

Consuming Places: A Bioregional Comparison of Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyles

By

Lauren Drakopoulos

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science  
Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Geography  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida Saint Petersburg

Major Professor: Rebecca Johns, Ph.D.  
Chris Meindl, Ph.D.  
Alison Ormsby, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
April 26, 2013

Keywords: Sustainability, Consumption, Political Ecology, Everglades, Sonoran  
Desert

Copyright © 2013, Lauren A. Drakopoulos

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents, who instilled in me the importance of hard work and perseverance in the face of adversity. Without them I would not be where I am today. I also dedicate this to my siblings Heidi and Teddy, whose inspiration and consultation have helped me find my path.

I would like to offer special thanks to my partner Kevin for always being there as a sounding board, editor, cheerleader and friend. Thanks also to my dear friends for all your words of encouragement and support and to Aimee for always accommodating my special scheduling needs.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee chair and mentor Dr. Rebecca Johns for her guidance, enthusiasm, encouragement and friendship. For the sake of brevity I will simply say, her role in my professional and personal development has been profound. I would like to offer special thanks to Dr. Chris Meindl for his patience, good humor and expertise, and for always keeping his office door open. I wish to acknowledge Dr. Alison Ormsby for her invaluable feedback and constructive recommendations as well as for her knowledge and assistance with the research on intentional communities.

Words can't express my appreciation and respect for all my research participants and host communities. Without their kindness, openness and trust this research would not have been possible. Special thanks also to all of the organizations and individuals who assisted in recruitment and supplemental interviews.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Abstract .....	ix
Chapter One: Introduction and Review of the Literature.....	1
Voluntary Simplicity .....	2
Intentional Community .....	11
Bioregionalism .....	12
Theoretical Framework .....	13
Chapter Outline.....	15
Chapter Two: Methods .....	17
Case Study .....	17
Study Sites.....	18
Identifying Simplifiers.....	19
Intentional Communities .....	21
Wind Spirit Community.....	22
Earth-N-Us Community .....	23
Conducting Research at the Communities.....	24
Urban Center Residents .....	26
Recruitment.....	26
Data collection.....	29
Data Analysis .....	33
Part I—Sonoran Desert Bioregion .....	35
Chapter Three: Bioregional Ethnography .....	35
Physical Geography.....	36
Climate and Biome.....	36
Geologic Origins.....	41
Flora and Fauna.....	43
Watersheds .....	47
Human Geography .....	50
Indigenous Populations.....	50
European and American Settlement: The Era of Extraction.....	52
Urbanization and the City of Phoenix .....	56
Demographics .....	58

Transportation .....	59
The Urban Core.....	60
Political Climate.....	60
Environmental Issues .....	62
Watershed Management.....	62
Water Conservation Efforts .....	67
Foodsheds .....	69
Summary .....	70
Chapter Four: Results: Sonoran Desert Bioregion .....	73
Urban Center Residents .....	73
Participant Introductions.....	75
Defining Simplicity.....	78
Origins and Motivation .....	80
Simplicity and Education .....	81
Waste Production.....	82
Resource Consumption.....	83
Water .....	86
Energy.....	89
Fuel .....	90
Food Production and Procurement .....	92
Building the Foodshed.....	93
Time and Money, the Limiting Factors .....	97
Community and Culture .....	98
Summary.....	100
Intentional Community .....	104
Community History and Description.....	104
Site Description: Getting the Lay of the Land.....	106
Membership Structure.....	115
Decision-making and Bylaws .....	118
Community Activities.....	119
Resident Responsibilities .....	120
Current Residents: Participant Profiles .....	121
Practicing Voluntary Simplicity .....	126
Living on Less .....	128
The Decline of Society .....	130
The Occupy Movement.....	131
Work for Wage .....	132
Misconceptions.....	133
Convenience, Time and Money.....	133
Living in Community.....	135
Community-Community Relations .....	137
Living Close to the Land.....	138
Climate .....	140
Arts, Healing, and Spirituality .....	140
Summary.....	143

Part II: The Greater Everglades Bioregion.....	147
Chapter Five: Bioregional Ethnography.....	147
Physical Geography.....	147
Climate and Biome.....	147
Geologic Origins.....	152
Fire, Soil and Hydroperiod: The Development and Maintenance of Plant Communities .....	154
Flora and Fauna.....	155
Invasive Species .....	164
Watersheds.....	165
Human Geography .....	168
Indigenous Populations.....	168
European Settlement .....	170
American Settlement.....	171
The Seminole and Miccosukee .....	172
Drainage and Agriculture .....	174
From Drainage to Flood Control.....	176
Watershed Management.....	179
Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.....	181
Urbanization and the City of Miami .....	183
Political and Economic Climate .....	187
Transportation .....	187
Ethnic Diversity .....	188
Immigration.....	189
Miami's Black Community .....	191
Demographics .....	192
Foodshed .....	193
Summary .....	196
Chapter Six: Results: Greater Everglades Bioregion.....	200
Urban Center Residents .....	200
Participant Introductions.....	202
Defining Simplicity.....	206
Origins and Motivation .....	208
Simplicity and Education .....	210
A Culture of Simplicity: The Missing Link .....	211
Resource Consumption.....	214
Fuel .....	214
Energy .....	215
Water.....	216
Waste Production.....	217
Food Production and Procurement. ....	218
Supporting the Foodshed .....	220
Time and Money .....	221

Simplicity, Ethnicity, and White Ethnic Cultures .....	223
Summary.....	224
Intentional Community .....	229
Community History and Description .....	229
Site Description: Getting the Lay of the Land.....	232
Membership Structure.....	244
Decision-making and Bylaws .....	245
Community Activities.....	245
Resident Responsibilities .....	247
Current Residents: Participant Profiles .....	247
Practicing Voluntary Simplicity .....	251
The Occupy Movement .....	257
An Urban Nature .....	259
Living in Community.....	259
Community-Community Relations.....	262
Arts, Healing, and Spirituality .....	265
Summary.....	266
Chapter Seven: Conclusions .....	268
Discussion .....	268
Intentional Communities.....	279
Ethnicity .....	282
Limitations.....	285
Implications.....	285
Literature Cited .....	290
Appendix A: Simplicity Guideline .....	304
Appendix B: Study Summary and Invite .....	306
Appendix C: Simplicity Study Participant Prescreen.....	307
Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol .....	309
Appendix E: Interview Protocol.....	311
Appendix F: The Co-Creators Agreements .....	313

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Organizations Contacted for Recruitment.....	28
Table 2: Summary of Research Questions and Methods of Investigation .....	33
Table 3: Fruit and Nut Trees and Other Plant Species Present at Wind Spirit Community .....	112
Table 4: Resident Classifications at Wind Spirit Community .....	116
Table 5: Residency Classification of Wind Spirit Community Participants .....	121
Table 6: Fruit Trees, Vegetables and Livestock Present at Earth-N-Us .....	242



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Summary of research methods and case studies with sample sizes .....	32
Figure 2: Biological Communities of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion and surrounding areas.....	37
Figure 3: Map of the outline of the Sonoran Desert biome showing average annual rainfall amounts and subregion boundaries .....	39
Figure 4: Lower Colorado River Valley with an ocotillo in the foreground.....	40
Figure 5: Saguaros in the Arizona Uplands region outside of Tucson, Arizona .....	41
Figure 6: Aloe ferox .....	44
Figure 7: Brittlebush ( <i>Encelia farinose</i> ).....	45
Figure 8: Arizona’s watersheds and rivers.....	48
Figure 9: Central Arizona Project (CAP): The canal and area it serves .....	65
Figure 10: Flowchart Depicting Potential Alternatives to Traditional Resource Consumption.....	85
Figure 11: Hydroponic edible garden grown supported by an aquaponics system fed by water from a tilapia pond (shown in Figure 12) .....	87
Figure 12: Hot tub converted to tilapia aquaculture pond by participant Shereen. Part of an aquaponics system in which water and excrement is filtered out and used to grow food and herbs (shown in Figure 11) .....	87
Figure 13: “Bootleg livestock” raised by participant Shereen at her urban home .....	92
Figure 14: Roosevelt Grow House community garden .....	96

Figure 15: Harvest for Humanity founder Denise Philips standing in front of row crops on the farm .....	97
Figure 16: Single occupancy dome house at Wind Spirit Community .....	108
Figure 17: Communal kitchen at Wind Spirit Community. Dining area shown center, additional seating area with wood burning stove in the foreground, food preparation area in the background .....	109
Figure 18: Main garden at Wind Spirit Community .....	113
Figure 19: Example of Spiritual statuary and objects found at Wind Spirit Community.....	141
Figure 20: Map of the Greater Everglades Bioregion natural and manmade features .....	148
Figure 21: Sawgrass marsh in Taylor Slough with tree islands in the background .....	156
Figure 22: Pine rocklands (pinelands) in Everglades National Park.....	158
Figure 23: Hardwood hammock in Everglades National Park .....	159
Figure 24: American Alligator ( <i>Alligator mississippiensis</i> ) on top of alligator nest .....	161
Figure 25: Florida Panther ( <i>Puma concolor coryi</i> ) .....	162
Figure 26: Wood stork ( <i>Mycteria americana</i> ).....	163
Figure 27: Brazilian Pepper ( <i>Schinus terebinthifolius</i> ).....	165
Figure 28: Old World Climbing Fern ( <i>Lygodium microphyllum</i> ) .....	165
Figure 29: Watersheds of the Greater Everglades Bioregion .....	166
Figure 30: Participant teaching a gardening workshop at a local farmer' market.....	203
Figure 31: South Miami farmer's market.....	220
Figure 32: Information booth at Souther Miami Farmer's market.....	221
Figure 33: Rowboat and sign at entrance to Earth-N-Us community.....	233

Figure 34: Animal enclosures at Earth-N-U's farm .....	235
Figure 35: Earth-N-U's founder Randy holding a tray from one of the farm hives.....	236
Figure 36: Tree house apartments at Earth-N-U's farm .....	238
Figure 37: Historic Volunteer Town at Earth-N-U's farm with resident tent in background .....	238
Figure 38: Communal outdoor shower "No Pecan Inn" located in common visitor area at Earth-N-U's farm.....	239
Figure 39: Outdoor communal kitchen by Volunteer Town at Earth-N-U's farm.....	240
Figure 40: Main garden at Earth-N-U's farm.....	241

## **Abstract**

Many have argued that in the developed world, consumption has reached unsustainable levels, precipitating social, economic, and environmental decline. Voluntary simplicity is an anti-consumption lifestyle in which practitioners are seeking out an authentic connection to the external world with fulfillment garnered from relationships rather than through the accumulation of material goods. Under the framework of political ecology, this research examined how bioregional characteristics impacted the way in which simplifiers think about and practice simplicity. Using focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation, the author did a bioregional comparison of voluntary simplifiers living in the Greater Everglades Bioregion and the Sonoran Desert Bioregion. Within each bioregion, a comparison was also made between adherents residing in an intentional community setting and individuals living non-communally. Bioregional profiles were developed to describe the historic, social, political and geographic landscapes present in each region. Applying a grounded theory approach, participant responses were analyzed within the framework of these profiles. Simplifiers shared some commonalities in their practices and motivations, regardless of bioregion or community setting. Overwhelmingly, participants adopted voluntary simplicity practices out of a sense of moral obligation to improve social and environmental conditions. Simplifiers living non-

communally prioritized the environmental impacts of their lifestyle whereas communal simplifiers foregrounded social issues such as equality and justice, communication, and cooperation. For each study group, practices depended on localized factors such as biophysical characteristics, infrastructure, and available technologies. The social and political cultures of the bioregion were more significant in shaping how simplifiers adapted to these features.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction and Review of the Literature

see the whole thing is a world of rucksack wanderers dharma bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oil and deodorants, and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway. All of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume

Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*

Many have argued that in the developed world, consumption has reached unsustainable levels, precipitating social, economic, and environmental decline (Arrow et al., 2004; Booth, 2004; Daly, 1996; Myers 1997). In an effort to alter this trajectory, there has been a call to action for policy-makers to reconfigure the economic and political systems that perpetuate current consumptive patterns (UNCED, 1992). Increasingly, where national policy has failed to embrace such changes, individuals have begun searching out ways to modify their consumptive behaviors in an effort to become better global and ecological citizens (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Booth, 2004; Seyfang, 2005). Voluntary simplicity is one such adaptation; an anti-consumption lifestyle in which one decouples quality of life from the accumulation of goods. My research sought to understand the influence of place on voluntary simplicity lifestyles, with place operationalized as bioregion. Bioregionalism is a way of reorienting ourselves with our environments by

constructing boundaries around the biophysical and cultural patterns present on the landscape (Aberley, 1999, Whitehead, 2007). Voluntary simplicity presupposes individuals can meet their needs by consuming far less than current economic systems proscribe and can do so in a socially and environmentally benign way. Therefore, I have chosen the scale of bioregion because, in the words of bioregionalist writer Doug Aberley (1999), “the bioregion... offers a scale of decentralization best able to support the achievement of cultural and ecological sustainability” (p. 37). Under the framework of political ecology, this research examined how bioregional characteristics impacted the way in which simplifiers think about and practice simplicity. Using focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation, I conducted a comparison of voluntary simplifiers living in the Greater Everglades Bioregion and the Sonoran Desert Bioregion. Within each bioregion, a comparison was also made between simplifiers residing in an intentional community setting and those living non-communally.

### **Voluntary Simplicity**

Voluntary simplicity is manifested in a multitude of ways and for a variety of reasons. Principally, adopting simplicity implies reevaluating one’s relationship to material goods. Simplifiers consume for utility rather than status, aim for quality over quantity, and weigh the costs and benefits of their consumptive choices (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Elgin & Mitchell, 1977; Oates et al., 2008; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Frequently, this is motivated by concern for environmental health as well as social justice and practitioners commonly engage in other

activities or behaviors associated with environmental stewardship and sustainability (Elgin, 1993; Johns, 2009, Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Other's simplicity choices are driven by the hope for financial solvency, being able to work less, freeing up more time for family and leisure (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Central to the movement is the role of the individual in determining how they would like to simplify their lives and to what degree (Andrews, 1997). Examples of simplicity practices include: purchasing organically grown, locally produced, or fairly traded food stuffs; monitoring resource use by driving less and recycling; and reducing the number of 'new' items one acquires by either buying less, purchasing used or second-hand goods or self provisioning (Johns, 2009; Leonard-Barton, 1981; Shaw & Moraes, 2009). Though predominantly white and middle class, simplicity participants have varied professional, religious and educational backgrounds (Elgin, 1993; Grigsby, 2004; Johns, 2009).

Simplifiers are seeking out an authentic connection to the external world (Elgin, 1993; Zvestoski, 2002). They seek fulfillment from relationships rather than through the accumulation of material goods (Eglin, 1993; Etzioni, 1998). Richard Gregg (1936) was the first to employ the phrase in his paper "The value of voluntary simplicity." Gregg (1936) contended that in attempting to lead a life of purpose, individuals must eliminate those things that make their lives unnecessarily complicated.

In contrast, high consumption lifestyles assume satisfaction is derived from the accumulation of goods as well as the status associated with those goods (Milbrath, 1993). Material goods are obtained to meet perceived "needs,"



which seem to increase exponentially with the proliferation of consumer goods available on the market (Booth, 2004). Goods are sought out not only for their newness and “novelty” (Booth, 2004, p. 19), they also communicate to the outside world that we, as individuals, are ‘worth’ something by signifying wealth and earning potential (Booth, 2004; Etzioni, 1998; Schor, 1998; Velben, 1899). Self-worth is then derived from material displays of wealth rather than from one’s contribution to the betterment of society (Velben, 1899). Writing over a century ago, Thorsten Veblen (1899) proposed that “conspicuous consumption” is integral to achieving status in society, particularly with industrialization and the movement of populations from rural to urban environments. In close-knit rural communities, individuals are quite familiar with the status and incomes of neighbors and friends. In an urban environment, Veblen (1899) maintains, these strong community connections are lacking, requiring one to find other ways of communicating their income and carving out their social positions—hence material displays of wealth. Consumers effectively become trapped in a web of “competitive ostentation;” everyone wants to keep up with the Joneses (Gregg, 1936, Chapter IV. Economic Reasons for Simplicity).

But social referent groups have changed. In her book *The Overspent American*, Juliet Schor (1998) posits that in recent decades, television and advertising have revolutionized competitive consumption by “stretching out our reference groups vertically” (p. 5). Individuals are no longer competing with peers among similar income brackets, but instead are comparing themselves to earners bringing in two, three and even four times their salary. The result has

been a “ratcheting up of standards” (Schor, 1998, p.5) for what constitutes ‘the good life.’ Spending has outpaced wage increases and consumer satisfaction is short-lived given the rate at which new technologies render one’s most recently acquired novelty obsolete (Schor, 1998).

