffic, because once you have a total bottleneck on Route 65, people of course try to find alternate routes so they'll be using, they'll be cutting through communities that now have very quiet backroads. We expect to see a big increase.

The fears and concerns associated with the proximity to retail suggest a desire to maintain unique characteristics of place character against the desire of retail chains to make profits by increasing their market share (Halebsky, 2004). In order to increase market share, retail chains have to locate in places near their consumer base (Halebsky, 2004). In the Pittsburgh region there are thirteen Wal-Mart stores within 20 miles of the city. Yet, interviewees opposed to Wal-Mart see chain retailers continuing to build more stores in a battle for profit and market share:

What their (Wal-Mart's) policy is, it is certainly not for the interest of the community. It is to get business and as much of it as they can.

They don't know when to stop. That's how I feel about Route 65, it's why open that one? When from right here, this customer base, there is 15 minutes to Wal-Mart in Robinson and 15 minutes to a Wal-Mart in Cranberry. So why have another one 10 minutes down the road, what's the difference?

The fight for the heart and soul of communities stands at the center of concerns expressed by Wal-Mart opponents. To them, the material elements associated with big-box chain stores -- a huge parking lot, the traffic, the beehive of activity as people come and go-- will disrupt the pace of life in their community. A Sewickley resident noted the psychological difference of interacting with small community businesses as compared to the big box store:

[The potential Wal-Mart development will create] a congregation, a mass all the time, all the time. It's kind of Sewickley especially, Bellevue as well as part of that and Emsworth they don't have a shopping district and Emsworth so they go to Bellevue or they come to Sewickley and it's a leisure type atmosphere . You go to Pittsburgh and it is so. And when you get here it slows you down a little bit and that is the beauty I think of it all. And whenever you get into a big parking lot and cars all around and people going and you are hustle bustle yourself and that's what it does. It just breaks up, you are getting that closer and it just kind of takes you away from it. No matter where you go I almost hear the noise. It's just where the city comes to you. Where's suburbia anymore? And that's sort of seems to be what it's doing. They are closing in on us.

Figure 17 shows the placement of the Wal-Mart Supercenter development along Route 65. Those who are not in favor of the Wal-Mart regard the proposed superstore as out of line with the built environments and current structuring of communities along the Ohio River Corridor. Residents of Sewickley and Emsworth note that the roads already cannot keep up with the traffic on the road system and that his congestion will increase with the introduction of Wal-Mart:

[These are] small old time communities, it's the wrong thing to put here. And then the fact that the roads are old, they are narrow and they were not built for this high traffic and it's already congested. A Wal-Mart is just going to make that worse.

There are a lot of concerns because the one kind of side street that comes up beside it and brings you down to Route 65 is not a road for a lot of traffic. 65 right there, you have people coming off of 79 right into that area that is my biggest concern about Wal-Mart being right there. The traffic and how will that flow of traffic kind of go there and what are they going to do with those roads up there. I think that's the biggest concern truly with it being down there.

Major Roads and Commerical Retail Development in Ohio River Communities

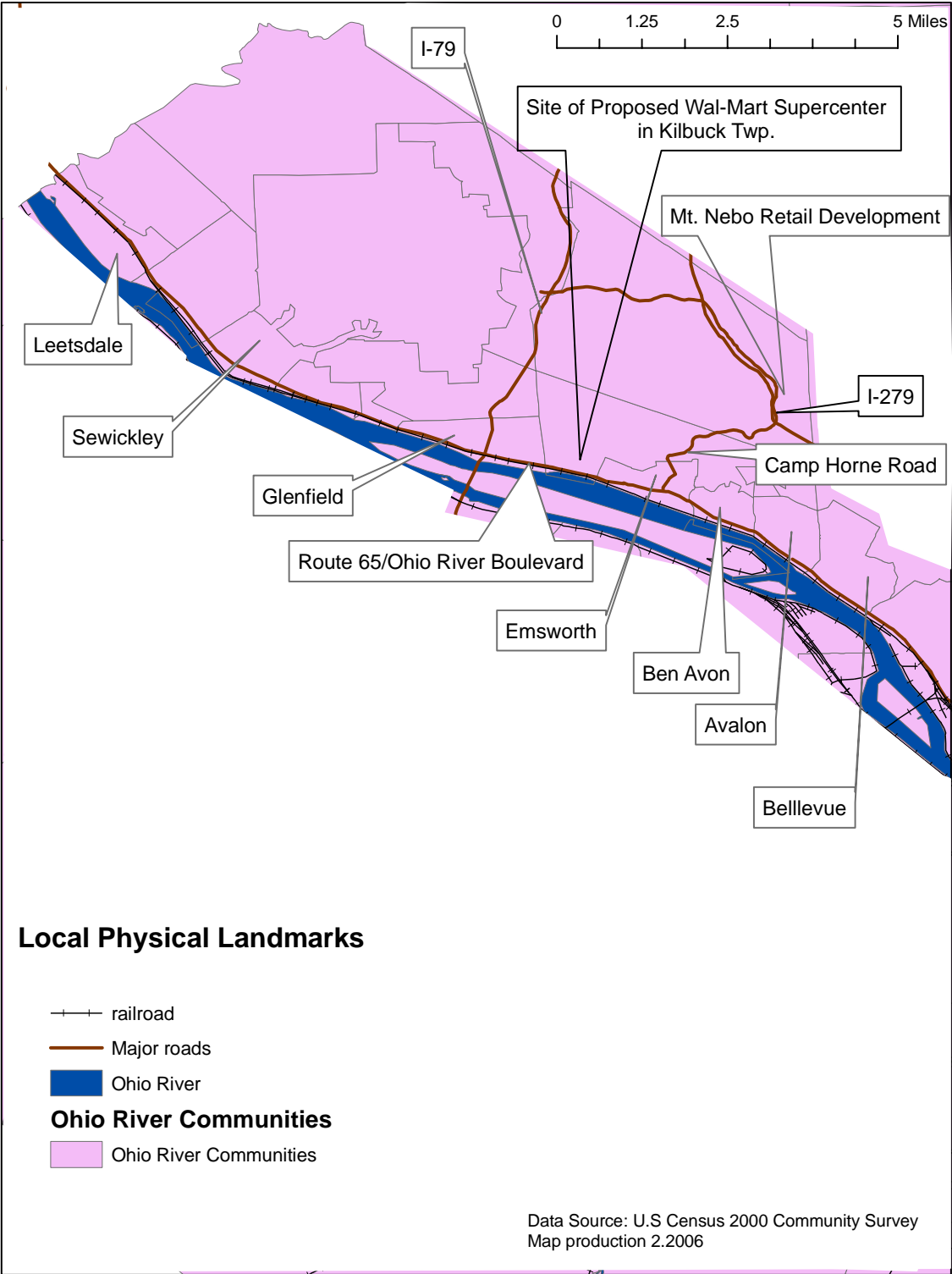


Figure 17. Major roads and commercial retail development in Ohio River Communities.

To these residents, these roads do not just represent a travel route, but an amenity of the Ohio River corridor communities that is going to be disrupted by the potential Wal-Mart development and negatively impact their lives. According to an Allepo resident:

I think the traffic is going to be incredibly tremendous. We are not going to be able to get out of our communities. And this whole Ohio corridor one of the benefits is to be able to get into Pittsburgh and enjoy the arts, to enjoy the opera, ballet, theater, the acts that go on in Pittsburgh, the sporting events. It would take forever to get in there. I mean we are a little spoiled and we maybe we shouldn't be so spoiled, but I can be in Oakland in 15 minutes or less so it's a great place to be, but it is not going to be like that. I think it going to be dangerous.

