Population Growth in the West: Perspectives on Immigration, Sustainability, and the Evolving Urban Landscape

10:00—11:00 a.m.
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Sturm Hall, Davis Auditorium

Current growth and immigration patterns may lead the U.S.A. to a population of one billion by the end of the century. Hear from national leaders on the impact of immigrants on the natural and built environment.

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How many Americans are enough?

Public policy is a kaleidoscope which time rotates and presents us constantly with new patterns. One of the most important challenges of public policy is to recognize when an old pattern is gone and a new one is in place. If I could, I could leave anything carved on the stone Capitol after my 12 years, it would be something like “ Beware of solutions appropriate to the past, but disastrous to the future.” It is easy to talk about yesterday’s issues, but the real policy challenges involve tomorrow’s issues.

A new, important, pressing public policy question faces America: What is our demographic destiny? How big a country do we want to become? How many people can live satisfactorily within our borders? These issues will not go away and will only grow more complicated.

Our natural American birth rate will lead to a stable population around 2050. With the current level of immigration, our population will be about 500 million on its way to a billion. I have yet to meet an American who wants 1 billion neighbors. Or 500 million. This is not as issue of immigrants, but of immigration.

What possible public policy advantage would there be to an America of 700 million? Do we lack for people? Do we have too much open space, parkland and recreation? What will 500 million Americans mean to our environment? Do we need a larger military? Are our schools unpopulated? Do we not have enough diversity? Will we live better lives if Pueblo and Denver double in size? Do you want a Colorado of 12 million people? These questions seem to answer themselves.

People must recognize that in the long term, the growth issue in America is immigration issue. We have a chance to stabilize America’s population or double it, and double it again, and the key driver is immigration. If we continue with our present policy of mass immigration, America takes almost twice as many immigrants as the rest of the world combined. We will continue to grow and grow and grow. The mathematics is relentless.

The first census in 1790 found 4 million Europeans in America. Two hundred years later, in 1990, we had about 260 million Americans. That means we had six doublings of the original European population: 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256. Please note that two more doublings give us more than 1 billion people sharing America.

Have you ever been to India or China? Is that what you want to leave to your grandchildren? Or perhaps more appropriately: Can you imagine an America of 1 billion people that you would want to leave to your grandchildren?

Of course immigration has been good for America and, yes, we are all immigrants. But is that the extent and depth of the argument? I governed Colorado for 12 years. In my experience mass immigration made virtually every problem I was trying to solve more difficult. I have been working all my political life trying to get low-income citizens health insurance. How can this ever be done when our Swiss cheese borders allow an endless stream of people needing medical care?

A majority of the births at our large Denver pediatric hospital are to illegal immigrants. Our standard school scores go down rather than up partly because of the large numbers of immigrant children. In just more than a decade, Denver schools have gone from 15 percent Hispanic to more than 60 percent Hispanic.

Housing? Our public housing is filled with both legal and illegal immigrants. Crime? Twenty percent of our federal prison space is filled with the foreign born. Sprawl and growth? Colorado is being flooded by Californians who move here because they don’t like what’s happening in California.

Bottom line, ask yourself: What problem in America will be made better by continuing to add new numbers of people? America before immigration “reforms” averaged about 270,000 immigrants a year. If we would return to those historic numbers, we would take a great step toward keeping our children a sustainable population.

It is time for a new vision for America. When the Statue of Liberty was erected we were a relatively empty continent in an uncrowded world. Now 4 billion people live below the U.S. welfare level (with 80 million born each year) and dream of America. We must decide how many we want or need. I would argue that America should move toward a stable, sustainable population. The world’s ecosystem does not need 300 million more consuming Americans, nor do we. Immigration has gone from a solution to a problem, and the sooner we recognize this, the better America we will leave our children and grandchildren.

Richard D. Lamm was a three-term governor of Colorado and currently is the director of the Center for Public Policy.

Illustration by Ann Boyden.
Global warming brings a clash of civilizations
Richard D. Lamm and Buie Seawell

Global warming is not just another issue in a long line of environmental problems that have received attention starting with Earth Day 1970. With honor and respect to all the great environmental victories, and to the people who fought for them, we feel that global warming will take a revolution in the way we see ourselves.

Adequately confronting global warming will require as much change from us as was required during the transition to the industrial revolution. We must, in effect, learn to live in a whole new world.

While there is still much uncertainty about how global warming will impact the earth, we know enough now to start the journey to sustainability. Evidence of global warming is sufficient to hold policymakers guilty of public-policy malpractice if they fail to act immediately and vigorously. History's judgment will be harsh on those who ignore such clear warning signs.

Our oceans are warming, our ice caps and glaciers are melting, our soils are eroding, our rainforests are shrinking, our ocean coral is dying, our fisheries are being depleted, and more and more species are disappearing. We are told by the National Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society and by most of the living Nobel Prize winners that global warming is a reality that we must take seriously. Even the Pentagon, hardly a historic voice for the environment, has issued a report, "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for U.S. National Security," laying out a series of possible nation-threatening scenarios for global warming.