Voluntary simplicity challenges this paradigm. Material goods are a means to an end, not the end itself. Products may facilitate existence in so far as they are useful but too many goods not only physically clutter one’s life (Gregg, 1936; Elgin, 1993, 2010) but also require life energy, in the form of waged works hours, in order to obtain them (Robin, 2008; Schor, 1998). Further, because in a high-consumption system one’s hours are spent working for wages so that more goods may be accumulated, there is less time available for unwaged house work such as cooking or provisioning household goods oneself (e.g. growing food, repairing items to extend their life). Therefore these items and services traditionally provisioned within the home must to be outsourced at a cost, a phenomena Heyman (2005, p. 118) terms “consumer proletarianization”.

Adopting simplicity allows one to get off the “treadmill” of work, consume, work, consume. Simplicity advocates argue that by reducing material consumption to satisfy “wants,” one can work less, freeing up more time to provision for “needs.” Not only does this approach save money (pecuniary life energy) on outsourcing, it fosters self-reliance (Elgin, 1993; Mather, 2010; Merkel, 2003; Robin, 2008; Schor, 1998). Simplifiers derive self-worth not from accumulation but from moral and ethical identities, identities that are created and perpetuated through simplicity practices (Sandlin & Walther, 2009). Further,

because individuals engage in simplicity in order to affect social and environmental change through a form of “consumer resistance,” their consumptive, or anti-consumptive, choices transcend to politicized acts, although at the risk of producing “moral commodities” (Bryant & Goodman, 2004, p. 350; see also Nelson, Rademacher & Paek; 2007).

In the last two decades, voluntary simplicity has gained currency as a social movement. In the early 1990s, popular books such as *Your Money or Your Life*, and *Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life* brought voluntary simplicity to wider audiences. Aimed at overworked and financially strained Americans, these books functioned as simplicity guides, awakening readers to the idea of prioritizing quality of life as a function of time spent finding meaning and fulfillment over earning and spending. Similarly, PBS has aired two documentaries, *Affluenza* and *Escape from Affluenza*, which sought to highlight the problems that have risen out of Western, high consumption lifestyles and propose alternatives, such as voluntary simplicity. In more recent years, books such as Merkel’s (2003) *Radical Simplicity* have functioned in much the same way. Duane Elgin’s (1993) *Voluntary Simplicity* introduces voluntary simplicity to readers, making its case by sharing stories of simplifiers all over the nation. In it, Elgin (1993) discusses the responses he obtained from a simplicity survey published in a 1977 edition of *Co-Evolution Quarterly*. Based on 420 voluntary mail-in responses, Elgin determined that simplifiers tended to be white, of middle income, highly educated, and that women in the movement outnumbered men two-to-one (Elgin, 1993; 1996). Other research has found similar demographic

trends (Huneke, 2005; Johns, 2009; Librova, 1999). Further, Elgin (1993) maintains that because a majority of his respondents were living in an urban setting, it “indicates this is not a predominantly ‘back-to-the-land’ movement,” (p. 62). I contend that this last finding makes a case for the study of these practices as they pertain to the urban environment.

Core scholarly work on the voluntary simplicity movement includes Leonard-Barton (1981), Etzioni (1998) and Grigsby (2004). In her research on voluntary simplicity lifestyles and energy conservation, Leonard-Barton (1981) developed a voluntary simplicity scale to measure tendency towards simplicity lifestyles based on actual behaviors. The scale was based on simplicity literature as well as reported behaviors for self-proclaimed simplifiers and outlines a number of activities identified as voluntary simplicity practices. As will be outlined in the following chapter, I’ve adapted this scale to my research as a guideline for recruitment and interview materials. Applying this scale to measure degrees of simplification, Leonard-Barton (1981) identified three types of simplifiers based on motivation and participation in the movement: conservers, crusaders and conformists. Conservers are those for whom “conservation is a way of life,” due to upbringing that centered on frugality out of necessity (Leonard-Barton, 1981, p. 249). Crusaders have a similarly strong ethic but their motivation is not one of frugality but of social consciousness. Conformists are less clear about motivations and less dutiful in their practices. Their choice to simplify may be out of guilt over wealth or from the influence of neighbors and friends (Leonard-Barton, 1981).

One of the most widely referenced works in the literature, Etzioni's (1998) commentary on voluntary simplifiers builds on the work of Leonard-Barton, Elgin and Schor. Etzioni's work on simplifiers, more theory than empirical study, assesses the future of voluntary simplicity as a social movement. This is framed against the backdrop of a broader discussion theorizing simplicity's roots in capitalist society. Further, Etzioni (1998) also organizes simplifiers into three categories based on degree and dedication to simplicity rather than motivation alone. According to his ranking, "downshiffters" are the most moderate of simplifiers opting for more visual displays of statement "conspicuous non-consumption," for example wearing used or shabby clothing but accessorizing with an expensive watch (Etzioni, 1998, p. 633). These displays emphasize the 'voluntary' aspect of ones simplicity. "Strong simplifiers" are those that have given up high-paying jobs and opted to reduce spending (Etzioni, 1998, p. 622). The third category, "holistic simplifiers" refers to voluntary simplifiers who embrace simplicity in all aspects of their lives; all actions are in accordance with their simplicity beliefs (Etzioni, 1998, p. 626). Etzioni's (1998) outlook is positive; he asserts that, should simplicity take hold with the larger population, the social and environmental benefits will be numerous.

Grigsby's (2005) book, *Buying Time and Getting By*, presents an in-depth look at the everyday lives of simplifiers. Using a qualitative research approach, Grigsby conducted participant observations at simplicity circles and workshops, and followed this research with 14 in-depth interviews. Her work also encompasses a textual analysis of key movement literature. Grigsby sought to do

more than just gain insight into the practices and motivations of voluntary simplifiers. Her work frames simplifiers' involvement in the movement and accompanying identity creation within broader themes of race, class and gender and their implications for power distribution (Grigsby, 2005).

Academically, voluntary simplicity has been a significant topic of study in several fields including marketing research, psychology and sociology. Several studies have sought to develop a profile of simplifiers, their motivations and practices (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Craig-lee & Hill, 2002; Johns, 2009; Johnston & Burton, 2003), and their consumption preferences (Huneke, 2005; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; McDonald et al., 2006). Oates et al. (2008) explored how and what kinds of information voluntary simplifiers employ when making consumptive decisions. Other research has delved into the social and psychological processes underlying simplicity (Shaw and Newholm 2002; Zavestoski, 2002) particularly through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Etzioni, 1998; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Zavestoski, 2002). Sociological research includes Sandlin and Walther's (2009) study into the role of simplicity practices for ethical identity creation as well as Grigsby's (2005), which was previously discussed.

Although simplicity research has covered a broad range of topics, no research has yet explored the *relationship* between simplicity practices and place. Leonard-Barton's (1981) work alludes to potential differences in how simplicity practices are manifested throughout the nation. Specifically addressing the application of the simplicity scale, Leonard-Barton recommends "further

refinement of the index, including tests for the applicability of items to different geographic locations” (1981, p. 250). In their consumer behavior research Shama and Wisenblit (1984) and Shama (1988) adopted Leonard-Barton’s scale to assess simplicity values in relation to behaviors, motivations and level of adoption. These results were compared for two (Shama & Wisenblit, 1984) and three (Shama, 1988) U.S. cities respectively. In both studies, the scale was used to create a survey incorporating closed-ended questions. Survey responses underwent statistical analysis, and responses indicated differences between cities in the practices in which simplifiers chose to engage (Shama, 1988; Shama & Wisenblit, 1984). Shama (1988) explains these results by suggesting that practices were adopted based on the relative ease with which one could do so in a given city, e.g. it may be easier to bicycle to work than to recycle if one’s city does not offer curbside recycling; an interesting hypothesis but lacking empirical evidence.

These studies illustrate that the field of geography is not only underrepresented in the simplicity literature, but that it offers a valuable theoretical toolkit for understanding how and why simplifiers engage in these practices. Despite early research (Leonard-Barton, 1981; Shama, 1988; Shama & Wisenblit, 1984) indicating that simplicity practices are in fact specific to locale, no other work has sought to explore the relationship between place and anti-consumption practices.

## **Intentional Community**

This research seeks to understand the role of place in forming and implementing simplicity practices. Community is considered both as a scale of place where infrastructure practices influence simplicity in a material way, and as source of social support, which Elgin (1993) cites as an important component for the success of individual transitions to simpler living. Kozeny (1996, para 3) defines an intentional community as “a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values.” When shared ideology centers on living simply, the “power of support and example” in helping manifest and perpetuate simplicity lifestyles is “much greater than rational assent or individual resolve” alone (Claxton, 1994, p. 77). In addition to creating an environment that fosters support for members’ shared beliefs and values, community encourages and reinforces virtuous and idealized behaviors (Brown 2002); a significant point when one is developing an ethical and moral identity (Sandlin & Walther, 2009).

Intentional communities are as varied as the possibilities for human goals and values. Origins may be spiritual or secular, but in either instance, communities are often a response to perceived failings in the social, economic and political order of society (Kozeny, 1996). Communities can vary widely in their approaches to decision-making, division of labor and group finances (Christian, 2003). Whether urban or rural, residences may take several forms such as a single shared dwelling or a grouping of homes as in the instances of ecovillages (Christian, 2003; Jackson, 2004) and cohousing arrangements



(Williams, 2008). Further, many have adopted methods for the on-site provisioning of food, child rearing and education, and waste disposal (Kozeny 2000).

An ecovillage is an intentional community based on sustainability and the ecological integration of human settlements with their natural environment (Christian, 2003). The ecovillage movement is part of a larger anti-globalization movement and proponents reject the dominant neo-liberal economic paradigm (Jackson, 2004). In rejecting capitalist consumer values, ecovillages seek to “synthesize social, environmental and spiritual concerns through the creation of intentional community” (Kirby, 2003, p. 324).

### **Bioregionalism**

In response to the growing environmental concerns of the 1970s, early bioregionalist writers Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann put forth a call for “reinhabitation” by “learning to live-in-place” (1977, p. 399). They were advocating for a bioregional approach to understanding and interacting with our natural environments. Bioregions are defined by the overlap of unique ecosystems and human systems that coalesce to give a locale its ‘place-ness’ and create a “geographic terrain and a terrain of consciousness... a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place” (Berg & Dasmann, 1977, p. 399). Bioregionalists contend, embracing the bioregion as the geographic frame of reference for social, economic and political activities ensures the long-term viability of those activities and the ecological systems on

which they rely (Aberley, 1999; Berg & Dasmann, 1977; Sale, 1991; see also Whitehead, 2007). According to the bioregional worldview, these components are inseparable and one cannot ignore the role human activity plays in developing and defining the bioregion, nor how the biophysical reality of the bioregion has brought about cultural adaptations (Aberley 1999). Given that bioregional borders are rarely “hard and fast,” (Lipschutz, 1999, p. 103) bioregionalists have employed such conceptual models as watershed (Snyder, 1993 see also Aberley, 1999; Sale, 1991) foodshed (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson & Stevenson, 1996; see also Bennett, 1997) and wasteshed (McGinnis, 1998) to establish bioregional boundaries.

Bioregionalism provides an alternative to traditional environmental legislative strategies. A bioregional approach to environmental governance would consider local histories of resource use and development and the social and cultural institutions that gave rise to and perpetuate these patterns (Flores, 1999). The current system, which governs under political boundaries that are arbitrarily determined, is inadequate to cope with ecosystems that cross state, and national lines. As an alternative to current resource management techniques, a bioregional model would result in more dynamic management solutions tailored to serve the unique needs of a given locale (Lipschutz 1999).

### **Theoretical Framework**

I have chosen to bring these concepts together under the framework of political ecology because political ecology considers not only the role of the consumer but also the factors affecting consumptive choices. This framework

assumes that local decisions regarding resource consumption are influenced at multiple spatial, cultural and temporal scales (Walker 1998). As illustrated by Josiah Heyman's work in the Sonora border town of Agua Prieta, political ecology "demonstrates consumption's interrelationships with other social, cultural and geographic changes as well as changes in the biophysical environment" (Heyman, 2005, p. 123). Heyman's (2005) research demonstrates that:

consumption practices are shaped by the technologies and practices available in particular historical and social contexts and that we cannot expect people to disengage from their existing ecological practices... unless some other technology or mode of activity becomes available to them. (p. 119)

I assert that Heyman's (2005) findings will also hold true for anti-consumption behaviors. Building on this work, I would further contend that environmental knowledge also plays a role in shaping consumption and anti-consumption behaviors.

Environmental historian William Cronon (1993) asserts that human history must be considered within its natural context. I would argue the same rule applies to human activities occurring in the present. Although Cronon (1993) cautions against reverting to environmental, or cultural, determinism, he maintains that human and natural systems each contribute to and influence the development of the other. Moreover, both entities are constantly changing. Perhaps at varying rates and differing scales but still, "neither nature nor culture is static"(Cronon, 1993, p. 13). Given these points, he contends that "environmental knowledge is culturally constructed and historically contingent"

(Cronon, 1993, p. 14). Applying this constructivist approach to bioregionalism, we can conclude that places are best understood at the confluence of the cultural, biophysical and temporal landscapes on which they are built. And where these landscapes meet, as in the case of the confluence of several water bodies, a dynamic terrain unfolds that equates to more than the sum of its parts. I adopt this line of reasoning to propose that if environmental knowledge is specific to a particular locale at a given point in time, and if that knowledge informs human/environment interactions (e.g. consumption), then anti-consumption will also be place-based. In the words of Doreen Massey, “geography matters” (Massey, 1984).

### **Chapter Outline**

In the following chapters I will present my research, beginning first with a discussion of the methods and analysis used for this inquiry in Chapter 2. The remaining text is separated into two parts. Part I is a discussion of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion in Chapters 3 and 4, Part II presents data from the Greater Everglades Bioregion in Chapters 5 and 6. A profile was developed for each of the bioregions. These profiles illustrate the current biophysical, cultural and political systems that together make up the unique bioregion. The bioregional profiles also provide a road map of how these systems have evolved over time.

Chapters 3 and 5 detail the bioregional profiles of the Sonoran Desert and Greater Everglades Bioregions respectively. Chapters 4 and 6 contain the case studies themselves. As previously discussed, two case studies were conducted

in each bioregion. Simplicity residents living in an intentional community in the region were compared to residents living non-communally in an urban center. The data has been organized by bioregion and case study. Chapter 4 begins with a glimpse into the lives of the urban center simplifiers of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, followed by the case study of community simplifiers in the same region. Chapter 6 follows this same outline, tackling the Greater Everglades Bioregion case studies. In Chapter 7, I summarize my findings and provide a comparison of case studies as well as an outline of underlining themes. Implications of the research as well as the limitations of the study are also addressed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Methods**

#### **Case Study**

This research utilized a case study approach, applying a combination of qualitative research methods derived from the fields of anthropology, sociology and geography. I determined this to be the most appropriate methodological approach for a number of reasons. First, the goal of the research is to understand how bioregion impacts simplicity, a multifaceted and complex subject. Second, I am interested in the contemporary manifestation of simplicity working under the premise that the phenomena is deeply embedded within its social, cultural and environmental contexts. These questions were addressed through the triangulation of multiple sources of data obtained through such qualitative research methods as focus groups, in-depth structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation, and document research (Yin 2003).

Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain insight into how participants understand and experience the particular subject under study. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher can also better understand how the study phenomenon is impacted by other factors that defy quantitative measurement, for example cultural and social circumstances. The data

accumulated through qualitative methods can be used to give a rich description of the study topic from the participants' perspective, often using her or his own words (Trochim, 2005).

## **Study Sites**

The study compared simplicity practitioners in two bioregions: the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, encompassing parts of Arizona, California, and Mexico, and the Greater Everglades bioregion found in South Florida. The literature on each of the bioregions was synthesized to create a profile that describes the geographic landscapes present in each region as well as the historical process that have shaped them. By looking at the way simplicity is practiced in different regions, I was able to compare simplifiers' experiences of place as it relates to simplicity. This allowed me gain deeper insight into what, if any, bioregional characteristics have the greatest influence on how they think about and practice simple living. Yin (2003) notes that comparing multiple cases can cover broader and more complex issues resulting in more robust findings than just examining a single case.

Two samples were targeted in each of these regions: 1) individual voluntary simplicity practitioners that are urban center residents and 2) simplicity practitioners that are residents of a simple living intentional community within each region. The purpose of this was to determine if and how 'institutionalized' simplicity practice (manifested through community focus, infrastructure and social networks) impacts a practitioner's experience of place as it relates to their

practice. In other words: do communal and non-communal simplicity practitioners experience the same place differently and how do bioregional characteristics of significance to simplicity practice vary between these two settings? For the purposes of this research, 'urban center resident' is defined as simplifiers living within the bounds of the metropolitan area researched in each bioregion. The label 'individual simplicity practitioner' implies that they were not living in an intentional community, although they could be living in a home with other unrelated adult residents.