Some fear that the increase in traffic on Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard will stretch onto other local roads as well. A Bell Acre community member is concerned that traffic will be impacted up to three miles away along the stretch of Route 65 in Sewickley:

Number one, it is going to kill the traffic on the Ohio River Boulevard. If they put it in it's going to be a TRAFFIC NIGHTMARE (emphasis by interviewee) on Route 65. I think it will actually affect traffic all the way to Sewickley, to the Sewickley Bridge at certain times.

Others worry that Route 65, already considered dangerous because of speeding drivers and limited space on the roadway will become even more congested with shoppers from other communities, not Ohio River community commuters according to a Glenfield resident. He uses the example of another congested four lane Pittsburgh highway to describe his concern of adding more drivers to a road that has limited potential for expansion:

Route 28, coming in and out of the city on 28 and as much as they done construction on that road, it is still a mess. You can't get in and out of the city without spending all kinds of time and that is what you are going to have over here. You have a railroad on one side and on another side you have a mountain and now they are going to put a store there.

Another element of this traffic issue is related to trust in local and state government agencies to create a traffic plan that will ensure minimal congestion in the area surrounding the Kilbuck Wal-Mart. Ohio River corridor residents who oppose the Wal-Mart fear congestion on Route 65 and a rerouting of traffic into the Emsworth community. As a Sewickley resident comments:

I keep talking about the traffic and, ... it doesn't seem like an immediate concern but as soon as you get down on that boulevard there I can see it being an immediate concern. I understand that they are closing one of the roads out there,

Toms Run Road. How they can be allowed to do that is beyond me. Those people that use that now are going to have to go through the Wal-Mart development to get to their street. Which is, where is the government agencies in that area? That shouldn't be allowed.

Other Ohio River residents, such as an Ohio Township community official and a Ben Avon homeowner, differ, noting that past traffic concerns with new retail development were handled effectively and that this new issue will be managed just the same:

Let me tell you this. I'm on the planning commission and have served for more than 10 years. I was also a supervisor at one time. When the Home Depot and Giant Eagle came in on Camp Horne and when you say people are concerned about them coming through, those most be Ben Avon Heights and Ben Avon, people [saying]... 'They are going to come through and destroy our communities.' It didn't happen! Well I'm going to tell you something, it never happened and I think that's exactly what's going to happen down at Wal-Mart. That traffic will FLOW (emphasis by interviewee). And I do not think it's going to be a problem. I really don't.

I don't know too many people that don't shop at a Wal-Mart if one is closer by. I can see one of concerns with the traffic issue and absolutely that is a concern, but hopefully they have something in place, some plan that will do something about that.

Even residents who are supportive of the Wal-Mart development see traffic as a concern. Some Ben Avon residents believe their distance from Kilbuck (1.5 miles) creates a buffer that will limit traffic in their area. At the same time, they draw on the example of the increased mass of big-box retail stores at "Mt. Nebo" and predict that the resulting congestion in the area will likely be similar to what may happen on Route 65:

That's just it, the traffic. We kind of felt ok about the Wal-Mart because it's sort of out. Both of them are far away enough from Ben Avon. I mean they are not in Ben Avon. They are far enough away, but I don't want, at the same point, I have seen the traffic increase in the Mt. Nebo Road area and I've we will probably see it on Route 65 too.

They accept increased congestion around mass big-box retail locations as just part of the shopping experience. Even so, one Ben Avon resident questions why this Wal-Mart development is happening along Route 65 when there is space around the "Mt. Nebo" area just three miles away. While this resident acknowledges the likelihood of increased traffic and congestion in the area, he says it is something to be expected around a large group of big-box retail (like the Robinson area discussed earlier). Consumers are accustomed to traffic congestion and the changes in consumption patterns that occur as a result of mass big-box retail development:

I don't know why Wal-Mart chose that particular location other than I am sure there was enough land available to them. Where they are building the new Target up above the Home Depot made more sense because you don't have that traffic congestion you have the intersection right there that takes off and everything is right there close at hand. Where there going at there's going to be a lot of traffic simply because 65 is overloaded as it is and you are going to get a lot of people coming in. Is it going to be tough going in and out of there? My guess is yes but then again most of the areas, you go to Robinson and it is just as bad.

6.3.2 The Big Box Store

With the increase in big-box retail consumption, Ohio River community residents acknowledge their shopping habits are now shaped by big-box retail products and services as well as by a store's proximity to their homes. They claim to use big-box stores for a variety of reasons, which include a big-box store's large selection of products, proximity to home and the perception of lower prices.

Accounts of experiences with big box stores are used by interviewees to explain their response to the Wal-Mart development. Consumers spoke of using big-box stores for their selection and ability to purchase large amounts of products at one time. The built environment of a big box store, creating a volume and selection at some stores allows interviewees to shop at less frequent intervals, which is seen as a positive. As noted by a Ben Avon resident, these stores serve consumers for both household needs, but also social needs such as entertaining:

I go to Sam's Club once a month and load up on paper products and "it's scary big" vats of detergent, lots of cleaning items and sometimes what did I find there well if we have people over I do what I call "catering by Sam's club" so I get vast quantities of something and just serve it up.

Conversely, the sheer volume of products can be a frustration and deterrent for individuals who only want selected items. One Leetsdale resident describes how time, as an organizing frame, explains her consumption habits at big-box stores. Also, the changing nature of big-box retail, with the move toward building even larger big-box stores is a reason she shops at a local Wal-Mart:

There are only certain things that I buy at Wal-Mart and I hit Wal-Mart every three months. And I buy kitty litter, bird seed, deer food and my shampoo and then I have been getting some of my sewing supplies there because of only one reason. They eliminated my JoAnn [Fabric]. There is not a Joann close to me.

There used to be a JoAnn Fabrics in the Northern Lights Shopping Center across from the Conway yard and they pulled out all the neighborhood JoAnn and did these BIG BOX (emphasis by interviewee) type stores and now there in the middle of I have to go to Robinson Town Center or out to Cranberry and then it's kind of like a New York Deli you take a ticket and you wait in line and I'm like I don't NEED (emphasis by interviewee) that and then that's the only thing. If I go to Wal-Mart and I need a zipper or some thread, I go throw it in the basket and go.

For others who support Wal-Mart, a local store is seen as a positive. A Ben Avon resident supporting the Kilbuck Wal-Mart says it provides benefits to his local community when compared to shopping at the same retailer in a different community:

I hate to say it but I like to spend my money locally and if they have a Wal-Mart here and I am going to go to Wal-Mart anyway I might as well spend my money locally as opposed to driving up to Cranberry or Robinson.

Many interviewees focused on grocery and food shopping habits to describe their use of big-box stores. These consumers identified a regional grocery chain, Giant Eagle, as a big-box style grocery store. As discussed in Chapter 2, Giant Eagle had 100 stores in Western Pennsylvania and controlled 40% of the grocery market in 2005.

In proximity to the Ohio River corridor communities there are two Giant Eagle stores. One store is in a relatively new shopping strip on Route 65 on the border of Sewickley and Leetsdale. The other Giant Eagle is a newer big-box style store located on a hillside off of Camp Horne Road. In conversations with local consumers, Giant Eagle is described based on both positive and negative attributes. These same attributes are associated with other big-box stores. One Ben Avon resident positively identifies Giant Eagle product selection in the same context as a large national office supply big-box store:

I just personally, I like the Giant Eagle...it is just like something like Office Max except it's food. Everything is there. It's a good location and a very well kept up store.

In order to provide consumers with "everything", the store's layout and organization must provide enough space to display everything. This large layout is negatively perceived by another Ben Avon community member because it provides her more opportunities to purchase items that may not be necessary:

They [Giant Eagle] have just become again these massive stores, that to get milk, which is what you usually go for, you are 20 aisles over, doing what they want you to do, which is pick up 10 items in between.

