

## Community Participation in Rapidly Growing Communities

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### Overview

Amenity-rich locations attract individuals searching for places to recreate, live, or retire. As a result, such areas, many of which are in the Western United States, experience changes related to population in-migration. Past research shows how the extensive in-migration of people with different values and perspectives can contribute to social conflict in affected communities. This study focuses on the relationship of community level indicators with community participation in a five-county rapidly growing amenity-rich area in southern Utah. The research team studied two main types of community members—seasonal and permanent residents. Differences among such residents can contribute to shifts in community social interaction and affect overall participation in community affairs. Because participation in community is a central aspect of fostering local community development, it is important to understand how these processes occur. This study found structural and interactional differences between permanent and seasonal residents. Both factors were stronger predictors of community participation for permanent compared to seasonal residents. This study adds to the literature on newcomers and long-term residents and their structural and interactional differences.

### Implications for Research and Extension

Within the context of rapidly growing, amenity-rich communities, the investigators examined changes in levels of community participation between permanent and seasonal residents. Of particular interest in this study were the ways in which structural and interactional differences were associated with community participation.

Significant structural variables included annual household income, level of education, size of community the respondent lived in the most before age 16, religious affiliation, and the number of years lived in the community. Residents with higher incomes, more education, who had lived mostly in small communities before age 16, had higher levels of community participation than their counterparts. In addition, the longer the individual lived in the community, the more participative the individual was.

Significant interactional variables found in this study included both community attachment/organizational involvement and community satisfaction/social interaction dimensions for permanent residents. Three dimensions of local organizational involvement were important predictors of community participation. Level of involvement in local activities, number of local organizations to which a respondent belonged, and hours participating in local activities are significant factors associated with community participation. Moreover, these dimensions are the strongest predictors of community participation. Residents who are



more involved had more interest in and attachment to their community. Increased levels of interaction in local activities were associated with improved social bonds, which were, in turn, associated with increased levels of community attachment.

This study helps us understand how differences in levels of community attachment/organizational involvement and community satisfaction/social interaction, sociodemographics, and length of residence differentially influence community participation by permanent and seasonal residents. These factors can better predict permanent residents' levels of participation. In contrast, seasonal residents' structural and interactional factors contributed less in predicting community participation. Seasonal residents' structural and interactional characteristics differed from those of permanent residents. These differences were reflected in their levels of community participation. However, overall, the interactional variables contributed more than the structural variables in predicting community participation for these two types of residents.

Although growth may be inevitable, it does not have to affect a community's interaction and participation negatively. Knowing the characteristics of seasonal and permanent active (and non-active) residents can help reduce the negative impacts associated with growth. Such knowledge would facilitate greater numbers of people becoming involved in local decision-making and, as a result, broaden levels of community participation.