### **Identifying Simplifiers**

Preliminary research located participants in the chosen bioregions practicing "voluntary simplicity", defined earlier in the introduction to this paper. A search for simplicity interest groups was conducted through the Internet and by contacting organizations that are known to facilitate simplicity discussion groups in other locales (the Unitarian Universalist Church, for example). While no group specifically practicing or advocating for Voluntary Simplicity (capital 'VS') was identified in either region, many groups were found that not only embraced the tenants of voluntary simplicity (little vs) in their practices but also used the discourse of the movement throughout their websites and literature. It is my belief that these groups represent modern incarnations of the simplicity movement.

A poignant example would be the recent advent of the permaculture movement. Permaculture, the word being a hybrid of the words 'permanent' and 'agriculture', is a design system used to facilitate sustainable living on both



individual and community levels. Central to the ethics and principles that guide permaculture design is a belief in caring for the earth and for other beings. Applying the approach of permaculture, waste is eliminated and interactive diversity forms the basis of a sustainable system in which humans are integrated with their natural environment (Holmgren, 2002).

In the most recent edition of his seminal work, *Voluntary Simplicity: Towards a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*, Elgin (2010) acknowledges that since an awareness of the need for ecological sustainability has been spreading, there are a number of different ways to describe what he calls “a leaderless revolution... a grassroots movement with many names” (2010, p. 16). He goes on to say that “there is no special virtue to the phrase ‘voluntary simplicity’” (Elgin, 2010, p. 16) and proceeds to list 10 common-use phrases that he deems suitable alternatives to the title ‘voluntary simplicity’. The phrases Elgin suggests are as follows: Green lifeways, Earth-friendly living, Soulful living, Simple living, Sustainable lifestyles, Living lightly, Compassionate lifeways, Conscious simplicity, Earth-conscious living, Simple prosperity (2010, p. 17). The bottom-line is that no matter the name, these alternative lifestyles are unified by a concern for living sustainably, in harmony with other beings (Elgin 2010).

I adopted Elgin’s line of reasoning and, applying the alternative phrases he uses to denote a voluntary simplicity lifestyle, targeted participants engaged in ‘sustainable lifestyle choices’. I operationalized this phrase to mean that in making ‘sustainable lifestyle choices’, prospective participants should be actively incorporating choices that centered on ‘living simply’ and ‘reducing consumption’.

To further support this approach, I developed a list of behaviors and activities using Elgin's (2010) research, the simplicity scale outlined by Leonard-Barton (1981), and permaculture principles (Holmgren, 2002). These behaviors and activities are indicative of voluntary simplicity philosophy (Appendix A). This list served as a guideline so that I could anticipate the kinds of activities in which participants might be engaging as they practice "sustainable lifestyle choices." I break from Leonard-Barton's (1981) application of the scale insofar as her research used the scale to structure a survey with close-ended questions, whereas I modeled open-ended interview questions after scale behaviors, therefore allowing participants to discuss personal behaviors not accounted for on the scale. Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) questioned the comprehensiveness of Leonard-Barton's scale, suggesting it was biased towards environmentally motivated simplicity practices. Examples of other motivations might include a desire to reduce spending or increase leisure time. I feel my adaptation has compensated for any potential bias.

### **Intentional Communities**

The intentional communities were found through the web version of the Communities Directory, a project of the Fellowship for Intentional Communities. I began looking for communities in each bioregion using an advanced search by state of interest (Arizona and Florida) and key word. After my initial search using the search terms 'voluntary simplicity' turned up no results, I conducted a second search using the key word 'permaculture'. I then began identifying potential study communities from the results by reviewing the community page listing in the

directory, a description of the community posted by a community representative, looking for language that employed Eglin's phrases as previously outlined. Communities were then contacted via email with a brief description of the research project and a request for permission to research. The communities chosen for the project were Wind Spirit, which is located near Globe, AZ and Earth-N-Us Farm in Miami, FL.

**Wind Spirit Community.** Wind Spirit has been established for over 14 years. Located on 16 acres in rural Arizona, Wind Spirit is a registered Arizona non-profit focused on organic food production through the application of permaculture principles and living simply, sustainably and in harmony with the land (<http://www.windspiritcommunity.org>). Wind Spirit is located between Phoenix and Tucson, AZ. The population of both communities varies seasonally. At the time of research, there were 7 full-time residents (plus 1 child) and 3 temporary residents at Wind Spirit. One of the temporary residents had a permanent dwelling on site where he lived on alternating weekends. Another was traveling the U.S. and made arrangements to stay at the community for 1 week. The third was an intern who had signed on to work at Wind Spirit through the WWOOF program (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, <http://www.woof.org/>) This resident arrived near the end of my visit and would be staying for several months. There are also community 'friends' who participate in community affairs from time to time but are not residents of the community. These individuals range from residents' significant others to neighbors and friends. In addition, during research at Wind Spirit, the community conducted a

yoga retreat and there were an additional 7 people attending this retreat and camping at the community. Retreat attendees were not included in the sample.

**Earth-N-Us Community.** Earth-N-Us is a 2-acre inner city farm located in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Miami, FL. The land has been cultivated for over 30 years but development as an intentional community was fairly recent. Earth-N-Us incorporates permaculture design and principles in their approach and provides a number of sustainable living educational workshops to the community (<http://www.earthnusfarm.org/>).

Earth-N-Us had a somewhat more unique residency circumstance. Residents at Earth-N-Us living on the area fenced off and viewed as the 'farm proper' fell into one of two categories: tent city residents and renters. Tent city residents were made up of travelers, WWOOFers, and permanent residents. Individuals choosing to occupy the tent city worked in exchange for boarding expenses and lived in tents or temporary structures. Renters paid money for rent and resided in permanent structures found throughout the property.

Given that Earth-N-Us was still in the early stages of development as a formalized intentional community, the line between 'community residents' living at the community with intentional shared purpose and those just choosing to live on the community grounds was not always clearly delineated. This is further complicated by the fact that the property owner possesses a total of 54 rental properties in the immediate area. Many of the residents of these properties participate in activities on the farm proper or use resources on the property such

as the tool shed or laundry facility. From what I could determine, there were 8-10 permanent community residents (2 additional children) and 5 additional renters on the farm proper. During the time of research, there were two additional temporary residents that joined the farm after I arrived. Several of the permanent residents were not on site due to their participation in the local faction of the Occupy Movement.

**Conducting research at the communities.** Participant observation proved a useful method of data collection while conducting fieldwork. Living with participants and bearing witness to the daily flow of life allowed me to gain insight into the unique manifestation of simplicity in each of these communities. In addition, I found that many residents, though happy to speak informally, were less eager to participate in formal structured interviews. Therefore, participant observation provided an excellent backdrop to the other methods I employed insofar as it allowed me to gain access to less willing participants, to build rapport with greater ease, and by improving comprehension of the data collected by other means (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002, p. 93). That is to say, the direct observation of participants in their natural environment was essential when asking them to discuss their everyday lives because key components or activities may have intentionally or unintentionally been left out (Creswell, 1998; Trochim, 2005).

I lived in each community for 7 days; holding focus groups and structured in-depth interviews with community members, engaging in participant observation, and documenting the experience through field notes and

photographs. I conducted fieldwork at Earth-N-U's in October of 2011. During this time I camped in the tent city with other residents. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 community members, including both temporary and permanent residents. A focus group was held on-site with 4 community members. Informal, unstructured interviews and conversations also took place with residents who did not want to participate in a structured in-depth interview.

In November of 2011 I lived at Wind Spirit. I camped 6 of 7 nights, staying my final evening in one of the small octagonal dwellings that most permanent residents use as a personal domicile. A focus group was held on-site with a combination of permanent and temporary residents as well as one community friend. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three residents. Unstructured interviews were conducted with several other residents.

A large part of my time while conducting fieldwork was spent taking part in community activities such as gardening and grounds maintenance, livestock care, group meal preparation and communal meal sharing, community meetings and other community events. I also engaged in other special events with community members such as Sunday volleyball and Miami's Critical Mass at Earth-N-U's and the yoga retreat held at Wind Spirit. Data collected through participant observation was documented through detailed field notes and photographs. Maps and lists of community infrastructure such as equipment, livestock and facilities, were recorded by hand in my free time while exploring the sites. I also kept typed field notes that I recorded from once to several times a day. These notes included summaries of the day's events or of informal

conversations and unstructured interviews with residents. Preliminary analyses and impressions were recorded in a separate set of typed notes. I also kept a record of all personal correspondence that included information about my experiences while conducting fieldwork. According to Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) the activities of participant observation and the written record of these experiences (field notes, journals and other documentation) make up the core of ethnographic research.

Print and online resources were also used to garner information about each community. Both communities have self-published websites and in the case of Earth-N-U's there were also several news stories written about community activities. Materials produced by community members including meeting notes, guidelines, and bulletin board postings were also reviewed.

### **Urban Center Residents**

The second sample in each bioregion was individual simplicity practitioners living in or near a prominent urban center. In the Sonoran Desert Bioregion the urban center was Phoenix, AZ, and in the Everglades Bioregion I sampled simplifiers living in Miami, FL.

**Recruitment.** Individuals living in a non-communal setting constituted a purposive sample that incorporated snowball sampling (Bernard, 2006). Recruitment efforts were targeted around the urban centers of Phoenix, Arizona in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion and Miami, Florida in the Greater Everglades Bioregion. Through an Internet search, key contacts and organizations in the

bioregions of interest were identified and contacted via email and phone. Table 1 provides a list of organizations and groups that were contacted. Organizations and individuals identified as possible recruitment sources were provided with an explanation of the research and the recruitment advertisement (Appendix B). They were asked to distribute, or to allow the distribution of, the recruitment advertisement to personal contacts or through organizational listservs, newsletters, discussion forums or other social networking outlets. I focused recruitment efforts on the social media platforms of Meetup.com and Facebook.com. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of South Florida approved the recruitment advertisement prior to the start of research.



Table 1

*Organizations Contacted for Recruitment*

**Miami, Florida**

All Locally Grown Produce LLC	I.D.E.A.S. For Miami
Bee Heaven Farm	Little Haiti Community Garden
Bike Miami	Little River Market Garden
Cinema Green	Miami and the Beaches Environmental Film Festival
Citizens for a Better South Florida	Miami Area Permaculturists
Dream in Green	Miami Greentech
Earth Ethics Institute	MOMM Organization
Earthsavve Miami	Operation Green Leaves
ECOMB	Rethink Reuse
Edible South Florida	Slow Food Miami
Environmental Education Provider	South Miami Farmers Market
Farm to Kitchen Miami	South Florida Eco Movie Group
FIU GoGreen	Student Groups-FIU Office of Sustainability
Friends of the Everglades	Students for Environmental Action
Go Green Kids	Treemendous Miami
Green U:University of Miami	Urban Environmental League
Greener Miami	Veganlicious Miami

**Phoenix, Arizona**

2012 Survivalists	Phoenix Backyard Poultry
Arizona Agriscapers	Phoenix Community Alliance
Arizona Native Plant Society	Phoenix Green Chamber of Commerce
ASU Community Engagement	Phoenix Parks and Conservation Foundation
ASU School of Sustainability	Phoenix Public Market
AZ Solar Center Group	Phoenix Sustainability
AZGreen Magazine	Phoenix Tour de Coops
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection	Reuse Alliance
Desert Urban Gardens	Rogue Green
East Valley Slightly Crunchy Families for Conscious Living	Sage Lifestyles
Ecostilleteo	Slow Food Phoenix
Edible Phoenix	Sonoran Institute
Environmental Fund for Arizona	Sonoran Living
Forming Community in Arizona	Sustainable Arizona
Green Living AZ	The Escalante Community Garden
Harvest For Humanity	Truck Farm Phoenix
Keep Phoenix Beautiful	U.S. Green Building Council Arizona Chapter
Local First Arizona	Urban Hobby Farm
Mrs. Green's World	Valley Permaculture Alliance
Natural Awakenings Phoenix Edition	Valleywide Recycling Partnership
	Women Designing Arizona
	Shaping Footprints

Participants were required to submit a prescreening survey (Appendix C) to ensure their eligibility for participation. Participation criteria required that the

participant be 18 years of age and actively incorporating 'sustainable lifestyle choices' that centered on 'living simply' and 'reducing consumption' for at least six months prior to their participation in the study. Due to a low response rate, I was not able to diversify my sample along racial and gender lines.

**Data collection.** A focus group was conducted with each target population in the urban centers (for Focus Group Protocol see Appendix D). Focus groups lasted between 1½-2 hours. There were no monetary incentives offered for participation although food and beverage were provided. When necessary, transportation was provided for participants. The focus group allowed participants to work together and build on each other's ideas to develop an understanding of how their consumption choices are impacted by their environment and vice versa. By using a focus group to develop a preliminary working understanding of the topic, valuable time in private interviews was better spent exploring topics of interest in much greater detail (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Trochim, 2005).

Focus groups conducted in the urban centers of Miami and Phoenix achieved an attendance of five and four participants respectively. This fell short of the original goal of 10-12 participants, determined by following the recommended methods of Stewart and Shamdasani (1990). This discrepancy was due to an initially lower than expected response rate and scheduling conflicts. Phoenix attendance further suffered due to the fact that there was a parade taking place near the site making access to the site slightly more challenging for some participants. The focus group in Miami was held in a

conference room at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Miami. In Phoenix the focus group was conducted in a conference room at the Days Inn Camelback. Location was partially based on proximity to participant's residences, determined by mapping their location using zip codes provided on the prescreening survey. Upon arrival, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form, which had previously been made available to them for review, and provided with a nametag that only included their first name.

Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants each in both Miami and in Phoenix. These interviews followed the protocol found in Appendix E. Three of the five focus group participants in Miami also participated in personal interviews and four additional participants who could not attend the focus group allowed me to interview them. In Phoenix, all focus group attendees also chose to take part in a one-on-one interview and three additional participants who could not attend the focus group also took part in a private interview. When possible, interviews were conducted in participants' homes. Not only did this afford the participants' a level of comfort but also, as noted in the previous discussion of participant observation, it allowed me to compare self-reported activities to real-life circumstance in the home. When it wasn't possible to conduct the interview at home other venues included public coffee houses or restaurants, via phone, or in one instance a conference room at the participant's place of work. Additional unstructured interviews were conducted with representatives from eight of the organizations (4 from each region) outlined in

Table 1. These interviews provided insight into what was being orchestrated on the organizational and community level to support simplicity lifestyles.

All focus groups and interviews were recorded with a digital audio recording device. The recordings were used to supplement handwritten notes taken during the sessions. I wrote up a summary of each of the interviews and focus groups based on notes taken during the interview. Transcriptions of audio recordings were made as needed. All data and original notes remained in my possession. Electronic data were stored on my laptop and as a digital backup on a personal external hard-drive. Both storage devices are password protected and I am the only one who can access them.

There were no foreseeable risks to research participants. All participants have been left anonymous with their names changed. Through the informed consent process, participants were made aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary and anonymous and could be ceased at any time. Participants were required to sign an informed consent form, which was formatted using the template provided by the IRB through the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at the University of South Florida. Possible benefits to participants included the opportunity to meet and network with like-minded members of their community.

Refer to Figure 1 for a summary of research methods by case study with sample size. Table 2 provides a summary of the research questions and the methods, and associated products used to answer these questions.