Low prices, plus the volume of product offerings, make big-box stores seem like the right place to spend money. Another Ben Avon local describes the time saved by shopping at one store as part of the advantage of big-box retail:

There's been an improvement when Home Depot went in. There was a lot of stuff I was only able to get at certain places. I went to 3 or 4 locations to get everything I needed. Now I just stop in there. You hate to say the Big Box but the price it'd right and everything is there.

Discussions about the potential Wal-Mart development focused on material elements associated with the traffic in and around the Ohio River communities and the use of big-box retail stores. This section detailed the varied responses to how the introduction of the Kilbuck Wal-Mart will alter the material aspects of the local community in both the physical movement of people and their shopping habits, which ultimately modify the material environment of local business districts. The next section continues to examine the role of community town centers, not just the material built environment, but more specifically the social consumer practices that shape local place character.

6.4 THE PRACTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMER PRACTICES

Community town centers create a public place where social interactions can occur and community relations can be strengthened. Often, these activities occur in community shopping districts. Such creates perceived common bonds of residence and social relationships. In the Ohio River communities, as elsewhere in the U.S., in the middle of the 20th century everyday consumption needs were addressed by a mix of small businesses serving the local community. The weekend day trip or the occasional visit to a large city for downtown shopping or a newly opened mall was an event for middle class families. The interviewees fondly recall purchases during these retail consumption events as special and unique. Two residents, of Sewickley and Ohio Township, recall these past consumption habits as being based upon what could be done or obtained that was different but not in competition to goods and services available back in their respective communities:

Back then you didn't have the malls. Northway Mall in the North Hills was the first indoor mall in the country. And that was kind of an exciting thing but then it didn't have, it was shopping experience but it didn't have everything. You always, you stayed in your community, you shopped here. Whatever you needed was right here you didn't have to go anywhere AND the community shopped here because that is what they had here.

Everyone used to go into Pittsburgh. You would go in the morning and spend the day, shop, go to the movies, this is what the women did. There was a place called Donahoes. And they had butter in these wheels and that was everybody shopped in Donahoes. And they would cut these chunks of butter.

At least in the minds of residents over age 40, such shopping activities did not threaten the businesses and services available in their local communities. One Glenfield resident describes past shopping as structured around the community and the flow of life:

I grew up in the city, I lived in the city and to me when I was a kid I walked down the street everyday, to little Joe's store which was a butcher shop and got meat. I would take it home and my mom would cook dinner. And I would go down to Al Lindaus, there was just all these little stores. And we maybe once a week, maybe once every couple weeks we would go to the thoroughfare and get major foods and the rest of the time. They weren't open nights, they weren't open weekends and we survived. I mean how many stores do we need? I still wish I could do that. I wish I could go to a little butcher store and get my meat. Back then we didn't have big freezers and we ate fresh meat.

Shopping for daily items like fresh meat fit within the contours of the local scale of life, according to the recollection of the interviewees. They do not remember limits on store hours as negative, but simply as part of the flow of social experiences. Consumption practices fit within specific hours of the day or days of the week. They contrast this with the current availability of consumption opportunities, at all hours, locations, with literally unlimited selection at big-box retail stores.

While there is a historic perception that community business districts met the consumption needs of local residents, in present terms Ohio River community residents identified the town centers in both Bellevue and Sewickley as locations that had lost shopping options. Small business owners detailed how the current lack of "necessity" or "needs" shops limit community resident interactions which would strengthen local place character. A small business owner in Sewickley articulates this loss:

I just think a weakness is the lack of all that we used to have to make it self-sufficient. No hardware store, office supply store. We used to have a guy who had

an electrician store. You could take a lamp. We used to have a bicycle repair shop.

Small business owners fear this lack of “self-sufficiency” creates a perception of the area as offering mostly specialty stores. In both Sewickley and Bellevue there are frame stores, antique stores and gift stores that are integrated into the other businesses that carry other products like groceries, clothing, toys, books and electronics. While both the GIS demographic data and local perceptions find that Sewickley is a more “up-scale” shopping area than Bellevue’s town center, both shopping districts get lumped together in residents’ discussions of the lack of local shopping options. As a Ben Avon resident notes:

Those things don’t really appeal to me. They have the same kind of things in Bellevue, kind of a lesser scale than Sewickley, but I just don’t need ‘knick a knacks.’ We just sort of need more practical things. Our daughter is growing out of her pants so we need new pants or socks or stuff like that. Or I just need more inexpensive pants. We kind of save up all the things we need to buy and we go to the big mega chain like Target or Wal-Mart and blow a wad of money and then we won’t have to go for a month or two.

According to another Ben Avon resident shopping in a local town center requires her to make a conscious decision to shop for something “different”:

Yeah, occasionally we go down there [to Sewickley]. We don’t routinely go down there but there have been times we’ve been down there and we say “let’s just go look in this store” just to kind of see the different stuff that’s down there.

The interviewees see current consumption opportunities as changing community landscapes and altering social practices. As was noted in Chapter five residents spoke about how community relations are bolstered by sidewalks and small business districts. Traveling to big-box retail stores almost always requires traveling, in a car, to the actual store. The store is not connected to the community, with the exception of the physical location. Rarely are there sidewalks designed around big-box retail store developments. Patterns of daily activity in a small town business district, whether walking or driving short distances, create opportunities where people “run” into friends and neighbors or “stop in” to stores.

When compared to Wal-Mart’s general product line, the opportunities for purchases in Sewickley and Bellevue stores seem limited to some interviewees. Their perception whether there are only specialty shops in local town centers influences whether they shop in town. This has the potential to lessen the diversity of individuals that interact in the local business districts,

further limiting opportunities for social engagement. The perception of a Ben Avon resident is that the shoppers in Bellevue and Sewickley are not the same people that shop at Wal-Mart:

I can't wait. It [Wal-Mart] just is going to be a lot closer for us and people have protested that it is going to put the shops in Sewickley out of business or the shops in Bellevue. But, what most of those shops down in Sewickley and some of those in Bellevue the little antique shops, those little specialty shops those are not things you buy at Wal-Mart. So it is not going to affect that type of person. If I want to go look for an antique table, I am not going to go to Wal-Mart, I am going to go find that little antique shop in Sewickley or Bellevue or wherever it is. I mean you are talking basically apples and oranges.

Some small business owners also share this perception that the local town centers support only specialty stores. Indeed, they think this perception make their business efforts more difficult. According to two different Sewickley store owners who sell books, groceries, toys and electronics:

There are a lot of specialty stores and I guess that's one of the unique parts of the business district. It's mostly specialty stores. If you're looking for something special, if you're looking for art, if you're looking for antiques, you could probably come to Sewickley...People don't head this way unless their in town. There could be lots of reasons that somebody's in this town rather than coming here but if they are in town hopefully they do shop here a little bit.

They come down and get an antique or a painting. They might come in and see what's going on in the industry but to really come in and purchase one, that sale there is kind of tough. But it gives us traffic.

These same Sewickley small business owners are concerned about how the potential Wal-Mart development will impact their businesses (toys to groceries). As two different owners note, being a specialty store will not protect the business when potential customers stop shopping the local businesses:

I think their feeling is Wal-Mart won't affect us, Wal-Mart doesn't carry what I carry. What they don't understand is that if a Wal-Mart goes in and people go down there perhaps they will spend their money there and not come back to here. What's tough to understand? We're concerned because Wal-Mart has what we have and at Christmas time they have some of the toys we have here and they sell at low cost to get the people in.