How can anyone read these reports and return to business as
usual? Perhaps because the implications to our everyday lives are so immense that we'd rather not comprehend them. One reason the attack on 9/11 succeeded was that the possibility of crashing planes into skyscrapers was almost beyond imagination.

Likewise with global warming: Trying to imagine a world without growing petroleum use, or traditional ways of growing the economy, or where human population must shrink rather than grow comes close to the unimaginable. Historian Barbara Tuchman observed how hard it is for those in charge to react to new realities: "When information is relayed to policymakers, they respond in terms of what is already inside their heads and consequently make policy less to fit the facts than to fit the baggage that has accumulated since childhood."

It is also immensely difficult to see our individual place within the ecological whole. The most cited article in the history of Science magazine helps us understand why. Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy in the Commons" concluded that when natural resources are held in common, free and available to all for the taking, people steadily increase their exploitation of the common resources until they are exhausted. Every participant in the tragedy pleads "not guilty." But the entire system moves toward disaster.

The poet W. H. Auden wrote, "All life is the question of whether or not to have children, after you've already had them." It is hard for us to see how our automobiles, our airplane travel or our third or fourth child will affect the environment when they bring us so much pleasure, but the impact is shared worldwide.

We do not recognize the lifetimes it takes to correct environmental damage or to reverse the damage already done. So it is a surprise to realize that the exhaust from President Kennedy's automobile on the day he was assassinated still hasn't fully played out its environmental impact. It takes perhaps 60 or 70 years for today's pollution to reach full impact as greenhouse gases. Like a car braking down, it will
take us a significant and perhaps fatal amount of time to brake down our industrial society. It will require foresight not historically present in humankind.

What we treat as just another environmental issue is more accurately a clash of civilizations. It is the shift from identifying individual polluters to be stopped to the issue of all of our lifestyles. We can only observe how nearsighted it is that so many people today focus on cultural and religious differences between the West and Islam, when human civilization itself stands on the brink of collapse.

Is it naive to hope that — like the appearance of an earthbound asteroid or the invasion of extraterrestrial aliens in all those countless, trite science fiction films — global warming may be the common cause that finally unites the human enterprise? Whatever it takes, we must begin to focus on the one environmental issue that threatens us all.

Richard Lamm and Buie Seawell are contributors to Writers on the Range, a service of High Country News (hcnc.org). Both are professors at the University of Denver, Lamm in public policy, and Seawell in business.
“Latino Urbanism”
By James Rojas

As great numbers of Latino immigrants and native-born Mexican Americans citizens settle into the large parts of Los Angeles, they bring with them different use of urban space to an already existing built environment. Their homes, ciudades, pueblos, and ranchos in Latin America are structured differently both physically and socially than the American suburb.

Latinos bring a rich use of public life LA and can this phenomena can be seen by the way Latinos retrofit the urban design of the streets. Street vendors carrying their wares, pushing carts or setting up temporary tables and tarps, vivid colors, murals and business signs, clusters of people socializing on street corners and over front yard fences, and the furniture and props that make these front yards into personal statements all contribute to the vivid, unique landscape of the city.

People
Very few signs or landmarks will indicate Latino LA, however one will know when they have arrived there because of the large number of people on the streets as compared to the lack of people on the streets in other parts of L.A. Street life is an integral part of the community fabric because they bring people together. Streets serve as plazas by creating a real sense of place in Latino neighborhoods.

Walking and using public transportation are an important means of transportation in Latino neighborhoods. The numerous small neighborhood mom and popshops that line commercial streets indicated that most customers walk to these stores. Latinos have the highest rider ship on Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority buses. While most
Angelinos cannot locate their local bus stop is, in Latino L.A. bus stops are major nodes of activity with passengers and vendors.

Latinos engage in all types of activities on streets ranging from; residents conversing over fences, elderly sitting on porches, children playing on sidewalks and front yards, teenagers congregating on the sidewalk, men working on cars and street vendors selling food and sundries from front gate to front gate.

**Street Vendors – Mobile Commerce in Latino LA**

The streets of Los Angeles provide Latinos a space and opportunity for economic survival by allowing them to sell items and/or their labor. While most Angelinos only drive cars on streets, Latinos have ingeniously transformed auto-oriented streets to fit their economic needs strategically mapping out intersections and temporarily transforming vacant lots, old gas stations, sidewalks, and curbs. When the highway engineers were planning LA’s famous freeways they did not anticipate people selling oranges from the on and off ramps. From men selling their labor to selling of extra clothing in front of ones home, Latinos blur the line between commercial and residential activities.

Vendors temporarily transform the urban landscape by adding a rhythmic activity to the street. Street vendors in Latino L.A. add an importance to the streets by bringing services to people. Their ephemeral nature bonds people and the place together. These uses enriched the urban landscape by adding more activity to the suburban neighborhoods.