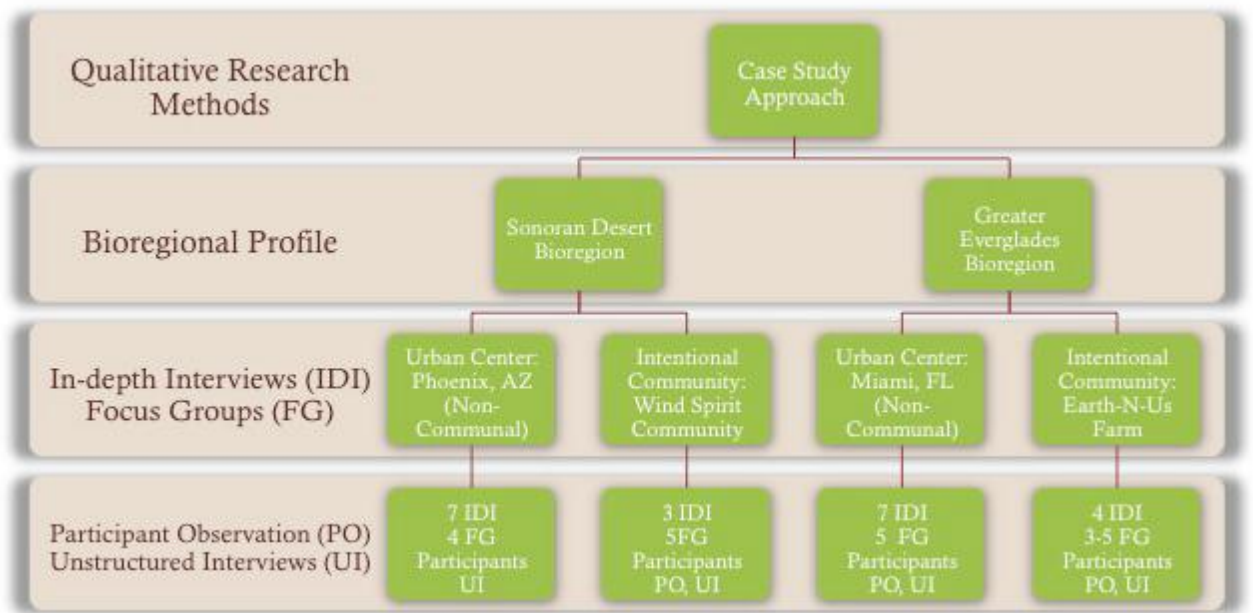


Figure 1. Summary of research methods and case studies with sample sizes

**Table 2**

*Summary of Research Questions and Methods of Investigation*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Method of Inquiry</b>	<b>Research Product</b>
1. Which bioregional characteristics pose the largest barriers or are most significant in facilitating simplification?	Focus Group	Notes, Transcripts (where relevant), Interview protocol
	In-Depth Interview	Transcripts (where relevant)
2. How does the impact of specific bioregional characteristics on simplicity differ between non-communal and communal simplicity practitioners? a. Do these simplicity practitioners experience the same place differently? b. How do Communal simplicity practitioners compare to non-communal simplicity practitioners in the way they rank impact of bioregional characteristics on simplicity?	Participant Observation	Notes, Field notes, Photographs
	Focus Group, In-depth Interview	Notes, Transcripts (where relevant)
3. What are the similarities or differences in the way that simplicity is envisioned and manifested in the two study bioregions?	Focus Group In-Depth Interview	Notes, Transcripts (where relevant), Interview protocol Transcripts (where relevant)
4. Can the identified differences and similarities in the conceptualization and practice of simplicity be linked to variances in characteristics between the two bioregions?	Synthesis of the bioregional literature	Bioregional Ethnography

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Trochim, 2005). Responses to interviews and focus groups were recorded in spreadsheets by bioregion, study site, question and respondent. Using open-coding, themes and subthemes were identified and responses were assigned to these categories and

tabulated in a matrix. I compared across categories and identified patterns between and within themes. Themes were depicted visually in flow charts, included in the discussion and analysis of the data found in later chapters. Throughout this process of categorizing and comparing, I formed and reformed my analysis and theories. This process also directed the more specific focuses of my bioregional profiles. Field notes were similarly coded and analyzed.

## **Part I—Sonoran Desert Bioregion**

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Bioregional Ethnography**

What is it about a place that makes it unique from other places? Perhaps the architecture, the culture, the cuisine, the climate? How did these characteristics come to be associated with the place they define and were they always as such or have they evolved together?

In this chapter I will be exploring what makes the Sonoran Desert bioregion a unique place. I will begin with a discussion of the physical geography of the region and its prehistoric origins. This will include a discussion of current climactic conditions as well as the flora and fauna. Given that bioregions are often defined in terms of their watershed boundaries, I will also address the watersheds relevant to this study area.

Next, I will discuss human settlement of the region going back to prehistoric Paleo-Indians. More recent indigenous groups lived in the region for many years before their populations were overrun by Spanish, and later in some areas, American settlers. I will then focus my attention on the populating of Arizona by American settlers honing in eventually on the modern city of Phoenix. I will discuss in depth the city's history and evolution, particularly as it relates to



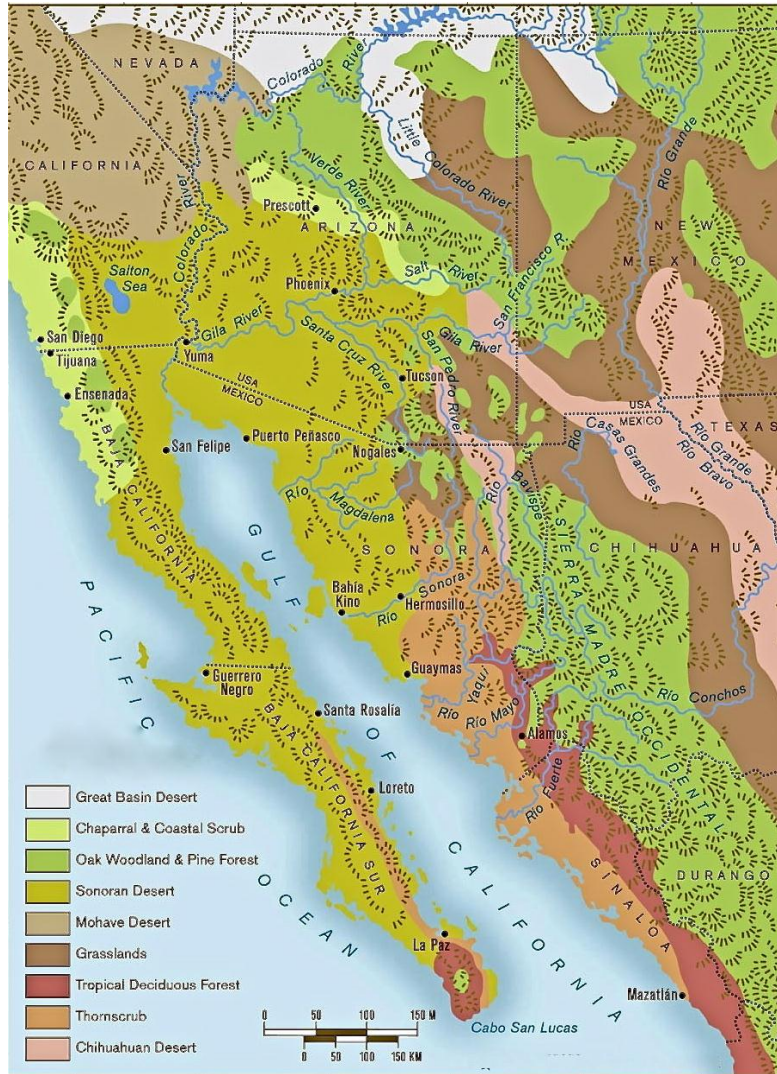
the larger bioregion. In exploring the social, cultural and political climate I will also examine how these institutions have shaped and been shaped by the physical environment.

This information will form a backdrop for the research I conducted in the region. By building a narrative of place for the Sonoran Desert bioregion generally and Phoenix specifically, I am able to nestle participants' understanding and experience as it pertains to their consumptive choices within the larger geographical framework. This allows me to better understand place-based decisions that influence consumptive practices.

### **Physical Geography**

**Climate and biotic communities.** Comprising 100,000 square miles, the Sonoran Desert Bioregion (SDB) encompasses parts of Arizona and California in the United States, and Sonora, the Baja California peninsula and the islands of the Gulf of California in Mexico. The bioregion is predominantly desert although the following biomes are also present as shown in Figure 2: temperate deciduous forest, grassland, chaparral, thornscrub, and tropical forest (Dimmitt, 2000a). For the purposes of this study I will focus primarily on the desert biome. The reason for this is two-fold. Not only were both study sites located in the Sonoran Desert proper but also participants displayed a keen awareness of their desert surrounding and responses focused exclusively on their interactions with the desert environment. This narrowed focus does not mean I will ignore the contributions that neighboring biomes within the bioregion have made in shaping the physical environment or the human-environment interactions that have taken

place in the larger bioregion. Where appropriate, these contributions and their respective biomes are discussed in the study.



*Figure 2.* Biological Communities of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion and surrounding areas. Reprinted from “Regional Natural History and Image Galleries,” by Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Center for Sonoran Desert Studies, retrieved from <http://www.desertmuseum.org/desert/sonora.php#map> Copyright 2006 Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. Reprinted with permission.

Desert biomes are defined as extremely arid environments receiving less than 10 inches of rainfall annually. Citing this traditional definition as too broad, Dimmitt (2000a, p. 10) suggests a more holistic definition stipulating that a desert

is a “biological community in which most of the indigenous plants and animals are adapted to chronic aridity and periodic extreme droughts and in which those conditions are necessary to maintain the [biological] community’s structure.” The Sonoran Desert is lush with relatively mild winters making it the most moderate of the North American deserts. These characteristics can be attributed to the bioregion’s origins as a tropical swamp before mountains began forming approximately 50 million years ago (mya). Frost is extremely rare here and only occurs in the Arizona Upland subdivision that will be discussed later. The bioregion can be distinguished by the amount and seasonality of rainfall it receives. Widespread gentle rain can be found in the northern two-thirds from December through May. From July through September, the southern two-thirds of the area experiences localized deluges as a result of the summer monsoon (Dimmitt, 2000a).

In his chapter “Biomes and Communities of the Sonoran Desert region” Mark Dimmitt (2000a) provides an in-depth discussion of renowned ecologist Forest Shreve’s regional classification system. Shreve identified seven sub-regions of the Sonoran Desert, distinguishable by their climate, topography, and vegetation. The original seven (Figure 3) included the Lower Colorado River Valley, Arizona Upland, Plains of Sonora, Central Gulf Coast, Vizcaino, Magdalena, and the Foothills of Sonora. The Foothills of Sonora area has since been reclassified as thornscrub, rather than desert, biome. Given that the study sites were located in the towns of Phoenix and Globe, Arizona, I have focused on their respective sub-regions, which are the Lower Colorado River Valley and the

Arizona Upland regions (Phoenix technically sits on the border of the two).

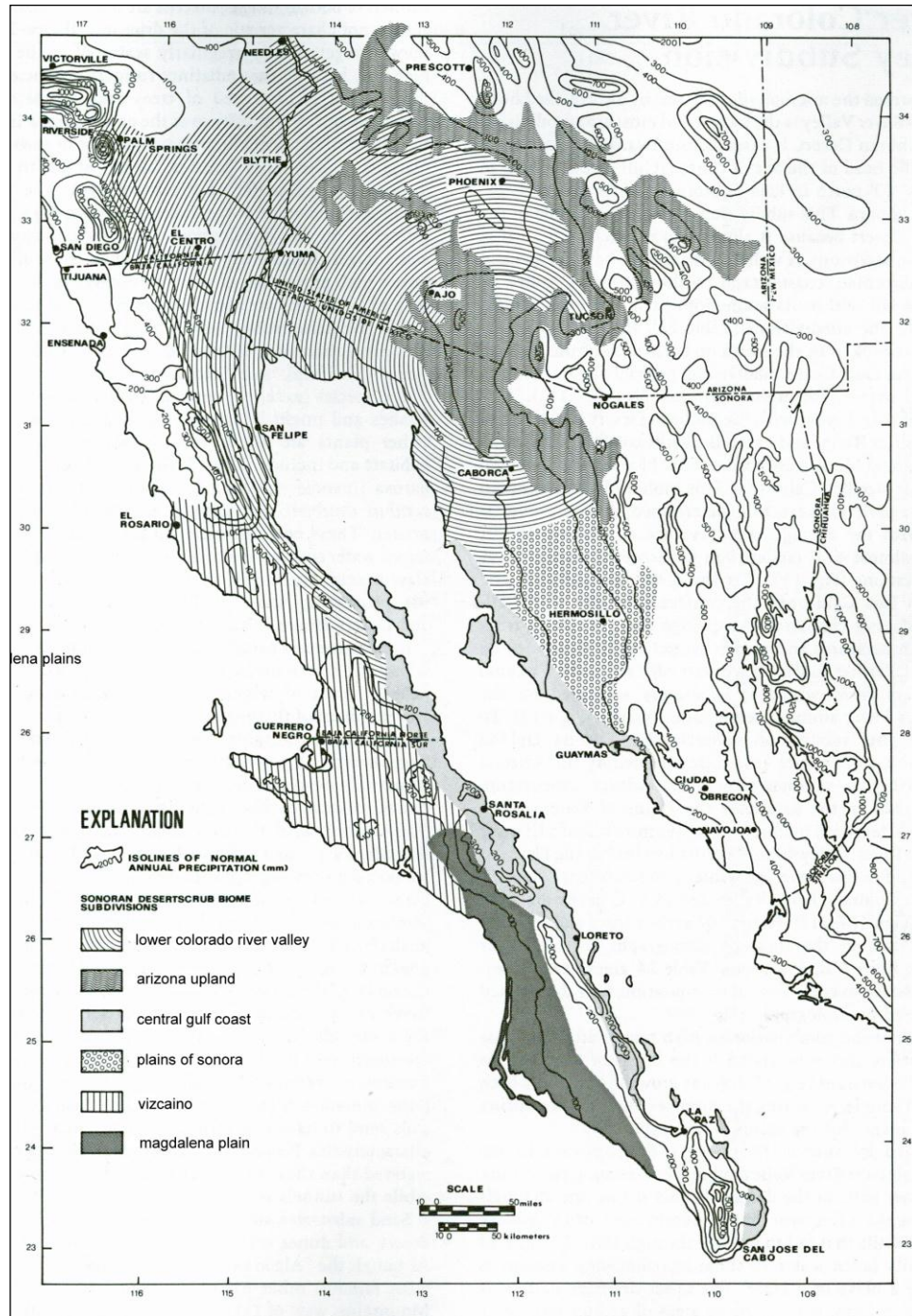


Figure 3. Map of the outline of the Sonoran Desert biome showing average annual rainfall amounts and subregion boundaries. Reprinted from "Sonoran Desertscrub," by R. M. Turner in *Biotic Communities: Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico* (p. 189), D. E. Brown (Ed.), 1994, Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press. Reprinted with permission.



The Lower Colorado River Valley sub-region is the largest, hottest and driest of the six with annual rainfall of less than three inches in some parts and summer temperatures exceeding 120°F. The terrain consists of broad valleys, scattered barren rock mountains and large washes (Figure 4). The large columnar cacti so representative of the Sonoran Desert are rare in this sub-region, found only in the valleys, with low shrubs and trees being more common. Annuals make up more than half of the flora (Dimmitt, 2000a).



*Figure 4.* Lower Colorado River Valley with an ocotillo in the foreground. Photograph from “Sonoran Desertscrub – Lower Colorado River Valley” by Mark A. Dimmitt retrieved from <http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM09810&sp=Sonoran%20Desertscrub%20-%20Lower%20Colorado%20River%20Valley>. Copyright 1989 Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. Reprinted with permission.

The Arizona Upland sub-region is both the highest and the coldest of the six. The valleys here are more narrow, the mountain ranges more numerous. The trees and saguaros (Figure 5) found on the slopes here give this area the

alternate name of “saguaro-palo verde forest” (Dimmitt, 2000a, p. 16). There are two rainy seasons in this sub-region accounting for a total average annual rainfall of 12 inches. Phoenix is situated in the Lower Colorado River Basin but its close proximity to the Arizona Upland sub-region means that many of its higher elevation areas, such as Metro Phoenix, public parks and land over 2000 ft, have qualities resembling the Uplands. Both the Arizona Upland and eastern half of the Lower Colorado River Basin experience five seasons: summer monsoon, autumn, winter, spring, and fore summer (Dimmitt, 2000a).



*Figure 5.* Saguaros in the Arizona Uplands region outside of Tucson, Arizona. Photograph by Lauren Drakopoulos.

**Geologic origins.** The climate of the SDB would not be as such were it not for the topography in and around the area. Located in the Basin and Range geologic province, the Sonoran Desert is home to low elevation valleys and

mountain ranges that run parallel to each other around the rims of the valleys in long thin expanses. The region was not always like this but instead began as smooth upland, transformed to its current mountainous desert landscape after a series of geologic events occurring over the last 40 million years.

Numerous volcanic centers in the region were active between 40 and 20 mya leaving behind volcanic flows as seen in the Gila mountains or, as with the Superstition mountains, large basins resulting from post-explosion collapse. Simultaneously, heat occurring in the earth's crust created pliability in the basin and range region that, under the pressure of movement from the Pacific Ocean tectonic plate, began to stretch apart. This pulling apart created fault zones that subsequently gave rise to regional arching and many of the area's mountain ranges, the Catalinas for example, as granite rocks floated upwards through the fault zones due to subsurface heat and their own buoyancy. The stretching of the basin and range region also created a brittle crust which cracked into many segments, some rising up and others sinking, creating the thin parallel mountain ranges found in the region today (Scarborough, 2000).