It kind of disturbed me quite a bit because of the business aspect, we are looking at 5 minutes away and they carry everything and I'm looking at it from just our side of it but our whole community side of it they carry everything that we have downtown. And it takes that shopper away and being as close as they are, that close. It will be severe enough.

Chain stores that have located in Sewickley will also be in competition with Wal-Mart, although the potential impact will likely not be as severe, according to small business owners. A Sewickley business owner describes how the difference in competing scales of ownership, between small business and national chain stores, can impact the community:

I think it can't help but hurt most of the businesses. It depends upon what they do with it but if they put in an eye center and a florist, it is going to hit just about everybody. I would hate to lose the grocery store. That is second, third generation, family run business. And I think those are the people it would hurt the most. The ones like Pendelton and Talbots, they'll just pull up and leave. It's no big deal. The corporation will just 'X' this one out. But for all these privately owned businesses, it is a strain. It's too small a community to compete with something like that.

Small business owners speak with concern about the difference in scale between national big box chains with similar goods and services. A Bell Acres resident with the potential to inherit a local Sewickley small business fears that future generations of entrepreneurs will not want to make the effort to compete against other big-box stores:

I got this idea in my head which you might think is crazy but I think that Wal-Mart since it is so huge and it seems to run the little areas, run it down to nothing, to sad towns where no one drives at night, where it is run-down. And so I think that Wal-Mart ruins the American Dream of owning your own business, being an entrepreneur, having an idea and thinking that it can succeed because people are like "well I'll just go to Wal-Mart because it is cheaper". So that's basically my reason why I won't shop there because why would anybody ever want to start their own business when Wal-Mart sells everything?

Small businesses owners believe that when the mix of local and chain business is disrupted there is the potential for gradual and long-term decline in a community. After the initial loss of locally owned small businesses, national chains are not likely to locate in communities that are struggling, particularly if other national chains have pulled out. This cycle can eventually create a depressed area. Some small business owners use the example of a local depressed community to articulate their concern about the proximity of Wal-Mart to the Sewickley town center. The specific examples of resident interaction and business aesthetics are highlighted by a Sewickley small business owner as examples which provide a "vibrancy" to a community:

Well are you familiar with Ambridge? I just think that Sewickley is alive and vibrant right now, people are on the street, the storefronts are all nice, there's a lot of regulation so there is not huge big signs and it's like a nice old Victorian town and I just think it's going to become run down and vacant.

Community town centers create a public place where social interactions can occur and community relations can be strengthened. Often, these activities occur through the processes associated with shopping community business districts. The scale of this community interaction happens among individuals, who share perceived common bonds of residence and thus relation to one another. Such interactions do not occur at a large big-box retail store, according to some local residents. An Allepo resident describes the intangible community building elements of a town center and the potential for them to be lost based on proximity and promises of lower prices at a local Wal-Mart:

Well I think it [Wal-Mart], I think it starts pulling people away because of its promise of saving prices. They get in their car and start driving to Wal-Mart, and it's open a little more frequently than most stores in our community, so that I think that young people can probably get in that habit of not knowing what they are missing...to think to get in your car 5 to 15 miles to go to a big ugly store and walk in to save \$2 instead of going to your community and taking time to talk to people and say hello. ...I get to stores in Sewickley and I know I am going to be gone 2 hours because I know I am going to run into to people I know and because I know them I am going to take time with them...that is the kind of thing you find in a local area. Friendliness, sharing things with people--you couldn't possibly do that [at a Wal-Mart] because there are too many people coming from all directions.

To its opponents, the Wal-Mart Supercenter has the potential to lessen and even eliminate multiple daily activities that put community residents in contact with each other. They see small businesses services like car repair and restaurants as building relationships based on trust; a car will be fixed correctly without being excessively charged for work or in consuming a quality meal a resident will not be charged an excessive cost or incur food poisoning. These small businesses service a community, maybe not with 24 hour service, but in a way that builds social relations and gives meaning to communities. These interviewees see such small practices as what builds the foundations of a community and makes a place unique. When those small interactions start to break down, they fear that the fabric of the community will start to unravel. When that happens, a Sewickley resident who states “wow this is not very appealing anymore...” may soon decide it is not only unappealing to shop in the community but also to live in the community.

How the potential Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck is perceived by Ohio River residents is based on their primary orientation, either to individual consumption needs or to the local community and the distinctive elements that create a desirable place character. This is

exemplified in the following two extended narratives. The first account, from a Ben Avon resident who supports Wal-Mart, contends that Wal-Mart will challenge other big-box retailers that have located nearby (Camp Horne Road/Mt. Nebo point) development, just two miles away and close to Emsworth. While this resident acknowledges shopping in Bellevue, the perception is that the community's mix of businesses and resulting possibilities for social interaction will not be threatened by the Wal-Mart development:

The irony is you usually think of Wal-Mart as something that it drives the nail in the coffin of the small mom and pop neighborhood stores and in this area probably the greatest threat would not be to that it would be to other big box retailers and to other chains because we are just starting to get them... so now Wal-Mart will come in to play and those will be the guys, who will be duking it out. So we don't really have any in here except the local barber shop, where it is not going to do anything or we have stationers up there. Bellevue is, the stores there are really pretty unique and sometimes I wonder how they can stay in business anyway but they seem to. But the stuff you get there is not necessarily the stuff you would go out "I won't go to Bellevue because I can get that stuff at Wal-Mart". It's kind of odd little shops, not a lot of food things. And again they are near, they have specific kind of restaurants that have sort of their own clientele or traditional like family restaurants and some gourmet places, so I don't think that's the type of food court Wal-Mart is going to threaten. So in this area I think the competition is going to come from Camp Horne which is really all coming at the same time actually between the Wal-Mart and the Giant Eagle. Those guys so it's not the little guys, It's sort of the bigger ones.

The contrasting narrative is from a Glenfield resident opposed to the Kilbuck Wal-Mart. She identifies community links between the various Ohio River corridor communities. She explains her delineation of "River Valley Communities" according to those communities physically located close to the river with Sewickley and Bellevue serving as "book ends" based on their defined small business districts. As opposed to the previous narrative that identifies Wal-Mart's competition with other big-box retailers, this resident notes how the economic and social center of a town will be lost as a result of shifting consumption practices. This shift will be almost invisible to local residents, until small businesses empty out and the "town" is gone:

We did call it our River Valley Communities, so it's like the river. Now we went from Bellevue because they have a town and those people can't wait till this Wal-Mart's open so they can come down here and do all their shopping. And we are like 'well what's going to happen to your town.' And they said 'well we will go there when we need things.' No you won't because there won't be a town when you need things. You can't say 'well, I will go to that bakery, there's still two bakeries in Bellevue.' Go anywhere and try to find a bakery you can't. You go to

either Giant Eagle or Wal-Mart's bakery or Shop N Save's (another large scale Pittsburgh grocery store chain). They [Bellevue] have two bakeries. If they think they can shop at Wal-Mart all the time and when they are hungry for a donut that bakery is not going to be there. It's not going to survive. They can't survive on 'well I'll go there when I need stuff.'