**Props**

Moveable objects or props add a second layer of architect to the Latino LA landscape and help Latinos use urban space. These props range from objects to sit on, talk over, play with and hear. These props scale down the urban landscape to a pedestrian level. Moveable objects or props, such as tables and chairs, allow the Latino residents to use the outdoor space by giving them flexibility and freedom over their environment. Props can be moved between inside and the outside space, as well as allow for personalization in public space. Like furniture in a room, props in the street connect the user to the open urban space. Props also help Latinos transform auto oriented streets to a pedestrian level.

**Cultural Expression Through Graphics**

Very few spaces and walls are left untouched in East Los Angeles. From graffiti, store signs and murals, blank wall space becomes a cultural expression for the residents. The use of paint helps Latinos to inexpensively claim ownership of space or express themselves. The use of graphics adds a strong visual element to the urban form. Buildings are kinetic because of the flamboyant words and graphics used. Many building areas cover from top to bottom with graphics. Murals can be political, religious or used for business advertisement. Many neighborhoods display public murals are both political and religious in nature. One of the unique urban advantages about murals is that they liven up a space. No where is this more apparent than the side streets from commercial streets where shop keepers have murals painted to advertise and keep the graffiti from being noticed.
The murals are painted on the large expansive, blank walls on the side of the buildings that faces the residential street. An interesting urban dynamic takes place because the commercial activity is wrapped around the building onto the residential side streets. The residential streets are liven up and are connected with the residential streets. These corners area are important to the resident of Latino LA where many vendors congregate.

Fences: A Social Catalyst

Fences are a fixed prop. In many front yards across America one can find fences. Most people will build fences for security, exclusion, seclusion etc. and Latinos build fences for these same reasons. Fences create easily defendable spaces and illustrate a simple, straightforward approach to procession: "This is my space." However it's the way Latinos use fences that becomes interesting.

Waist-high fences are ubiquitous throughout the residential landscape of Latino Los Angeles. The fences function as place to keep things out or in, provide a place hang wet laundry, sell items or just chat with a neighbor. Fences are a useful threshold between the household and public domain and bring residents together. Boundaries bring people together and the fences in Latino neighborhoods define boundaries between public and private space. However here the fences break down the social and physical barriers by creating a place where people can congregate. The middle class suburban neighborhood people rarely congregate in the front yard. This visible expanse of land acts as a psychological barrier that separates the private space of the home from the public space of the street. Collectively the enclosed front yards create a different urban landscape and transform the neighborhood.

Enclosed front yards help transform the street into a plaza. This new plaza is not the typical plaza we see in Latin American or Europe with strong defining street walls but has an unconventional form. Nevertheless the streets in Latino LA have all the social activity of a plaza. Residents and pedestrians can participate in the social dialog on the street from the comfort and security of their enclosed front yard. Fences clearly delineate their property between neighbors, which allows them to personalize their front yard without physically interfering with each other.

La Yarda: A Personal Expression

Nowhere else in urban landscape of Latino Los Angeles is the use of space so illuminated and celebrated than in the front yard. Typical middle class front yard is an impersonal space in which no one sits there, no personal objects are left lying while the front yards in Latino LA are personal vignettes of the owner's life. Depending on the practical needs of the owners, the use and design of the front yard vary from elaborate courtyard gardens reminiscent of Mexico, a place for children, to working places. Middle class Americans put their daily habits in the backyard. Latinos bring the party, workspace and conversation to the front yard creating activity in the public space.

The front yard in middle class suburbs has become a space dedicated to showing that we are good citizens, and responsible members of the community. In Latino LA front yard is not measure by the cosmetics of the lawn but rather your participation in streets activities. The Latino front yards reflect the Latino cultural values applied to American suburb form.
Housecapes: Latino Vernacular

Non-Latinos built the homes in Latino LA, but these homes have evolved into a vernacular form as residents make changes to suit their needs. Every change, no matter how small, has meaning and purpose. Bringing the sofa out to the front porch, stuccoing over the clap board, painting the house vivid colors or placing a statue of the Virgin in the front yard, all reflect the struggles, triumphs, and everyday habits of working class Latinos. A bastard of two architectural vocabularies, Latino homes and barrios create a new language that uses syntax from both Latin American and the US urban forms.

The front porch becomes one of the main focal points of the house. In most American homes today the use and importance of the front porch has declined for various reasons. However in Latino Los Angeles the front porch has gained a new importance with residents enlarging and expanding them for their heavy use. Residents sit on the porch to escape summer heat or just be outside with family, friends and neighbors. The driveway and front yard can serve as a party or work space.

Unlike the typical middle class suburban house that pulls itself away from the street, the Latino household extends graciously to the street. Each house communicates with the street and other through the use of fences and props.

Conclusion

Latinos and more recent immigrants are transforming urban space in Los Angeles. Street vendors carrying their wares, pushing carts or setting up temporary tables and tarps, vivid colors, murals and business signs, clusters of people socializing on street corners and over front yard fences, and the furniture and props that make these front yards into personal statements all contribute to the vivid, unique landscape of the city.

References