The area began to cool and stabilize about 8 mya with subsequent geologic formation and shaping taking place through erosion. Streams in the region's valleys either drain into the valley's low spot or connect with flowing rivers. As a result of these streams moving gravel, sand and clay from mountains to valley floors, most valleys in Basin and Range country are filled with 5000 ft of debris. This is also where groundwater is stored as the layers of debris create desert aquifers. Most of this erosion has taken place during the last

two million years during the glaciations and climate changes of the Pleistocene Period. Glaciers in Arizona, found above 9000 ft elevation, were melting about 14,000 years ago with the modern desert climate developing around 12,000 years ago. These glacial melts and the desert's notorious localized short but heavy rainfall patterns cause runoff full of debris, mud and vegetation to flow rapidly down narrow canyons through the mountains, distributing at the base of the mountain in a cone shaped configuration known as an alluvial fan. Alluvial fans are common features of desert mountain ranges and of the Basin and Range region generally (Scarborough, 2000)

**Flora and fauna.** The flora and fauna community, as found in the bioregion today, established around 4500 years ago (Van Devender, 2000b). There are more than 2000 plant species and 550 vertebrates found here as well as thousands (the actual number is unknown) of invertebrate species (Dimmitt, 2000a). Of the plant and vertebrate species, 500 and 75 species respectively are endemic (Nabhan, 2000). One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Sonoran Desert bioregion is the presence of north-south corridors, critical for wildlife migration. According to a study conducted by The Wildlands Project (1999) in conjunction with the Sonoran Desert Museum, the introduction of African grasses by cattle industry proponents has impacted the vegetation makeup so dramatically that these corridors are now at greater risk of wildfires.

Native species have developed a number of adaptations, allowing them to thrive in times of water scarcity as well as abundance. Succulence, drought tolerance and drought evasion are the three primary adaptations that allow



desert plants to cope with extensive dry periods. Succulents, such as cacti and aloes (Figure 6), are able to absorb large quantities of water through very wet soil. This water is then stored in fleshy leaves, stems and roots. Because of the nature of desert soil and its inability to retain moisture for long periods of time, succulents have shallow and extensive root systems that allow them to absorb excess moisture rapidly before it evaporates from the soil. Succulents also possess adaptations that allow them to retain their moisture in periods of drought. Such adaptations include reduced surface area (few to no leaves) to diminish the effects of transpiration, mucilaginous properties that bind to water molecules in the plant, and spines, bitterness or toxicity to protect their valuable water stores from predators (Dimmitt, 2000b).



*Figure 6.* Aloe ferox. Photograph from ASDM Sonoran Desert Digital Library by Roger Hirschman retrieved from <http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM23273&sp=Aloe%20ferox>. Copyright Roger Hirschman. Reprinted with permission.

Drought tolerant plants enter into dormancy during periods of extreme drought. They shed leaves and lose moisture such that one might think they are

dead and use them for kindling, despite the fact that they are still alive. Drought tolerant plants have much deeper root systems than succulents, particularly trees and shrubs such as creosote bush (*Larrea tridentate*), brittlebush (*Encelia farinose*) (Figure 7) and mesquite trees. These deep root systems allow them to control growth cycles by absorbing moisture from the soil only when a deep penetrating rain occurs. In this way the soil stays moist at greater depths ensuring a sustained water source (Dimmitt, 2000b).



*Figure 7.* Brittlebush (*Encelia farinose*) . Photograph from ASDM Sonoran Desert Digital Library by Roger Hirschman retrieved from <http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM23273&sp=Aloe%20ferox>. Copyright Roger Hirschman. Reprinted with permission.

Drought evasion is an adaptation of Sonoran Desert annuals. The seeds of these flowers can wait for lengthy periods of time, in rare instances decades, to germinate. Their life cycle lasts the extent of the wet period then their energy goes into producing the next generation of seeds. Desert annuals can be

grouped by the timing of germination; winter-spring flowers, those that follow the summer rains, and the final group, which will flower during any season with adequate rainfall (Dimmitt, 2000b).

Similarly, mammals and birds of the Sonoran Desert have evolved adaptations to the extreme desert aridity and heat. First and foremost, many are nocturnal in order to avoid the higher daytime temperatures. Those that are active during the day find refuge in cooler microclimates such as in the shade of a tree or through burrows and nests. Others radiate and conduct heat from their bodies through the loss of fur or feathers. Evaporative cooling through panting or flapping is also an important method for temperature regulation (Siminski, 2000).

More than 500 bird species have been identified in the SDB. However, with rapid development and immigration, the rich riparian habitats found in the desert have been swiftly declining. This is partially due to aquifer mining and subsequent ground subsidence and depletion of the water table. Loss of riparian forest has resulted in almost a 50% decline in breeding bird species (The Wildlands Project, 1999).

The Sonoran Desert is also home to over 100 species of freshwater fishes as well as amphibians and reptiles. More than 30 of the fish species found in the Sonoran Desert are Arizona natives although many natives are vanishing with more than two-thirds listed as either Threatened or Endangered (Ivanyi, 2000). Amphibians and reptiles also possess many unique adaptations that allow them to call the desert home. Some are only active during certain seasons or times of

day whereas others are able to burrow or use the environment to regulate their body temperatures (Van Devender, 2000a).

**Watersheds.** The SDB includes a number of watersheds. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the watersheds directly impacting the study area. The city of Phoenix is situated within the confines of the Salt River Watershed and sources water from the Salt, Verde and Little Colorado River watersheds (Figure 8), all of which are included in the Colorado River system. The Little Colorado River Watershed is not considered part of the SDB but should be addressed nonetheless as it is vital to Phoenix's water resources.

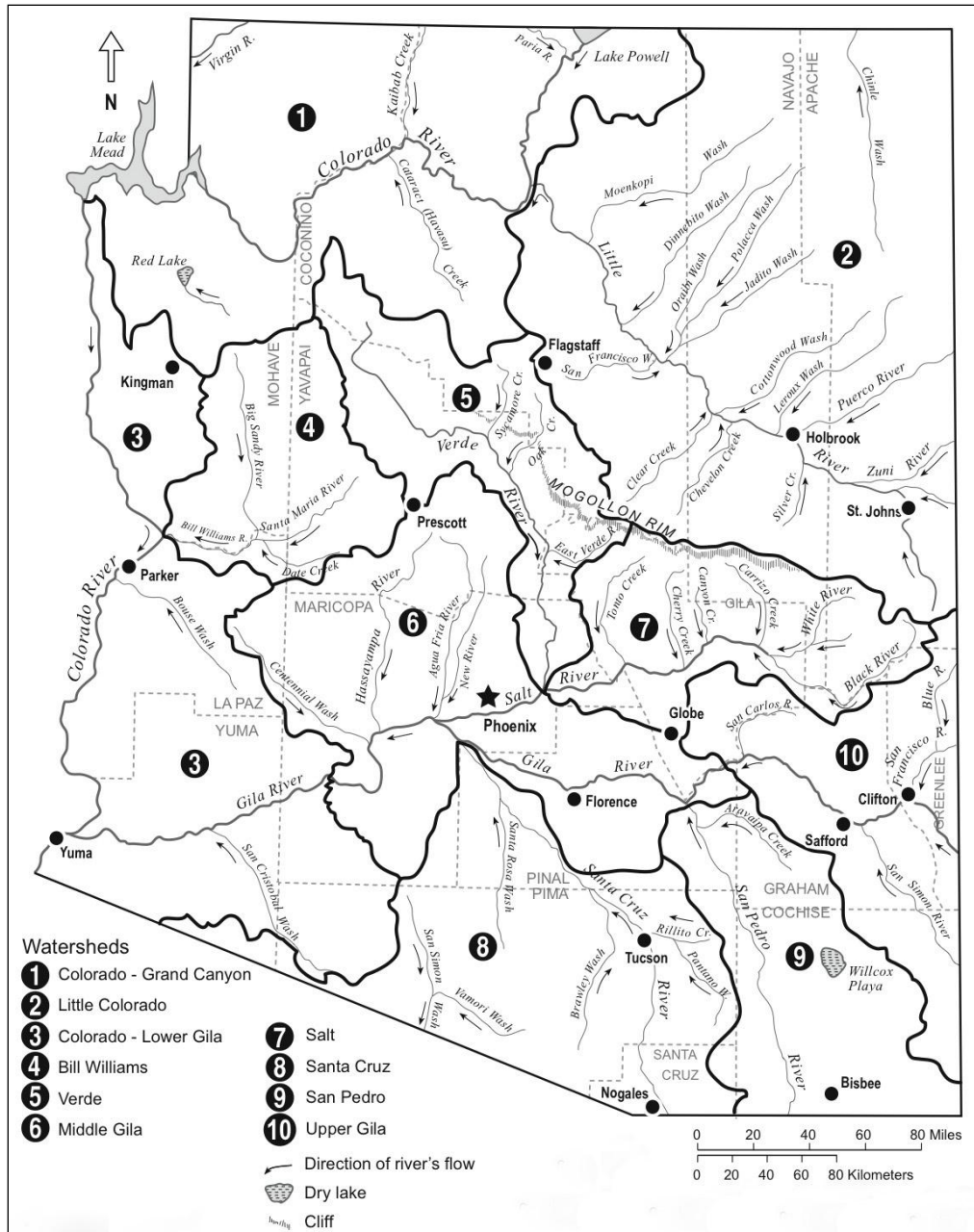


Figure 8. Arizona's watersheds and rivers. Reprinted from the Arizona Geographic Alliance, Arizona State University School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, Terry Dorschied (cartographer), retrieved from [http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/AZ\\_Watersheds.pdf](http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/AZ_Watersheds.pdf). Reprinted with permission.

The Salt River Watershed is comprised mostly of the Salt River and Tonto Creek basins. The Salt River is the largest tributary of the Gila River and the watershed extends to the confluence of these two rivers on its western edge.

Winter snow accumulation from the high altitudes of the Salt River Basin feeds the White and Black rivers, which make up the headwaters of the Salt River. The watershed also contains a number of perennial streams, many of which are also fed by groundwater surfacing through geologic features such as fractures and joints. Surface waters flow to Theodore Roosevelt Lake and are subsequently dispersed to a series of reservoirs and dams managed through the Salt River Project. Water quality is a concern for several lakes and streams in the watershed that have higher than normal levels of copper due to local mining activities, as well as high levels of E. coli and nitrate, likely due to agriculture and horticulture (Arizona Department of Water Resources, 2010).

The Verde River watershed includes parts of Coconino, Gila and Yavapai counties in Central Arizona, extending down into the Phoenix Active Management Area (Active Management Areas will be discussed later in this chapter). The watershed covers about 6188 square miles and ranges in elevation from 1750 feet to 12600 feet. Originating in a volcanic rock canyon below Sullivan Lake Dam, the Verde River is fed by spring waters. Major tributaries to the Verde River include Oak Creek, Wet Beaver Creek, West Clear Creek, Sycamore Creek, and East Verde River (ADWR, 2010).

The Little Colorado River Watershed is defined by the Little Colorado River. The Little Colorado River has origins in the White Mountains and is a tributary to the San Juan River, ending in the Colorado River. The watershed spans 26794 square miles with elevations ranging from 2700 ft to 12600 ft. The watershed is sparsely populated with land use being primarily grazing, forestry,

mining and recreation. The primary source of water is snowmelt, totaling about 15-20 inches yearly (Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, 2012). The management of these critical water sources will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **Human Geography**

**Indigenous populations.** The first settlers to the SDB were Paleo-Indians arriving roughly 12,000 years ago (Sheridan, 2000). According to the archeological record, more than half of the large mammal species in the area became extinct around this time. These findings have led some to suggest that these ancient hunter-gatherers hunted out the big game species of the region (Logan, 2006; Sheridan, 2000).

The region's next permanent settlers were the Hohokam people. The Hohokam left their mark on the region by building an extensive canal system near the confluence of the Gila and Salt Rivers, present day Phoenix, to support their agricultural civilization. Estimates vary widely as to just how large the Hohokam civilization was in its heyday; some say their population numbered in the hundreds of thousands with others giving more conservative estimates of 30,000-60,000 (Logan, 2006). The canal system spanned up to 315 miles throughout the Phoenix basin; potentially irrigating up to 250,000 acres though most likely this number was closer to 30,000-60,000 acres as not all canals were in use at the same time. It's a mystery to this day as to why the Hohokam civilization disappeared in the 1400s. It is been postulated that they fell prey to disease, or that war caused by internal conflicts brought them to their end. Still

others believe they were forced to abandon their settlement due to crop failure brought on by years of irrigation with salty basin rivers and subsequent soil mineralization (Logan, 2006; Sheridan, 2000).

At the time Europeans first began exploring the region in the 1500s, there were many Native American populations, such as the ancestors of the Yaquis and Mayos, Opatas, Eudeves and Lower Pimas, living throughout the SDB. Subsisting in part on an agriculturally based diet, these tribes lived along rivers and tributaries. The area previously inhabited by the Hohokam still lay abandoned and would for centuries to come. According to Sheridan (2000), native populations in the SDB declined by as much as 95% in the two centuries after European contact. This can be attributed in part to the fact that Native peoples lacked immunity to the diseases brought by Europeans, resulting in the decimation of populations who came in contact with these explorers. Targeted genocides also ensued as tensions erupted between natives and non-natives over resource use and territorial expansion (Logan, 2006; Sheridan, 2000).

Several indigenous groups are still living in the region today. The Tohono O'odham, "desert people", also known as the Papago might be descendents of the Hohokam civilization and are the second largest indigenous settlement in the state both in land and numbers. The Tohono O'odham Nation's home lands, including property on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, have been reduced from their pre-colonial size but currently include four reservations totaling more than 2.8 million acres (Arnold & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2007; Highwater-Langston, 2003). Presently, the Nation's membership is thought to be over 27,000 people,



with residents on both sides of the international border. Traditionally, the Tohono O'odham people hunted, gathered, and practiced desert agriculture. Raising cattle currently dominates the Nation's subsistence practices today (Arnold & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2007). Changes to the O'odham diet and lifestyle as they've increasingly lost access to traditional foods and cultural practices has brought on a host of health problems making the O'odham people subject to the highest rate of adult onset diabetes of any ethnic group (Ross, 2011).

**European and American settlement: The era of extraction.** With the onslaught of Spaniards and Americans taking interest in the region's natural riches, the cultural and physical landscape of the Sonoran Desert began to change dramatically. In his chapter "Human Ecology of the Sonoran Desert" (2000) renowned anthropologist and historian of the American Southwest Thomas Sheridan describes the reshaping of the SDB as centering on "the three C's": cattle, copper and cotton. Spanish and American explorers to the region spearheaded this transition. By the 1880s the "era of extraction" was in full swing.

The cattle industry was the first to start this transformation. Although cattle had been present in the region since their introduction by Jesuit missionaries as early as the 1600s, the cattle industry did not really take off until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Areas of the Sonoran Desert located in present day Mexico suffered overgrazing as a result of cattle and other livestock. Cattle raising also spawned fighting as natives began competing with neighboring ranchers for traditional hunting grounds. The cattle industry precipitated the introduction of African grasses that have resulted in a myriad of ecological consequences as

previously noted (The Wildlands Project, 1999). Cattle ranching became so synonymous with Arizona and the region in general that ranches became popular on the tourist circuit. For a period of time, ranchers were able to turn a larger profit running their land as dude ranches, offering a 'real ranch' experience to tourists, than they were functioning as working ranches (Logan, 2006). Cattle ranching persists in the SDB today.

Mining towns began springing up throughout the SDB during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Silver and gold mining operations dotted the west down into Mexico. Cattle ranches supplied the more permanent mining settlements giving rise to the "ranch-mine settlement complex" (Sheridan, 2000). As an industrial rather than precious metal, copper was mined in much greater quantities and required smelting. Therefore, copper mining depended heavily on railroads for transport and by 1880 Southern Pacific carved out a route through the region. Not only did the expanding railroad routes alter the landscape, but also the process of mining copper left a much more devastating trail of open pits and slag heaps than had the gold and silver operations of the past (Sheridan, 2000).

Agriculture was the third industry to take hold in the SDB leading to what Sheridan (2000, p. 113) describes as the "ultimate transformation of the Sonoran Desert". While agriculture had been practiced in the SDB for thousands of years, historically it had been reliant on surface water. Technological advances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a significant impact on how cropland was irrigated. Groundwater harvested through pumping and the construction of large dams allowed

agriculture to occur in new places and at a larger scale than ever before. The Salt River Project's Roosevelt Dam, built in 1902, was one of the first projects to be approved under the Reclamation Act. Plagued with periods of drought and flooding prior to its construction, completion of the dam turned the Salt River valley into one of the region's leading agricultural producers. With World Wars I and II, cotton production skyrocketed in both Arizona and Mexico. In Mexico, cotton production was heavily reliant on groundwater pumping and soon discharge greatly exceeded recharging putting limitations on its production. In Arizona, post WWII growth and development, not water shortages, checked cotton production and the agricultural industry (Sheridan, 2000).