Small businesses play varied roles in a community's organization. For some, the business district centers the activities of a town and creates opportunities to interact and engage with local residents. For others, the local business district does not meet their daily needs, but provides the occasional, unique shopping trip. Still others find the small business district, with its particular mix of stores and services, shaping the social practices associated local place character in Ohio River communities. The potential Wal-Mart development and its impact on community town centers and small businesses are viewed very differently according to an interviewee's economic position and community of residence. The views of small business owners in Sewickley stands in stark contrast to those residents in communities like Ben Avon and Glenfield that do not have business districts. Additionally there is a divide between Ohio River community residents who shop in local town centers in Bellevue and Sewickley compared to those who do not shop those town centers, because of the perceived lack of "needs" shopping in those districts. Ultimately, the varied uses and perceptions of Ohio River community business districts shape response to the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Response to Wal-Mart development is based community members' relation to either the community or the consumer society at large. If they identify or affiliate with the community, they see their community as threatened by big-box retail. This threat is based on how big-box retail is a placeless entity. Since big-box retail outlets do not draw on local place character elements to connect or engage in the community. Big-box retail, owned by global companies is not situated in a particular scale, like local, state, national or even global boundaries. They seem to move freely between these scales of experience when it provides the greatest advantage or profit to them. Concurrently, the consumer society pushes the control of the consumption process away from the local or individual scale into something where the individual is just part of a

larger global process. Individuals express frustration and/or concern with the homogeneity of communities, products and services that result from this increasing relationship between consumption process and big-box global retail.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1.1 Role community played in resident responses

Residents of the Ohio River area who opposed and supported the Wal-Mart development in Kilbuck highlighted somewhat different material, social practices, and symbolic characteristics of place character.

Those who opposed Wal-Mart, predominately residents and business owners from Sewickley or Ohio River communities who shopped in Bellevue and Sewickley, saw the Bellevue and especially the Sewickley small business districts as assets that shaped many aspects of community life. They were focal points for events, helped maintain interpersonal relations, and sustained the social fabric of the community. Indeed, residents in Allepo, Emsworth, Leetsdale and Glenfield saw their communities as lacking and incomplete because they did not have active and vibrant small business districts. Whether as a place to visit with other community members or the opportunity to get owner support for community events from small shop owners, these shopping districts provided an identity that was envied by residents of surrounding Ohio River communities. When discussing Wal-Mart, they focused on its likely negative impact on local communities and the impending disruption of place character. Highlighted by these residents was the demise of locally owned small businesses. With the exception of small business owners, who feared for their livelihood, the main concern was the shifting social relations in communities that have a defined town center or a local business base. Secondary to the impact on local community place character elements was the frustration with the increasing inability of local people to influence economic development by global corporations, as well as a concern about the continued growth of consumption. Siting a Wal-mart Supercenter and a strip mall in Kilbuck, to them, represented further encroachment into their

lives, specifically in the ways they organized their consumer practices. They saw the potential Wal-Mart as further limiting individual and local control over the consumption experience.

Ben Avon residents were most likely to support the Kilbuck Wal-Mart. Like residents in communities without business districts, Ben Avon locals decried the lack of a local business district, but their descriptions of what they valued about community centered around its old fashioned housing stock and a perception of being different from neighboring Avalon and Emsworth. Although they shopped in both Sewickley and Bellevue, they supported Wal-Mart because they perceived that their location south of Kilbuck meant that any negative impact of the store would not threaten their community. They identified benefits of the potential Wal-Mart development for their consumption needs, such as lower prices, especially on groceries, a greater selection of goods and services when compared to current local consumption options, an increase in job opportunities for community residents, additional taxes for local communities, and a reduction in the amount of time spent shopping because of the store’s close proximity to home residences.

The following typology characterizes distinctions between the orientations of residents who are in favor and those against the Kilbuck Wal-Mart development.

Table 7. Typology of ORC orientation and perspective on Kilbuck Wal-Mart development.

| ORC residents | Primary Orientation | Secondary Orientation |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Pro Kilbuck Wal-Mart | Positive Impact on Personal Consumption Practices | Ambivalent or Concerned Impact on Community |
| Anti Kilbuck Wal-Mart | Negative Impact on Communities | Negative Impact on Personal Consumption Practices |

Community location had some influence on whether residents supported or opposed Wal-Mart and how they framed their understanding of community place character. In particular, those residents who lived in communities near Sewickley (such as Allepo and Bell Acres) opposed the Wal-Mart development. But residents of the same community were not uniform in their assessments. This was particularly true of residents in the varying communities of Emsworth and Ben Avon. Some residents on both sides of the issue also held varying degrees of ambivalence and/or resignation to the project.

Importantly, the differing perspectives on Wal-Mart provide insight into residents’ perceptions of what is valuable about their local community. Those who opposed Wal-Mart talked about the value of social relationships on a small scale. But what they also valued was the

social, physical, and economic exclusivity of their communities. They saw their towns as unique and therefore desirable and feared that the introduction of the Kilbuck Wal-Mart would threaten these aspects of their communities. For residents who supported the Kilbuck Wal-Mart there was less fear or concern that community characteristics would be threatened with the introduction of the big-box retail store. Rather, they focused on convenience and access to greater product selection and lower prices. Their perception of community rested on its access to opportunities, like shopping, rather than more symbolic characteristics of place character like status or exclusivity.

Ironically, all members of the Ohio River communities were impacted by the Wal-Mart development on September 19, 2006. After construction started on the River Pointe Plaza development, anchored by the Wal-Mart Supercenter in December 2005, the project progressed through demolition of old buildings and preparation of the site for construction. On September 19, 2006, however, a steep hillside collapsed and the earth which had been moved to create the Wal-Mart parking lot and building location slid across four lanes of Route 65 and over the Norfolk Southern Railway lines (Ritchie and Johnson, 2006; Ritchie and Hasch, 2006). The landslide caused road closures along Route 65 and traffic delays throughout the northern suburbs of Pittsburgh. It also generated a large response in the Pittsburgh media and local government officials are investigating how the development was approved (Lundquist, 2006). While both lanes of south Route 65 and one lane of north Route 65 were reopened to traffic approximately two weeks after the landslide, community residents along the Ohio River corridor have joined the Communities First! group in asking additional questions about the development.

7.1.2 Utilizing sociology of place

Disputes over community controlled economic development have a history in U.S. social movements. Community battles over military installation, nuclear plants and hazardous water have emerged when particular actions or practices have contradicted local political, cultural and social perspectives (Miller, 2000). My utilization of a sociology of place framework has useful lessons for social movement research. It identifies the need for scholars to understand how the social and material realities of geographic location shape and create meanings and values and, in turn, how these meanings and values serve as the basis for the community response. Studying

place thus provides a better understanding of the “Back Yard” that people fight for, whether the opposition is against big box retail, highway relocation or a garbage dump.

My research focuses on one particular local response, but it is representative of a larger social movement growing in many U.S. communities against “big box” retail development, particularly Wal-Mart, and against excess consumption. Paul Routledge (1993, p.21) argues it is important to understand place when we study such social movements,

The concept of place informs us about why social movements occur where they do and the context within which movement agency interrelates the social structure. Second, the concept of place informs us about the nature of specific movements...Finally,...place provides the means of understanding the spirit of movement agency, that which inspires and motivates people, the articulation of the experiences of everyday life.

Research on community opposition generally focuses on the community where a proposed Wal-Mart will be situated for its response (Halebsky, 2004). By utilizing a sociology of place framework, I uncovered new aspects of the socio-cultural, political and economic makeup of the Ohio River communities. This makeup is represented in the material, social practices and symbolic characteristics by which people denote local place character. Identifying these characteristics is an important step in understanding why social movements occur where they do, the nature of the emplaced social movement activity, and what inspires some community members to respond to what they perceive as an external threat.

7.1.3 Contributions to a sociology of place

This research adds to Gieryn’s effort to develop a geographical sphere of social analysis since studying the varied local responses to a national-global retail organization provides a “[grounding] analyses of social, economic and political phenomena in their appropriate geographic context” (Hubbard et. al., 2004 p. 6). A place-sensitive sociology reintroduces the role of community as a part of an individual’s identity. Historically, community was understood as what linked people together based on similar morals, values, ideals and social relations in a discrete geographical setting (Agnew and Duncan, 1989). A sociology of place expands the definition of community beyond the geographical setting to include how the built location and the meanings and values associated with a place shape an individual’s experience and how

he/she responds to social change. In this vein, place can be as critical to an individual's social experience as gender, race and class.