It is important to note that the Apache people had a strong impact on the economic and cultural development of the region. Apaches frequently raided European and other native camps to acquire cattle and other foreign goods. Until the surrender of Geronimo in the late 1800s, raiding had deterred Spanish exploration to Northern Arizona and the Salt River Valley and halted the spread of cattle, railroads and mining to these areas (Logan, 2006; Sheridan, 2000). These raids went on for many years and fending off raiders left the Mexican army exhausted, contributing to their practical forfeiture of northern territory to American forces. American troops began moving in to protect their newly acquired outposts from the raiders, creating a newfound need for supplies, food and hay. Government spending on military needs brought wealth to areas whose growth and prosperity had been hindered by the constant threat of Apache raids. This wealth, with the protection that the new military presence offered, prompted

many Mexicans to stay in Tucson even after it was negotiated into American hands (Logan, 2006).

The lack of Spanish culture and influence in the far northern part of the region is clearly illustrated when comparing Tucson and Phoenix. Separated by only 100 miles, these cities have dealt with cultural diversity in very different ways, so much so that it is visible in the architecture and the built environment. Tucson in the South, has historically embraced its Spanish origin and heritage, maintaining many of the structures and structural elements that were brought by Spanish explorers. Phoenix, lacking these influences, has developed under the pretense of being a “Modern American” town and has even touted its Anglicized culture and architecture to tourists and prospective residents (Logan, 2006, p.36). Additionally, many have argued that Phoenix has a history of racial and ethnic intolerance, as exhibited through the lack of political representation for people of color, their disproportionate exposure to hazardous wastes and increased vulnerability to natural hazards such as flooding or extreme heat events (Chow, Chuang, & Gober, 2012; Gober, 2006; Logan,2006; Ross, 2011). In his scathing analysis examining the cultural, environmental and historical factors that have won Phoenix the title of “World’s Most Unsustainable City,” Ross (2011) argues that technological solutions to improve sustainability will “end up reinforcing existing patterns of eco-apartheid” if they do not address the city’s rampant social and environmental inequalities (p. 17).

**Urbanization and the city of Phoenix.** The city of Phoenix owes credit for its birth to Mr. Jack Swilling. Swilling, using the last vestiges of Hohokam civilization as a blueprint, began digging irrigation ditches out of the old Indian canal system in late 1860s and early 1870s. With irrigation now available, agriculture grew rapidly as did the city. The canals not only provided water to residents, but also a public space for recreation along banks (Gober, 2006). Given that the city lies near the confluence of three rivers, water posed few restrictions on growth compared to other cities in the region, and grow Phoenix did (Logan, 2006).

The dry, hot desert climate worked both for and against development. Health seekers and wealthy tourists and retirees were drawn by the dry, warm winters. Hot summers prevented many from staying on as full-time residents until air-conditioning became widespread in the 1950s. Prior to this, residents used swamp coolers (evaporative cooling devices). The dry clear desert air also contributed to the establishment of military bases and defense plants in Phoenix. A desire to maintain clear skies and clean air, attributes that had driven growth and settlement in the region, spearheaded the push to bring 'clean industries' to the region in post-war years (Gober, 2006; Logan, 2006).

Electronics and high tech manufacturing industries were the first to respond to this call. Requiring little in the way of natural resources or large-scale transport systems, companies such as Motorola and Sperry Rand began locating in Phoenix in the early 1950s bringing with them high paying jobs and good benefits for college graduates and war veterans eager to settle the area. The

desert offered these young professionals natural amenities and recreational opportunities as well as ample land for the development of low-density sprawling suburbs that would house them (Gober, 2006; Logan, 2006; Ross, 2011).

Most of these suburbs were built on converted farmland. As money continued to be poured into the real estate sector, agricultural land was worth more as a commodity than the crops that were grown on it (Logan, 2006). The conversion of farmland to suburb boded well for water resources since, comparatively, agriculture consumed far more water on a single plot of land than residential use of the same sized plot. But it also meant that with the abundance of convertible cropland there were few natural barriers to growth (Gober, 2006).

Logan (2006, p. 162) identifies several “push and pull factors [that] contributed to the tremendous growth”. Post-WWII, when the first population boom hit, jobs were on the decline in the rust belt and the growing electronics industry and amiable desert climate offered much allure. Finally, at a time when there was a push to move west, Phoenix offered a less polluted and more affordable alternative to Los Angeles and other parts of California. Gober (2006) also highlights the fact that the housing industry makes up a very large segment of the local economy. According to a report in the *Arizona Republic* housing accounted for approximately one-third or \$140 billion dollars of the economy in 2004 (as cited in Gober, 2006).

Overall, Phoenix residents experience a weak sense of place. Due to rapid growth, Phoenix has developed a culture of change and migration with

many new residents maintaining stronger ties to their hometowns causing conflicting loyalties. Gober (2006) repeatedly denounces the proliferation of retirement communities and gated and master planned communities throughout Phoenix as promoting social fragmentation and a devolved sense of belonging on the citywide or regional scale. Instead, these promote community on the neighborhood scale, compelling residents to develop a very narrow definition of “place” that is confined to their immediate streets and neighborhoods. This is further compounded by the urban sprawl of Phoenix; the city’s lack of character and strong urban center challenge any attempt at developing a “sense of place” (Gober, 2006). The lack of vestedness, community, and civic responsibility amongst residents is further symptomatic of this weak sense of place (Ross, 2011).

***Demographics.*** Arizona was one of the fastest growing states between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census, 2011). The Metropolitan Phoenix area is made up of 27 municipalities ranging from urban to suburban to semi-rural farming communities. The City of Phoenix proper is located at the heart of the urban center. The population of the City of Phoenix is 1.4 million and the total population for the Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale metropolitan area was just over four million according to the 2010 U.S. Census. Of this total, 29% of Metro Phoenix residents are of Latino or Hispanic origin. More specifically, 25% of residents are of Mexican decent and Mexico is the most significant source of new residents immigrating to the state. Metropolitan Phoenix is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States both in terms of population and land

area. Despite being stereotyped as a retirement destination with an aging population, the median age of residents is 34 years old, slightly lower than the national average (U.S. Census, 2010).

***Transportation.*** Much of this growth was taking place when private automobiles were in their heyday after WWII (Gober, 2006). This, in combination with the fact that many new residents had moved to Phoenix to escape inner-city life (Logan, 2006), encouraged low-density suburban sprawl. According to Gober (2006, p. 101) sprawl and a lack of coordination between housing and employment opportunities has perpetuated an “automobile oriented culture”. Cars have become a necessary and assumed feature of the Phoenix landscape (Gober, 2006).

Phoenix resisted building a freeway system for fear of the pollution and the impaired aesthetic it would bring, despite heavy reliance on private automobiles and increasing commute times and traffic (Logan, 2006). As recently as 1999, “Phoenix had fewer freeway miles than any other major city except Miami” (Gober, 2006, p.153). In order to mitigate these problems, in 1985, Phoenix adopted a general plan that advanced one of the first ‘urban village’ models of growth in the country (Gober, 2006; Ross, 2011). This system outlined nine villages in which people would work, live and recreate but due to residential segregation and the aforementioned lack of housing and employment coordination, this model worked far better in theory than in practice (Gober, 2006). Until recently, Maricopa County had been allocating less than 5% of its federal transport subsidies to public transportation, compared to the national



average of 20%. Finally, in 2000, attention shifted towards improving public transportation and Phoenix passed an initiative that relied on a sales tax increase to improve bus service and finance a light rail system. The 20.3-mile starter segment was completed in 2010. While this is considered a valuable asset to residents, it is assumed that residents will still need private cars in for transportation to and from the system's connection points (Gober, 2006).

***The urban core.*** Despite the fact that Phoenix now has one of the least developed downtowns of any city in America, its urban core had historically been the center of commerce for the region (Gober, 2006). In the 1980s, there was a push to begin revitalizing the downtown and create a strong urban center. Phoenix opted to promote large scale infrastructure, such as performance halls and stadiums, rather than support the development of a strong local business community that would encourage residents to venture downtown more often than for the occasional special event. The current trend is to bring in university campuses and research firms in the hope that these too will help revitalize the downtown and urban core. As part of the informal economy, the arts community has been banding together in the downtown district, attempting to strengthen the urban core by bringing city residents into downtown for monthly street fairs and art walks. This movement has met with some resistance from city officials eager to tear down low rent artist studios to make room for high dollar condos (Ross, 2011).

***Political climate.*** While the state of Arizona is politically conservative, Phoenix is more left leaning. The city of Phoenix has a city council and city

manager form of government, leaving the mayoral role as more ceremonial than functional. Developers have always had a great deal of political pull, both city and statewide with few exceptions. In 2000, environmentalists rallied citizens to support a strict, statewide growth management initiative, Proposition 202 (Ross, 2011). Though polls suggested that the initiative had a large margin of support, it was ultimately voted down. Gober (2006) attributes this failure to pro-development forces playing on residents' and other stakeholders' concerns over property rights and housing costs. The Phoenix Mountain Preserve, established in 1973, provides one example of politicians and residents saying "no" to development interests. Thanks to city efforts, a moratorium has been established on further development in the mountains surrounding Phoenix (Logan, 2006).

One would be remiss to discuss Arizona politics and not mention the Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB1070), the anti-illegal immigration Senate bill that was signed into law by Republican Governor Jan Brewer in April of 2010. The bill has met with tremendous resistance at both the state and national levels. According to Ross (2011), passing SB1070 brought on a backlash of boycotts by city councils, organizations and other prominent individuals resulting in a half billion dollar hit to the state's economy. In addition, after the bill passed a wave of immigrants fled the state. Groups supporting the bill were eager to blame border crossers for damage done to the fragile Sonoran Desert ecosystem. In actuality, maintenance and construction of the border fence has actually caused more harm comparatively, including fragmenting wildlife corridors thereby jeopardizing biological diversity (Ross, 2011).

**Environmental issues.** Unbridled growth has also brought on serious environmental concerns. The seasonal “brown cloud” that hangs over the city is symptomatic of increased levels of smog. This is a result of urbanization and associated pollutants and the unique physical geography of the region. The hot, clear, dry desert air easily accumulates pollutants, which are then trapped near the surface of the city in a layer of cool air when inversions occur and warmer air sits on top of the cool air like a lid. Urbanization has also triggered increased temperatures in the city, known as the urban heat island effect. Nighttime temperatures in the city can be as much as 12°F warmer than in neighboring rural areas. Not only do these raised temperatures pose significant health risks to vulnerable populations, such as minorities and the elderly, they also cause increases in energy and water consumption (Gober, 2006; Chow, Chuang, & Gober, 2012).

**Watershed management.** Finding water to service a rapidly growing population in the hot, arid desert has been challenging at best. Attempts have resulted in a labyrinthine web of providers and management techniques for the Phoenix metro area, extending out to what is now being termed the ‘Sun Corridor’ or the forming megalopolis running from Prescott to Tucson (Ross, 2011). With hundreds of providers and multiple management agencies, water supply management has three main components: Central Arizona surface water managed through the Salt River Project (SRP), Colorado River water managed under the Central Arizona Project (CAP), and groundwater managed by the Groundwater Management Act (GMA).

Because growth has been piecemeal with no real regional water management plan, Phoenix municipal water service has developed in a disjointed manner. As the region's initial source of water, canals serviced agriculture as well as the homes and businesses on agricultural land. The urban center of the city developed a well-water system and this system serviced residents living beyond the reach of the canal system. Once the SRP formed, agricultural land fell under its domain. As the city continued to grow and agricultural land was converted into urban sprawl, these new city residences continued to be serviced by the SRP rather than the municipal supply (Logan, 2006). According to the Morrison Institute for Public Policy (2011) the SRP is viewed as a water management success story despite development having now grown beyond the reaches of the SRP system, requiring that its water supply be augmented with other sources (groundwater and CAP water). The SRP draws water from the Salt and Verde watersheds. It functions as both a water provider and electric utility, managing eight dams, 251 wells and 1300 miles of canal, serving 250,000 acres (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011).

The Colorado River currently provides water for 30 million people in seven western states and an additional three million acres of land used for 15% of national crop production and 12% of national livestock production (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011). CAP is a 336-mile long surface water delivery system (Figure 9) responsible for bringing Colorado River water to the sun corridor (Maricopa, Pima, and Pinal counties). Designed to move 1.5 million-acre feet (MAF) of water per year, the canal began bringing water to Arizona in 1985.

In the Colorado River Compact of 1922, the state was allocated the rights to 2.8 MAF per year from Colorado River (Gober, 2011). Current uses along the Arizona portion of the Colorado River total about 1.2 MAF, with the remaining 1.6 MAF of the Arizona allowance going to CAP. In order to get authorization for CAP, the state agreed that the CAP allocation would be the lowest in priority and the first to experience interruption and shortages. Current CAP usage is roughly 800,000 acre-feet for long-term mostly municipal contractors and an additional 800,000 acre-feet for “excess” contractors, which includes most farmers. Agriculture will absorb the bulk of reductions in CAP allocations should a shortage occur. Due to physical constraints, CAP cannot be delivered to some areas and therefore has not been able to supplant groundwater in the way it was intended to (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011).

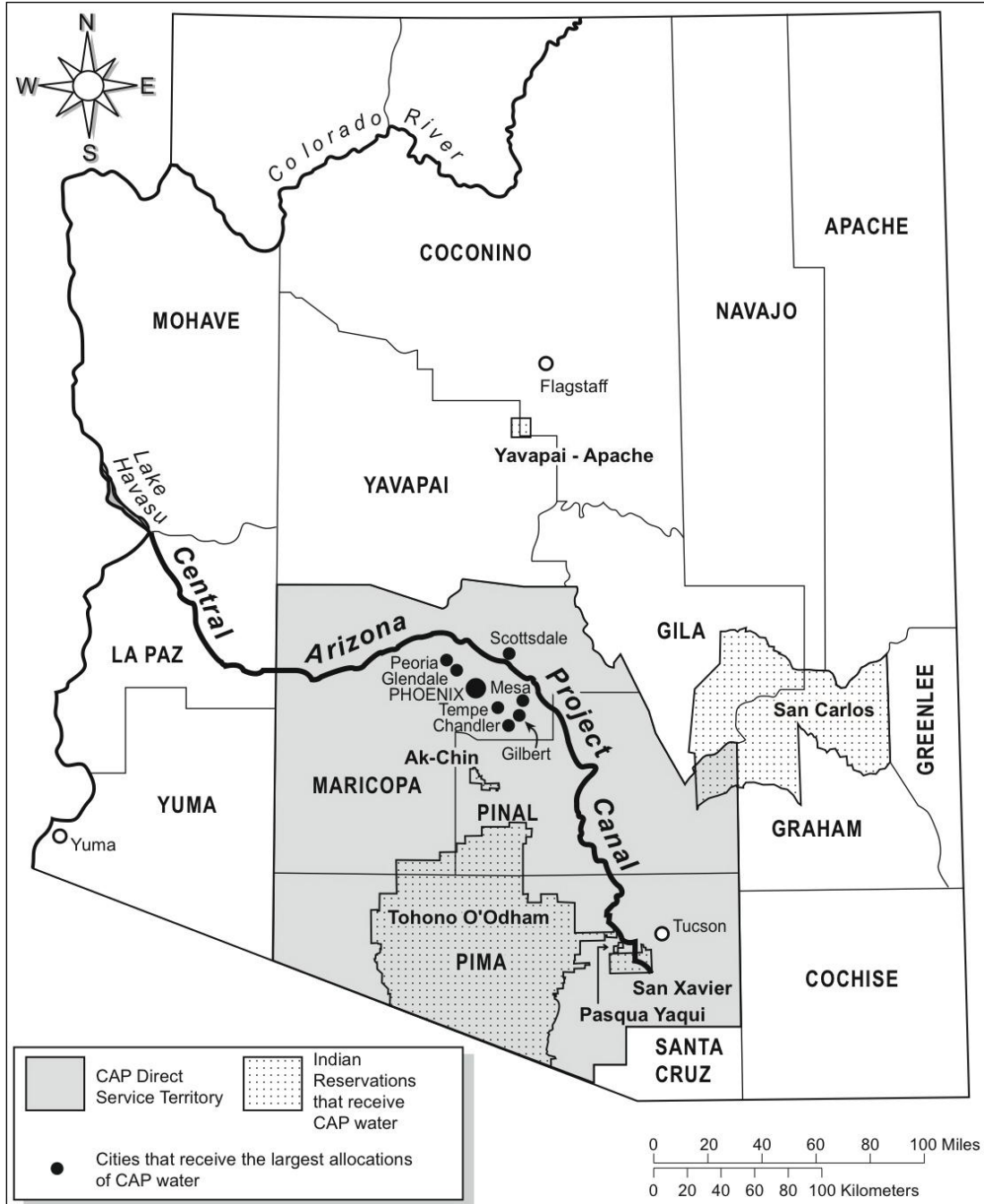


Figure 9. Central Arizona Project (CAP): The canal and area it serves. Reprinted from the Arizona Geographic Alliance, Arizona State University School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, Terry Dorschied (cartographer), retrieved from <http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/CAP.pdf>. Reprinted with permission.

Historically, groundwater has been viewed as separate from surface water and therefore unregulated. People were free to harvest groundwater resources

available under their own property. This approach has caused major issues for places like Arizona which has limited resources and high demand. Some of the negative impacts of overharvesting of groundwater include a drop in water table, soil subsidence and fissuring, and long-term depletion of aquifers. By 1980, the state of Arizona was consuming more than twice the renewable annual supply of water (Gober, 2006). Concern over excessive groundwater extraction grew with road and building damage. This damage was a result of subsidence and aquifer compaction, which reduces overall storage capacity. In the late 1970s, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior put pressure on the state to begin regulating groundwater harvest, otherwise face losing CAP funding (Gober, 2011; Logan, 2006). In response, Arizona passed the Groundwater Management Act (GMA) in 1980.

The GMA identified five Active Management Areas (AMA's), places where groundwater harvesting was heaviest. The areas established in the original 1980 charter include Prescott, Phoenix, Pinal, and Tucson with a fifth, Santa Cruz, established in 1994. The goal of all but the Pinal AMA was to get groundwater pumping to 'safe yield' defined as "when discharge does not exceed recharge" (Sheridan, 2000, p.117) by 2025. In the Pinal AMA, groundwater depletion was to continue so as to preserve agriculture while still reserving a supply in case of future urbanization. The rate of groundwater withdrawal has decreased in all the AMA's since they were established. The Phoenix AMA has achieved safe yield status and the Tucson AMA has come close to reaching this goal but long-term projections suggest safe yield cannot be maintained without further management

actions (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011).

Areas outside of the AMA's face their own challenges as they begin to feel the pressures of growth. Watershed-wide issues are difficult to manage given that "government boundaries rarely match hydrogeographic boundaries" (Water Education Foundation, 2007, p. 16). To manage these areas, the state legislature created the Rural Arizona Watershed Initiative (RWI) in 1999. Under the RWI, 17 watershed groups from rural areas were formed. These groups, with input from citizens and stakeholders, develop management plans for local watershed resources.

***Water conservation efforts.*** Whereas other desert cities such as Tucson have developed an ethos of water conservation, Phoenix's approach to water challenges has focused on increasing supply and reserves (Logan, 2006). When looking at daily per capita usage between 1985 and 2008, Tucson consumes on average about 25% less water than Phoenix with about half of Phoenix's residential water use going to outdoor landscapes (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011). Part of the reason that conservation has not been a priority is that water is comparatively cheap in Arizona. Overall, water rates in the Southwest have been kept low by subsidizing water to encourage agriculture; pumping groundwater is fairly inexpensive due to the low cost of electricity for pumping, which is provisioned specifically for agricultural use by the federal government. Tucson has aggressively implemented block pricing to encourage conservative consumption, but generally speaking, using pricing mechanisms to promote



conservation is both politically and socially challenging (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011).

A regional approach to water conservation and management has been hampered by the fact that there are more than 285 water providers currently in the Sun Corridor (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011). Citing an interview he conducted with geographer Patricia Gober, Ross (2011) illustrates how this kind of fragmented management will further aggravate the disproportionate environmental hardships faced by vulnerable populations. In their interview Gober points out one of the many questions that must be grappled with in saying, “how does the social, political and economic dynamic play out when the first signs of shortage start to appear,” meaning who will be the first to suffer cuts when shortages arise and should prices go up, will water only be available to those who can afford it (Ross, 2011, p.45)?

Water issues and future planning have not received adequate public discussion for several reasons. Professional water managers feel that preparing for future water planning and related issues should be left to professionals and kept out of the public domain. Fearing how it might impact growth and economic development, elected officials and growth advocates have also shied away from public discourse on the matter. And finally, lacking adequate knowledge regarding the true state of Arizona’s water resources and allocation, residents fear that immediate shortages are imminent at the first mention of public water conservation campaigns (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011). According to a study conducted by Arizona State University’s Morrison Institute for Public

Policy (2011), renewable water supplies for the Phoenix-metro area are estimated to be, on average, 2.5-3 MAF per year. Given current pattern of use, excluding commercial agriculture, it's thought that this amount should be able to support a population of 9.5 million residents.

Water is a critical, contested, and complex resource in the Sonoran Desert. There is very little public discussion meaning that many residents are left in the dark as to the true state of water resources in the region. Generally speaking, the culture of water in the region and locally has been to seek out new resources rather than conserve water. As I will outline in the next chapter, this has interesting implications for how simplifiers view their water consumption.

**Foodsheds.** Dating as far back as the early Hohokam, there has been a strong agricultural presence in the bioregion. Because of reliance on large irrigation systems, agriculture in Arizona has traditionally been done on a large scale and consisted of fiber instead of food crops. According to Gober (2006, 118) "as recently as 1975 there was still a significant agricultural presence in the area". But, according to Gober (2005), as urban growth ensues most view cropland as just a holding zone for land until it is urbanized. This is a trend that can be seen nationally as well; sprawl and suburban growth have contributed to loss of farmland and a further reliance on the global food system (Halweil, 2002). Many argue that Phoenix shouldn't be so quick to urbanize agricultural land as it provides a built in buffer for water resources and ignores the growing trend towards sustainable local food systems. Water supplied to agricultural land can be variable, compared to the reliability needed for municipal users, making

agricultural use a good buffer in times of shortage. Currently 77% of water use statewide goes to agriculture, 54% of that to hay, a high water user but low value crop (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2011).

Farmers yearning to protect the region's agricultural heritage have developed creative adaptations to cope with urbanization and the pressure to sell out to development. Reminiscent of the 'dude ranches' of the region's early development, farmers are building their own brand of "agritainment" as farm-themed master-planned communities. Other farms now appeal to the local community for support by offering cooking classes, farm tours, pick-your-own options, and by selling produce at local farmer's markets (Gober, 2006).

As of 2010, there were 15,500 farms in operation in the state totaling about 26.1 million acres of farmland. The top agricultural commodities are lettuce, cotton and hay. Vegetables, hay, cotton and cottonseed are Arizona's top crop exports. Arizona is also a national leader in the production of melons, lettuce, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower and lemons. Arizona's most valuable farm products are dairy goods and cattle with approximately 1 million head of cattle and 18600 milk cows in the state. In Arizona, agriculture is a \$9.2 billion dollar per year industry (Agriculture in the classroom, 2010).

## **Summary**

Touching several states and two countries, the Sonoran Desert Bioregion is an expansive area. The region is primarily desert biome and as such the resident plant and animal populations have many adaptations that allow them to

survive in the dry, arid environment. The region is home to countless species of plants, birds, reptiles, fish and other animals. But, with a rapid rise in human populations, habitat loss and the introduction of non-native species has jeopardized many of the endemic flora and fauna.

Human settlement has a long history in the bioregion dating back to prehistoric Paleo-Indian groups. The great Hohokam people were the first to establish a permanent agricultural center in the region although for reasons unknown, this civilization eventually disappeared. Native populations in surrounding areas also developed semi-agricultural lifestyles. Some of these groups are still present in the region today, most on reservations. These later groups saw their numbers decline dramatically with the onslaught of Spanish and American explorers entering the region in the late 1500s.

European and American interest in the area was driven by the region's mineral richness and agricultural productivity, first as cattle pasture and later for cotton and other crops. With the introduction of the railroad, populations exploded.

The City of Phoenix was developed around the former Hohokam canal system at the confluence of three major rivers. Having secured, at least for a time, such an abundance of water in a region where it is so scarce, the city developed rapidly. Many, ranging from health seekers to vacationers and from the military to young professionals, were drawn by the region's mild winter climate, natural aesthetic and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Farmland was quickly converted to suburb as residents moved to Phoenix and surrounding to escape the densely populated urban centers back home. But a city built on sprawl gave rise to many other problems. Phoenix's urban core is underdeveloped and weak public transportation is inadequate resulting in traffic, long commute times and pollution. Additionally, loss of farmland to population growth poses a barrier to securing a local food system.

Phoenix now also faces water issues given that population has outpaced water resources and conservation efforts are minimal. Groundwater depletion and surface water allocation are both serious concerns. Making matters more challenging is the complex nature of water management in the region.

All of these factors impact the lives of citizens of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion. In the next section, I will analyze data collected from individuals practicing voluntary simplicity in both a communal and non-communal setting. The purpose will be to understand how simplifiers view their consumptive practices and in what ways they attempt to reduce their consumption. Further, using the geographical framework outlined above, I will examine the importance of geography at the scale of bioregion in shaping the way regional simplifiers make consumptive choices.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Results: Sonoran Desert Bioregion**

Don't own so much clutter that you will be relieved to see your house catch fire.

Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Handbook*

This research is comprised of two case studies examining how voluntary simplicity practitioners think about and reduce their consumption and, more importantly, how this relates to place particularly at the scale of bioregion. In the preceding chapter, I presented a profile of the cultural and physical evolution of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion (SDB). In the following discussion of data collected from simplifiers living within this area, I have reflected on how their choices relate to the region's cultural and physical development. Data was collected from intentional community residents during a weeklong stay from November 2-9, 2011 at which time I lived at the community. From November 9-15, 2011 I conducted research with urban center residents.

#### **Urban Center Residents**

The purpose of this research was to understand how bioregional characteristics shape the way people think about and practice voluntary simplicity. This chapter presents data collected from in-depth interviews and a

focus group conducted with simplifiers living in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion. These simplifiers were living independently in and around the City of Phoenix. By independent I do not mean that they strictly lived alone but instead that they were not living in a structured or formal intentional community. Data was collected over the course of a two-week period in November 2011, except for one phone interview that was conducted in December due to scheduling conflicts. Interviews were, when possible, conducted at participants' homes and when this was not feasible another in-person venue was chosen or they were conducted over the phone. The focus group was conducted in a conference room at a hotel in Phoenix chosen based on its centralized location. For this discussion, participants have been given fictitious names to maintain their anonymity.

Interview and focus group responses were reviewed and coded based on themes that developed in the responses themselves. All participants were asked to define simplicity so that further questioning could work from a shared understanding of the terms being used. Participants were also asked a series of questions about how they began practicing simplicity and their motivation for doing so. I have included participant definitions of simplicity in this discussion as well as an overview of when and why participants started practicing simplicity. Otherwise, the remaining themes presented here were drawn from participant responses to the questioners included in Appendixes D and E. Themes do not correspond to a specific protocol question, for example no question was asked regarding water use, instead participants brought up water use in response to general question about consumption. The analysis begins with an introduction to

each of the participants to establish a context and background for their individual simplicity practices. Using the bioregional ethnography previously developed, I have examined participants' responses at the bioregional scale to gain insight into how the characteristics that help define the Sonoran Desert Bioregion have shaped resident simplifiers' consumptive choices.

Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants, four of whom also participated in a focus group. Participants were recruited from several municipalities within the Phoenix metropolitan area, living in urban or suburban communities. All participants were female. About half of the participants were between the ages of 18-32, the other half between the ages of 47-65 with only one participant falling between the ages of 33-46. Most participants were Caucasian, two of the seven were of some other ethnicity, one of Asian descent and one of Arab descent.

**Participant introductions.** Shereen is an Arizona native. She grew up in a rural area of Scottsdale, a northeastern suburb of Phoenix. Attending high school at a bordering school situated on a working cattle ranch, Shereen later went on to complete a Bachelor's and some coursework towards a Master's degree. Prior to retirement, she was employed for many years in the library of a local university. Shereen keeps "bootleg livestock" (illegal goats, chickens and ducks) for their eggs and milk at her home in Tempe, another city in the Phoenix metro area (Shereen, personal communication, November 12, 2011). She has also recently converted a hot tub to an in-ground aquaponics operation for raising tilapia, using the fecal (nutrient) rich water for irrigation. Shereen has



implemented permaculture principles and energy saving devices throughout her property as well.

Carol is also another Phoenix native. She has spent the majority of her life in the area except for the years she spent in Flagstaff, AZ obtaining a Bachelor's degree in aquatic biology. Employed as the education program manger for a local chapter of a national non-profit that centers recycling, Carol is both very knowledgeable and passionate about recycling and waste reduction. Carol shares her home in South Phoenix with her mother. Here, Carol is in charge of household decisions and has incorporated sustainable choices into the household routine (composting, gardening, and purchasing from a vegetable co-op).

Also an Arizona native, Sharon says that a number have factors have kept her in the area including family and personal connections and the weather. Sharon has a teaching certificate as well as a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and a Master's in curriculum instruction. Employed in the education sector as both a teacher and in curriculum development, Sharon also writes grant application responses. Sharon lives with her husband on the outskirts of Phoenix.

Sam moved to Phoenix for work from Houston 14 years ago. Sam lived in Colorado prior to Houston, and it was clear from our interview that she was very passionate about regional issues in the American West, particularly water. She currently lives in Scottsdale, AZ. Sam has completed a BA degree and now works as program manager, specializing in building sustainable communities, for

a regional environmental non-profit that focuses on community-based growth management and conservation.

Jane also came to Phoenix 14 years ago for work and fell in love with the climate. Jane moved to Arizona from Chicago, IL, and has also lived in metropolitan cities along both the East and West Coasts including San Francisco and Las Angeles, CA. With a Bachelor's in business, Jane spent most of her life working in the banking sector. Her move to Arizona marked the start of a new career, eventually landing her as the executive director of another local environmental non-profit. Jane's non-profit focuses on providing educational resources, particularly on the topic of gardening, that facilitate sustainable urban living in the desert Southwest. Her home is nestled in an historic area of downtown Phoenix. With a focus on drought tolerant and native species, Jane's landscape demonstrates her enthusiasm for regionally appropriate gardening techniques.

Sarah has lived in Arizona for 13 years. Born and raised in Minneapolis, MN, she has also lived in Las Angeles, California, Maui, Hawaii, and Chicago, IL. Sarah has completed some college coursework in Journalism. Sarah is an entrepreneur and environmental activist. In addition to her work as an environmental consultant, freelance environmental writer, PR consultant with a focus on "greening" and indoor air quality/green building educator, she has sat on numerous committees. Most recently, Sarah started an environmental social networking organization that conducts monthly networking events. Although she has always been sustainability minded, Sarah's pursuit of environmental quality

standards as a career and cause evolved out of her family's experience living in a 'sick house', a home with poor indoor air quality and the toll that it took on their health.

Drawn to the desert because of her ethnic heritage, Heidi came to Phoenix from Ohio 13 years ago. Her impression of Phoenix was that it was a large city surrounded by parks, outdoor recreation options being a major draw for her. Heidi studied herbalism and nutrition, completing an Associate of Arts degree. Having also completed certification as a desert landscaper, Heidi works as a horticulturist for a local nature non-profit. In addition, Heidi enjoys such hobbies as candle making and oil painting. She is also an avid composter and practices vermiculture, or composting in earthworm bins.

There are some interesting trends that should be outlined here. Participants were professionals in either the environmental non-profit or education sectors or some combination thereof. All had completed some higher education with most having a Bachelor's degree or higher. Participants had also received other kinds of certification and specialized training such as Master Gardener certification, desert landscaping certification and teaching certification. These findings are consistent with the literature on simplifiers (Johns, 2009). And finally, residence trends are illustrate Gober's (2006) findings that Phoenix transplants have strong ties to the Midwest and California.

**Defining simplicity.** Participants view simplicity as something larger than themselves. Rather than viewing their consumption as occurring in a vacuum,

they are aware of the larger system within which their consumption is embedded. This was exhibited in the ways they chose to define and practice simplicity. For example, during our interview Sharon defined simplicity as, “consumption that’s healthy for the environment and people and the world” (Sharon, personal communication, December 2, 2011). Similarly, Carol noted in our interview that she saw simplicity as a “combination of people, profit and planet” (Carol, personal communication, November 10, 2011). In private interviews, both Carol and Sam described living simply as ‘holistic’. Sarah also articulated this view when she stated during our interview that simplicity was “the synergy of everything” and that it was “not just about products and people who can afford those products” (Sarah, personal communication, November 13, 2011). From these statements, it’s clear that participants view their consumptive choices as impacting the world around them.

Participants felt that practicing simplicity meant balancing and/or reducing inputs and outputs, one manifestation of which was by reducing consumption. For example, for Heidi, simplicity is when “the input can support the output” or when the “input/output balance each other out” (Heidi, personal communication, November 14, 2011). For Shereen this meant reducing consumption and practicing reuse both through the purchase of used rather than new goods and repurposing items on her own property. During the focus group discussion, both Carol and Jane echoed this view of simplicity with Jane saying simplifying meant “requiring less” (Focus group, November 11, 2011). These comments illustrate

that participants view consumption as one step in a larger system, a system that relies on inputs from a finite pool of resources.