A place sensitive sociology is also important for understanding the varied and nuanced ways that globalization impacts various scales, particularly the local. The ways a geographic location and its built environment are understood by local citizens is critical to understanding whether global phenomenon will be accepted or opposed by local residents. As the traditional national barriers to the global flow of people and commerce are eroded, local communities will increasingly become a focal point at which globalization can be challenged.

7.1.4 What future studies could do....

My research serves as an example of using place character as an analytical framework to study a social phenomena. The particular community descriptions that residents articulated were products of the community debate over a Wal-Mart development. A different analytic lens on the same community would be afforded by a study taking place during a local residential property tax increase, political scandal or school board conflict and different place character elements would be highlighted. In addition, the community descriptions utilized in this analysis of place character are a product of the residents sampled. A sample with a different social, economic and demographic mix of local residents might identify a set of place character elements different from those identified in this research.

Future researchers could expand on this study in several ways. First, future studies could refine the integration of ethnographic observation with GIS community level data. These two methods provide a comparison of how residents and social researchers often describe communities. Additionally, future research could refine the integration of these methods to provide greater insight into the extent to which macro level features of community match individual perceptions and how these affect response to a community issue. This may be particularly valuable to social researchers studying localized social movements and geographers conducting community studies.

Even with these limitations, my research findings should add to the discourse and debate on community identity and planning in the wake of external disruptions. As Norman notes (1999), opposition to "big box" retail development hinges on concerns such as:

- Disruption of a community's way of life
- Shift in a community's identity to something not accepted
- Homogenization of places, with a loss of a sense of place

Descriptions of particular community place character elements articulate and provide context to some of Norman's concerns. The community characteristics described by my interviewees are stronger than "just a 'sense of place' or consciousness that people develop through experiences in a place" (Miller, 2000, p.57). They are examples of lived action in the continuous struggle to shape, re-create, or maintain the social and material meanings that keep a community for the people, by the people and of the people.

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF EVENTS PRIOR TO WAL-MART SUPERCENTER DEVELOPMENT IN KILBUCK TOWNSHIP*

The following timeline provides an account of the actions and events that preceded the Wal-Mart Supercenter development at the former Dixmont State Hospital grounds in Kilbuck Township, along Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard. It highlights the efforts of Communities First! to stop the Wal-Mart Supercenter development. Communities First! is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with its mission to “enhance the livability and natural beauty of our Ohio River corridor communities.” It includes residents from the following communities: Kilbuck, Allepo, Avalon, Edgeworth, Emsworth, Glenfield, Ohio, Osborne and Sewickley.

2002

- February-- Glenfield mayor expresses concern to Kilbuck Township supervisors over lack of communication about proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck.
- April-- Kilbuck township supervisors approve initial plan to convert former Dixmont State Hospital site into a Wal-Mart Supercenter. Project proposed by ASC Development Company of Emsworth. Development company needs permits to start cleaning up the site and for construction to begin. A plan for asbestos removal in the Dixmont buildings needs to be approved with a permit from the Allegheny County Health Department. A plan for sewers must be approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. A traffic plan must be approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation before construction can begin.
- May-- Communities First! files lawsuit with Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas to challenge the approval of the Wal-Mart site development by Kilbuck supervisors.

2003

- May --Kilbuck supervisors provide preliminary approval of revised site plan. Communities First! lawsuit still pending in Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas.
- July --Emsworth Council votes against upgrading sewer pump station in order for Wal-Mart to tap into system.

2004

- February-- ASC development company receives approval from Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for the companies plans for controlling stormwater run-off at the construction of the River Pointe Plaza, home of the Wal-Mart Supercenter. Communities First group concerned about flooding along Toms Run Road.
- August-- Emsworth council decides to agree to a plan to let ASC development tap into the borough' sewer lines. The developer has agreed to help pay for an upgrade to the pump station.
- October-- Pennsylvania State Department of Environmental Health holds public hearing on sewer plan as part of permit approval for Rive Point Plaza development.
- October-- Communities First! Group files a petition to intervene with PennDOT. In order to see and review information PennDOT used in making its decision to approve the traffic plan.
- November-- The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Health rejects sewer plan for store. Pennsylvania Department of Transportation rejects a highway occupancy permit application for the River Point Plaza project.
- December--Pennsylvania Department of Enviornmental Health approves a permit for storm sewer system construction at River Point Plaza.

2005

- January-- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation approves traffic permit for River Point Plaza construction. Plan calls for a stop light at the store entrance off of Route 65 along with additional turn lanes on both sides of the road. A right turn lane would also be added on Camp Horne Road.

- June-- PennDOT Hearing Officer Andrew Cline ruled that Communities First! does not have legal standing to intervene and challenge the traffic permit for the River Pointe Plaza Project.
- August-- Pennsylvania Transportation Secretary Allen Biehler issued a ruling denying an appeal by Communities First! to gain legal standing to intervene in order to appeal PennDOT traffic permit approval of the River Pointe Plaza Project.
- December—Demolition and ground clearing begins at former site of Dixmont State Hospital grounds.

*Timeline of events organized by author as compiled from published media sources.

APPENDIX B

BRIEF HISTORY OF DIXMONT STATE HOSPITAL

The location of the proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter development in Kilbuck Township has a long history. Elements such as close proximity to Pittsburgh city amenities and distance from the cityscapes are noted by current Ohio River community residents as positive attributes of the area. Those same elements were identified as the location's strengths in the mid 1850s, leading to the construction of one of Pennsylvania's hospitals for the mentally ill. During the 1800s those suffering mental illness were often referred to as "insane" or "lunatic;" In the 1840s, the activism and research by Boston philanthropist Dorothea Dix raised awareness in the eastern United States of inhumane treatment and conditions of those identified as lunatic or insane (Morrison, 2001). Based on Dix's effort, in 1845, Pennsylvania's state legislature passed into law, "An act to establish an asylum for the insane poor of the Commonwealth [to be] called the Pennsylvania State Lunatic Hospital and Union Asylum for the Insane" (Morrison, 2001, p. 14). By the early 1850s, there was perceived need for a hospital serving the needs of the insane in Western Pennsylvania. Unique for the time, private benefactors purchased the land in Western Pennsylvania for the insane hospital location. The state law noted that the hospital location needed to be "a place of easy access, large acreage and of a commanding and cheerful view for those unfortunate wards of the state" (1897) (See Figure 18 and 19).



**Figure 18. Aerial view of Dixmont Hospital showing proximity to Ohio River, railroad and Route 65.
Reprinted with permission Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center**



**Figure 19. View of main hospital buildings.
Reprinted with permission Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center**

Initially land was purchased south of Pittsburgh along the Monogohela river. Ms. Dix determined that land was not an ideal site and chose the site of a 300 acre farm, seven miles from Pittsburgh on the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, Chicago railroad (Boucher, 1908). Also at her request, the hospital was named Dixmont, on behalf of her grandfather. In 1859, a special ceremony marked the laying of Dixmont's main building's cornerstone. Ernest Morrison quotes *Post-Gazette* newspaper account describing the Dixmont landscape:

Although the river was narrow at that spot, the site Dix had selected was described as "a garden smiling with whatever is beautiful". The surrounding hillsides were covered with tall elms, the broad fields "waved" their "burdens of corn and grain" in the breeze, and trim hedgerows divided the meadows into neat squares. In the distance the smoke rising over the river and the "scream" of steamboat whistles reminded the gathering of "commerce and its dependencies in the far off world" (quoted in Morrison, 2001, p.23)

Dixmont hospital opened in November 11, 1862 and was home to 111 patients (Morrison, 2001). Through the twentieth century the hospital's treatment focus, identification and ownership changed. During that time the Hospital strived to maintain self-sufficiency. As noted in the 1908 book, *A Century and a half of Pittsburg and her people*, the 1905 annual report notes the effort:

The work at Dixmont has been kept at as high a standard as that of any institution of its character in the country... The general kitchen and dormitory building is all but completed. It is happy in design, substantially built and thoroughly adapted to the work for which it was designed...The farm continues to supply the wants in the way of vegetables at reasonable cost; and a new gas well, of greater capacity than any heretofore drilled in this vicinity, gives us an ideal and cheap fuel.
(Boucher, 1908)

In 1945 the hospital was taken over by the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and officially named Dixmont State Hospital (Winnick, 2001). Legal and social changes in treatment and acceptance of individuals with mental illness led to a decline in state-run institutions and in 1984, the Commonwealth closed Dixmont. Covering 25 percent of Kilbuck township's total property, the land was put up for sale in 1986 (Ove, 1998). A potential deal for the land was stuck in court for eight years. Delays were related to ground contamination from waste, asbestos in buildings, gravesites for 1343 bodies (including Civil War soldiers) and old gas wells as well as Reed Hall's, a Dixmont campus building, and designation on the National Register of Historic Places (Ove, 1998). In 1998, the land was made available for sale and was purchased by Kilbuck residents Ralph and Carole Stroyne (Ovenshine, 1998). The Stroyne's subdivided the 407 acres,

with two subdivisions to be redeveloped as residential housing plans (Stroyne, 2005). The third subdivision, the Dixmont Hospital campus is approximately 75 acres. During the course of this research, the Stroynes were in contract with ASC development to build the Wal-Mart Supercenter on the former Dixmont Hospital campus (Stroyne, 2005).

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

What brought you to this community?

How long have you lived in this community?

How would you describe your community?

What type of community events do you participate in?

What community organizations are you involved in?

What are some desirable characteristics/strengths of this community?

What are some weaknesses?

In your opinion what has helped to maintain the strengths or caused the weaknesses?

Does your community have a main street? What defines it?

When you think of your community what words, images come to mind?

Do you frequent local restaurants? Which ones? Why?

Do you frequent local businesses? Which ones? Why?

Having shopping opportunities in the community changed over the years?

Where do you shop for groceries? For clothing? For household purchases?

Do you shop at the local/nearby Wal-Mart? Why or why not?

How does Wal-Mart fit into your description of community?

Do you know anyone who works at Wal-Mart? Do you work at Wal-Mart?

When did you hear about Wal-Mart coming to the area?

Did you talk to anyone about Wal-Mart coming to the area?

Did your attitude towards Wal-Mart change over time?

(If Wal-Mart exists in community) What effects does it have on the community?

If Wal-Mart does not exist in community) What effects do you think it will have on your community?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agnew, John A. and James S. Duncan. 1989. *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Altheide, David L. and John M. Johnson. 1994. "Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research." In Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp.485-499.
- Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Anderson, Sarah. 2005. "Wal-Mart's Pay Gap". Institute for Policy Studies Report. April 15.
- Atkinson, Paul and Martyn Hammersley. 1994. "Ethnography and Participant Observation." In Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp.248-261.
- Babbie, Earl. 1998. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- Bell, David. 1976. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bernhardt, Annette; Chaddha, Anmol; McGrath, Siobhan. 2005. "What Do We Know About Wal-Mart?" Economic Policy Brief. No. 2 August. Brennan Center for Justice NYU School of Law.
- Blee, Kathleen M. and Verta Taylor. 2002. "The Uses of Semi-Structured Interviews in Social Movement Research." In Klandermans, Bert and Suzanne Staggenborg eds. *Methods in Social Movement Research*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press pp. 92-117.
- Boucher, John Newton. 1908. *A Century and a Half of Pittsburg and Her People*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: The Lewis Publishing Company.
- Briem, Christopher. 2004. "Is Downtown Dead? Hardly." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Feb. 1.
- Brown, Jennifer and Jonathan Sime. 1981. "A Methodology for Accounts." in Brenner, Michael ed. *Social Method and Social Life*. New York, NY: Academic Press. pp.159-188.

- Brown, Norman F. 1931. "The Ohio River Boulevard and the McKees Rocks Bridge Important Links in Allegheny County's Ultimate Highway System." In *McKees Rocks Bridge Ohio River Boulevard* souvenir pamphlet Myers Printing Company.
- Bucsko, Mike and Ed Blazina. 2004. "Why County Begat 130 Towns." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Aug. 8.
- Canclini, Nestor Garcia. 2001. *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- City of Allegheny, Pa: History and Institutions; Illustrations and Sketches of the Banking, Wholesale and Manufacturing Interests and the Representative Professional Interests of Allegheny County*. 1897. The Evening Record.
- Code of Ordinances of the Borough of Sewickley, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania*. 1996. Mechanicsburgh, PA: Penns Valley Publishers. Revised Through July 21, 2003.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. 2003. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Cohn, Elizabeth. 2005. "Wal-Mart: A College Curriculum." Published by Wal-Mart Watch.
- Copeland, David. 2004. "Union Hope to Bag Contract." Pittsburgh Tribune-Review June 19.
- Communities First!. 2004. Organization document.
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Denzin, Norman. 1994. "The Art and Politics of Interpretation." In Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp.500-515.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Elliot, Dorinda and Bill Shenzhen/Powell. 2005. "Wal-Mart Nation." Time June 19.
- El Nasser, Haya. 2004. "Cities Put Shackles on Chain Stores." USA Today July 20.
- Entrikin, J. Nicholas. 1991. *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. 1958. *The Affluent Society*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Giant Eagle Corporate Website. Accessed 2005. www.gianteagle.com.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

- Gieryn, Thomas F. 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26 pp.463-496.
- Graff, Thomas O. 1998. "The Locations of Wal-Mart and Kmart Supercenters: Contrasting Corporate Strategies." *Professional Geographer*. 50 (1) pp.46-57
- Gratz, Roberta Brandes. 1998. *Cities Back from the Edge*. New York: Preservation Press.
- Gronow, Jukka and Alan Warde. 2001. *Ordinary Consumption*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Halebsky, Stephen. 2004. "Superstores and the Politics of Retail Development." *City & Community*. 3 (2) June pp.115-134.
- Haller, William. 1998. *Regional restructuring and underclass growth: impacts of manufacturing decline in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area*. Dissertation. University of Pittsburgh.
- Hardie, Frances C. 1998. *Sewickley : A History of a Valley Community*. RR. Bonnelly Financial.
- Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Hayden, Dolores. 1995. *The Power of Place*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Heckathorn, Douglas D. 1997. "Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations." *Social Problems*. 44 (2) May pp. 174-199.
- Heckathorn, Douglas D. 2002. "Respondent Driven Sampling II: Deriving Valid Population Estimates from Chain-Referral Samples of Hidden Population." *Social Problems*. 49 (1) Feb. pp.11-34.
- Held, David and Anthony McGrew. 2000. *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Helyar, John. 2003. "COSTCO: The Only Company Wal-Mart Fears." Fortune Nov. 10.
- Hine, Thomas. 2005. "The Way We Used to Shop." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette March 13.
- History of Allegheny County Pennsylvania: With Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks and Important Manufactories*. 1889 Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippingot Co.
- Hough, Michael. 1990. *Out of Place*. New Haven, CT: Yale.
- "How Big Can It Grow?" 2004. The Economist April 17-23 p.67-69.
- Hubbard, Phil; Kitchin, Rob; Valentine, Gill, eds. 2004. *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- "Is Wal-Mart Too Powerful?" 2003. Business Week. Oct. 6.

- Isin, Engin, F. 2000. *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Janesick, Valerie J. 1994. "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning." In Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp.209-219.
- Jones, Roland. 2003. "Wal-Mart Takes on the World." MSNBC website. Nov. 18. www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3540911
- "Jury Hears Opening Statements in Second Phase of Wal-Mart Trial." January 14, 2004. Associated Press on CNN website. www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/01/14/walmart.lawsuit.ap/index.html
- Karjanen, David. 2004. "The Wal-Mart Way Seems to Be, 'Only My Way.'" Newsday and Pittsburgh Post Gazette May 2.
- Landry, Timothy; Arnold, Todd; Stark, John. 2005. "Retailer Community Embeddedness and Consumer Patronage." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. 12 pp.65-72.
- Lindeman, Theresa. 2003. "The Labor Strategy of Food." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette July 6.
- Lindeman, Theresa. 2003a. "New Wal-Mart Distribution Center Covers a lot of Ground." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette July 16.
- Longstreth, Richard W. 1997. *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture. The Automobile and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lundquist, Molly T. 2006. "We Told You So." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. September 27.
- Keith, Michael and Steve Pile, eds. 1993. *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London, UK: Routledge.
- King Greenwood, Jill and Rick Wills. 2006. "Blast collapses hillside, shutting Route 65." Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. September 27.
- Kirk, Jerome and Marc L Muller. 1990. "Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research." Sage University Paper series on Qualitative Applications in the Social Sciences, Vol. 1. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Marx, Karl. 1967. *Capital; A Critique of Political Economy*. Frederick Engels ed. New York, NY: International Publishers .
- Marston, Sallie A. 2000. "The Social Construction of Scale." *Progress in Human Geography*. 24 (2) pp.219-242.

- Massey, Doreen. 1991. "The Political Place of Locality Studies." *Environment and Planning A*. 23 pp.267-281.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCormick, Gavin. 2003. "Low Wal-Mart Labor Costs Play Role in Supermarket Strikes." Associated Press. Oct. 21.
- Miller, Byron A. 2000. *Geography and Social Movements: Comparing Nuclear Activism in the Boston Area*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Miller, Daniel; Jackson, Peter; Thrift, Nigel; Holbrook, Beverley; Rowlands, Michael. 1998. *Shopping, Place and Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Molotch, Harvey; Freudenberg, William; Paulsen, Krista E. 2000. "History Repeats Itself, but How? City Character, Urban Tradition, and the Accomplishment of Place." *American Sociological Review*. 65 Dec. pp.791-823.
- Morse, Janice. 1994. "Designing Funded Qualitative Research." In Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp.220-235.
- Morrison, Ernest. 2001. "The Physician, the Philanthropist, and the Politician." A History of Public Mental Health Care in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Historical.
- Muller, Thomas and Elizabeth Humstone. 1996. *What Happened When Wal-Mart Came to Town? A Report on Three Iowa Communities with a Statistical Analysis of Seven Iowa Counties*. prepared for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- Norman, Al. 1999. *Slam-Dunking Wal-Mart*. Raphel Marketing.
- Ortega, Bob. 2000. *In Sam We Trust: The Untold Story of Sam Walton and Wal-Mart, the World's Most Powerful Retailer*. New York, NY: Times Business.
- Ove, Torsten. 1998. "Eagerly awaiting a for sale sign." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Feb. 23.
- Ovenshine, Gordon. 1998. "For \$757,000, Dixmont is theirs." North Hills News Record Sept. 11.
- Park, Robert E. 1936. "Human Ecology." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 42 (1) pp. 1-15.
- Paulsen, Krista E. 2004. "Making Character Count: Empirical Strategies for Studying Place Distinction." *City & Community*. 3 (3) Sept. pp.243-262.
- Phillips, Gladys. 1992. *Centennial History of Ben Avon. 1892-1992*.
- Riesman, David. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. With Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Riesman, David. 1964. *Abundance for What? And Other Essays*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Ritchie, Jim and Andrew Johnson. 2006. "Kilbuck, Developer Get Failing Grade." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. September 21.
- Ritchie, Jim and Michael Hasch. 2006. "Pressure Mounts as Hillside Crumble." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. September 22.
- "Final Report on Research for Big Box Retail/Superstore Development". 2003. Prepared by Rodino Associates for Los Angeles Industrial and Commercial Development Division.
- Rupert, Evelyn. 2000. "Who Governs the Global City?" in *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*. Edited by Engin Isin. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2001. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schein, Richard H. 1997. "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 87 (4) p.660-680.
- Schneider, Greg and Dina ElBoghdady. 2003. "Retailers Forced to Follow Wal-Mart." The Washington Post Nov. 6.
- "Shopping for Subsidies: How Wal-Mart Uses Taxpayer Money to Finance Its Never-ending Growth." 2004. Good Jobs First Report.
- Szucs, Loretto Davis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. 1997. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry Incorporated.
- "Shameless: How Wal-Mart Bullies its Way into Communities Across America." 2005. Wal-Mart Watch Special Report.
- Shmidt, Edward L. 1931. "Description of Ohio River Boulevard." in *McKees Rocks Bridge Ohio River Boulevard* souvenir pamphlet. Myers Printing Company.
- Shropshire, Corilyn. 2005. "Sewickley: Where the Techies can Live and Play." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. October 2.
- Sprawl-Busters International Website. www.sprawl-busters.com.
- Stilgoe, John R. 1998. *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*. New York, NY: Walker and Co.
- Stroyne, Ralph. 2005. Interview
- "The High Cost of Low Prices." 2003. BusinessWeek Oct. 6.
- "The Economic Impact of Wal-Mart." 2005. report prepared by Global Insight.

- Troy, Mike. 2002. "Wal-Mart Set to Grow Sales, Store Count." *DSN Retailing* 41 (20) Oct. 28.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1991. "A View of Geography." *Geographical Review*. 81 (1) Jan. pp. 99-107.
- Van Trump, James D. 1975. *Glenfield: Past, Present and Future*. report by Glenfield Residents and Pittsburgh History Landmark Foundation.
- Vaught, Charles; Brnich, Michael; Mallet, Launa; Wiehagen, William; Cole, Henry; Conti, Ron; Kowalksi, Kathleen; Litton, Charles. 2000. *Behavioral and Organizational Dimensions of Underground Mine Fires*. NIOSH Information Circular No.9450. DHHS (NIOSH) Pb. No. 2000-126.
- Veblen, Thomas. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Wal-MartAnnualReport.2006.
<http://walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=453&contId=5700>
 Date accessed: July 15.
- Walton, Sam. 1992. *Sam Walton: Made in America*. Doubleday.
- Williams, Peter; Hubbard, Phil; Clark, David; Berkeley, Nigel. 2001. "Consumption, Exclusion and Emotion: The Social Geographies of Shopping." *Social & Cultural Geography*. 2 (2) pp.203-218.
- Winnick, Pamela. 2001. "Hanging on to History." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette April 25.
- Wirth, Louis. 1939. "Urbanism as a Way of Life." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 44(1) pp. 1-24.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 2005. "Does the Future Belong to China?" Newsweek May 9.
- Zukin, Sharon. 1998. "Urban Lifestyles: Diversity and Standardization in Spaces of Consumption." *Urban Studies*. 255 (5-6) pp.825-839.
- Zukin, Sharon. 2004. *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.