Other statements indicate that simplifiers' choice to simplify is eco-centered, or driven by environmental concern. Jane and Carol both described living simply as leaving "less of an impact" or being "low impact" (Focus group, November 11, 2011). Referencing a framework used to assess the ability of ecological systems to meet human consumption (Rees, 1992), Jane and Sam discussed 'footprint' during interviews and in the focus group, stating that living simply meant "reducing footprint" or leaving a "small footprint" (Jane, personal communication, November 12, 2011; Sam, personal communication, November 10, 2011; Focus group, November 11, 2011).

**Origins and motivation.** Beyond just trying to reduce consumption, simplifiers are careful and calculated when they are making consumptive choices. A number of questions arise. How much will I consume? What will I consume and is there a better alternative? How will I procure these resources? How much waste will there be once I'm done consuming and how will I dispose of that waste? These are all questions that simplifiers must deal with on a daily basis and they continuously make these decisions out of passion for the cause and a sense of moral obligation. Sharon explained to me that living simply brought meaning to her life and that she was "living what [she] believes" (Sharon, personal communication, December 2, 2011). Heidi also noted during our interview that what motivated her to simplify was that it was "the right thing to do" (Heidi, personal communication, November 14, 2011).

During in-depth interviews, participants were asked how they were first introduced to simplicity practices. Three of the seven respondents recalled that simplicity had always been a part of their lives. Both Heidi and Sarah said they had been raised with simplicity practices. Sam recalled that her family had always composted, gardened, and were mindful of water usage.

**Simplicity and education.** Those that were not introduced to simplicity at home were exposed to these practices in an educational setting such as college or classes offered on simplicity topics and practices. Carol was first introduced to simplicity ideas in college, although, as I will discuss later, she had already formed ideas about reducing waste production after a speaker came to her elementary class. Jane learned about simplicity practices while attending a Master Gardener program. Both Shereen and Sharon experienced less structured but still education/information based introductions to simplicity through environmental literature such as books and magazines. In the same vein, Carol and Heidi both made a connection between their choice to begin living simply and the experience of receiving formal education at the time.

Participants made a strong association between practicing simplicity and education or knowledge. Sam observed Scottsdale to be a more sustainable city than Phoenix or other neighboring cities. She attributed this, in part, to her perception that Scottsdale residents were more educated than their Phoenixian counterparts. Similarly, other participants felt that education and information was integral to raising simplicity awareness amongst. Participants were also eager to point to information and classes on simplicity subjects offered by local

organizations as key resources for Phoenician residents wanting to practice simplicity.

**Waste production.** Participants were concerned about the waste that their consumption produced. Sharon expressed concern that there was an excess of waste and that landfills would soon be inadequate to support human waste production. Heidi claimed that seeing waste around her inspired her to begin practicing simplicity. Similarly, Carol recalled a guest speaker in elementary school discussing the 'waste stream'. For her, this invoked the image of a "river of garbage", at which point she made the connection between consumption and waste believing that the only cure would be reducing consumption.

Participant responses, both in focus group discussion and interview questions, centered on three themes: creating less waste by either actually producing less or by dealing with one's own waste; recycling waste; and reusing waste. Generally, participants found waste mitigation to be one of the easiest aspects of practicing simplicity. Participants often considered the waste outcomes when purchasing products or engaging in daily activities. In order to avoid creating waste they would often opt for non-disposable items, for example Sharon preferred washable cloth napkins to disposable paper towels or Carol would bring reusable containers to restaurants for leftovers to avoid Styrofoam.

Participants also discussed measures taken to deal with their own waste. Almost all of the participants composted their food waste or had composted at

one point in their lives. While participants agreed that composting at home was a easy task for them, several felt that the city would benefit from a municipal composting program. Five of the seven participants specifically stated that they recycled through a municipal recycling program. Most felt that recycling was easy, but Carol, who worked in the recycling industry, felt that there were some challenges to recycling in the Phoenix-metro area. In particular, she noted that recycling programs were ineffective in areas with an ethnically diverse population, citing a lack of culturally sensitive and multilingual outreach materials. Shereen and Heidi both indicated that they were practicing reuse rather than direct product disposal. Shereen also participated in community reuse forums such as Freecycle.com and Craigslist.org; websites on which individuals can exchange used goods either at a reduced rate or through gifting. Overall, engaging in some form waste reduction, either composting, recycling or reuse, was the most universally practiced form of simplicity among participants.

**Resource consumption.** Based on interview and focus group responses, I found that participants were typically focused on their consumption of water, fuel and energy. One of the most discussed themes was transportation and although participants' reasons for wanting to reduce driving were not specifically addressed, I assume it is due to a combination of the following factors: reducing fuel consumption and associated emissions, improving personal health and the costs associated with private automotive use. Therefore, fuel consumption has included in the discussion of resource reduction. For each resource, consumption patterns fell into one of two categories. Participants would either find ways to



reduce or eliminate their consumption of the resource or they would find alternative sources or ways of consuming that made less of an overall impact on the environment. The flowchart in Figure 10 illustrates the flows of resource reduction.

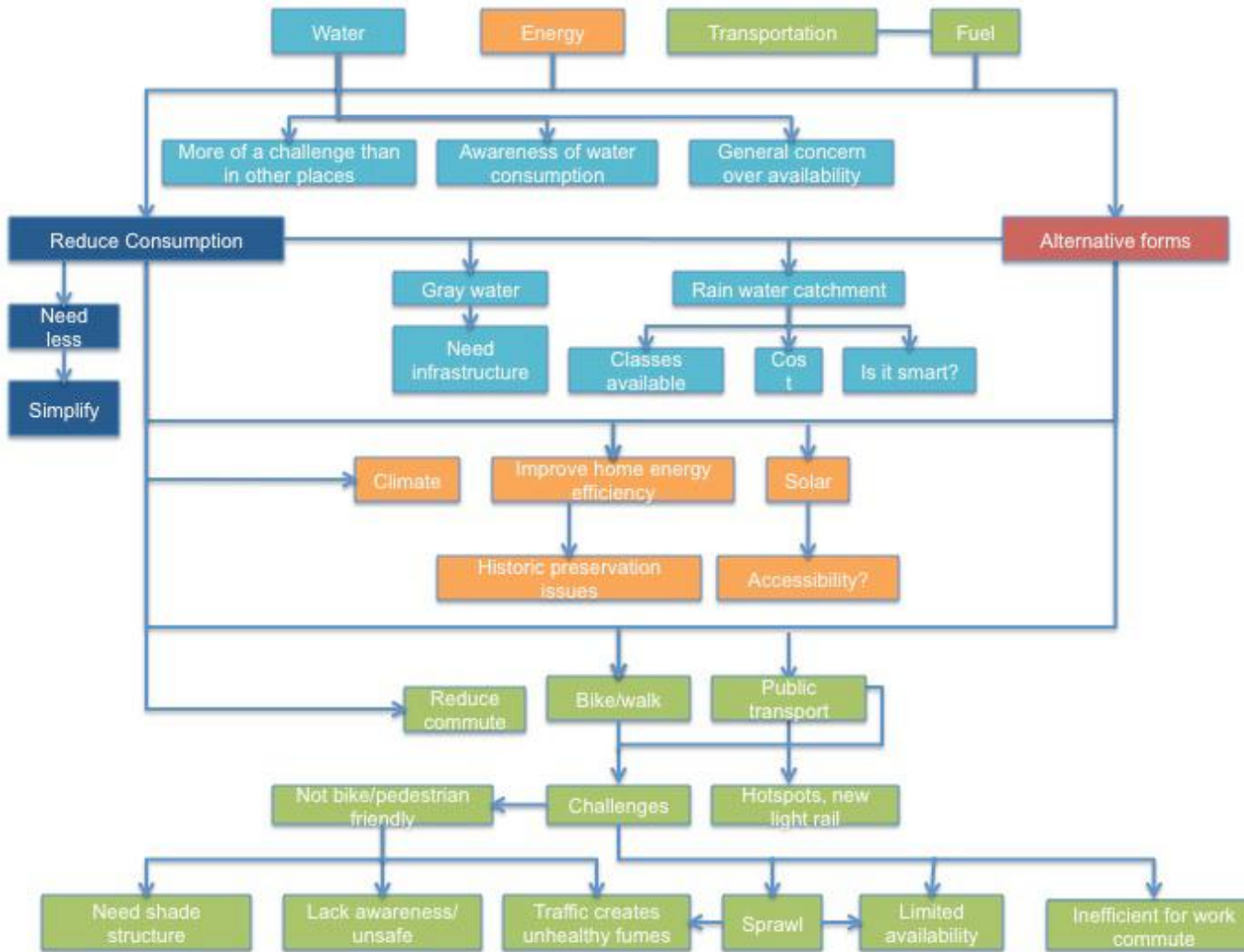


Figure 10. Flowchart Depicting Potential Alternatives to Traditional Resource Consumption.

**Water.** Given that participants were living in a desert environment, water consumption and conservation was a major concern. For example, Sarah noted, “Arizona faces a different set of challenges such as water” (Sarah, personal communication, November 13, 2011). This sentiment was echoed by Sam who said that “water [is one of] the biggest challenges for the West” (Sam, personal communication, November 10, 2011). Participants felt that the desert climate necessitated higher-than-normal water use. Shereen, for example, found it difficult to maintain a summer garden because of extreme temperatures and a lack of rainfall. Sam also felt that summer heat led to excessive use and costly water bills. During both the focus group and in private interviews, participants were asked what resource they were most concerned with as Phoenix residents. All responded that they were concerned about water in addition to other resources.

Despite the fact that participants were in agreement that water was a resource of concern, few specifically mentioned reducing water consumption in their responses to interview and focus group questions. This is not to say residents were not reducing their consumption of water, or that they were even consuming at the same level as non-simplifiers. In fact one might assume participants were consuming at a lower rate given that several had or planned to convert their lawns to edible landscapes as with Shereen (Figures 11 and 12), pools to gardens as with Carol, or in the example of Jane’s lawn xeriscaped with

native and drought tolerant plants. Still, it is interesting to note that only one participant *directly* mentioned reducing water consumption during our interview.



*Figure 11.* Hydroponic edible garden grown supported by an aquaponics system fed by water from a tilapia pond (shown in Figure 12). Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.



*Figure 12.* Hot tub converted to tilapia aquaculture pond by participant Shereen. Part of an aquaponics system in which water and excrement is filtered out and used to grow food and herbs (shown in Figure 11). Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

Participants did repeatedly address rainwater harvesting as well as gray water use as forms of resource supplementation. Carol, for example, was already practicing rainwater harvesting at her home. While both gray water and rainwater harvesting can be considered conservation efforts, and therefore reduce consumption of ground and surface water resources, neither practice necessarily implies a reduction in overall water consumption. For participants though, both rainwater and gray water harvesting posed their own unique challenges. Heidi pointed out that implementing rainwater harvesting was often cost prohibitive due to the equipment needed. During the focus group several participants expressed an interest in gray water use, but felt the city lacked the infrastructure needed to implement such a practice. Additionally, there seemed to be some ambiguity among participants as to whether such installments were permitted by code.

Overall, participants did not perceive there to be much awareness regionally about the need for water conservation. Shereen, a lifelong Phoenix resident, felt that “awareness of water issues is not what it used to be” and that in the past “a dirty car was a sign of social consciousness” (Focus group, November 11, 2011).

Clearly, participants share an awareness that they are living in a desert, an environment where water is severely restricted at times. Still, as we have seen, reducing water consumption per se, was not a high priority as most participants, instead, viewed supplementation in the form of gray water and rainwater as a reasonable solution. This inconsistency is almost to be expected. My previous research uncovered that very little public discussion about water

conservation or the state of water in the region has taken place. In fact, water managers and politicians have intentionally kept residents in the dark on such matters. Water management in the region is also extremely complicated. Therefore, both the physical reality of water in the desert and historically complex attempts at water management have shaped the way participants think about this resource.

**Energy.** Energy consumption was another prominent theme discussed by participants during both the focus group and in-depth interviews. Six of the seven participants said that they were concerned about energy consumption. Some said they were trying to reduce energy consumption generally whereas others discussed energy saving activities or interests of theirs. For example Heidi mentioned solar expansion in Arizona several times during our interview and Jane discussed retrofitting her historic home with energy conservation measures. Interestingly, the desert climate was viewed as both a blessing and a curse in terms of its effects on energy consumption. Both Sam and Sharon commented that summer months were so hot that they required excessive energy use for cooling homes. But, mild winters allowed them to forego home heating. Sharon also pointed out that because of abundant year-round sunlight she were able to dry her clothes outside rather than use an electric dryer. She felt this allowed her to feel more self-reliant. Both Carol and Jane had either already started projects retrofitting their homes to improve energy efficiency or hoped to make such improvements in the future. Both Heidi and Carol felt that the region should be taking bigger steps towards solar energy.

**Fuel.** The most universally addressed theme amongst participants was transportation. Participants repeatedly commented both in interviews and in the focus group that they would like to reduce personal automotive use. As discussed in the introduction to this section, one outcome of reducing automotive use would be reducing fuel consumption and associated emissions. In order to reduce their driving, participants outlined several potential solutions that equated to eliminating fuel consumption or finding alternatives to traditional use patterns. Some participants attempted to walk or ride a bicycle instead of driving. Most often this would be done for less important tasks, for example both Heidi and Jane would ride a bicycle to run errands, rather than as a feasible means of getting to work. Sharon spoke about relocating closer to the central part of town to eliminate or reduce her drive time for shopping and recreational activities. She had already begun working from home to reduce her commute, this after several years spent bicycling to work.

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction for the public transportation system claiming it was inadequate. Only two participants used public transport regularly, one out of necessity due to an inability to drive, the other because she lived conveniently near the new light rail system. The participant who was unable to drive would more often walk or use dial-a-ride, a service provided by public transportation for individuals needing special assistance.

While many participants were working towards finding alternatives to car travel, it was certainly one of the most challenging simplicity practices. As previously discussed, personal automobiles are an assumed and necessary part

of the Phoenician landscape. This is in large part due to the urban sprawl that has been such a defining characteristic of Phoenix's growth. Participants often identified sprawl as a key reason why they were unable to walk or ride a bicycle instead of driving. Earlier research indicated that sprawl and associated traffic are negatively impacting Phoenix's air quality. Participants expressed concern over air quality and increased exposure to car fumes should they opt to walk or ride a bicycle instead of drive.

Participants also felt that Phoenix was not bicycle or pedestrian friendly. Jane felt that since Phoenix had never developed a strong bicycle culture, motorists were not accustomed to sharing the road with cyclists. Several participants said that bicycling in Phoenix was downright dangerous. Several also noted that high summer temperatures make commuting by foot or bicycle challenging. I suspect this is particularly significant for those working in more formal professions, lacking access to showers or other services in the workplace. In addition, Jane noted that the extreme sun that shines over Phoenix most of the year necessitates shade structures or foliage to make streets more walkable. My research also pointed out this fact, uncovering that little investment has been made in such things as shade structures since the city planning centered on the use of automobiles.

Likewise public transportation, having received little attention from planners until recent years, does not offer a much better alternative. Aside from Carol, who lived close to the light rail and was able to use it on occasion, participants did not feel that public transportation service was adequate enough



to be considered a viable means of transportation, despite having hotspots of service. Perhaps in the coming years, as the light rail line is expanded this will change.

**Food production and procurement.** Food was one of the most frequently discussed topics during interviews and the focus group. Participants discussed food production and procurement and how these related to information and educational opportunities. More than half of participants were actively growing at least some portion of their own food. Primarily this meant growing produce although Shereen was also raising livestock such as chickens and goats (Figure 13) for eggs and milk. Food production occurred in several settings including home gardens and community gardens in both urban and suburban landscapes.



*Figure 13.* “Bootleg livestock” raised by participant Shereen at her urban home. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos

Participants also discussed matters regarding food procurement. Those that were not producing their own food attempted to procure food from local sources. For example, Sharon shopped at the local farmer's market, the Phoenix Public Market, and Carol purchased through a produce cooperative. These venues provide participants with a way to support local agriculture while obtaining food that they viewed as healthier and more environmentally sustainable. This also empowered participants by allowing them to make informed decisions about their food consumption. For example, by purchasing food at the farmer's market, Sharon was able to meet the farmers that were producing her food and "see the whole philosophy by speaking with the farmers." Carol, who also shopped at the downtown farmer's market and purchased through a produce cooperative, valued these resources because she had limited access to fresh, local or organically grown food in her residential community. This suggests that, for participants, shopping at the market transcended the usual grocery store experience. By creating a space where patrons can connect with growers, the market empowers patrons by allowing them to feel that they are also connecting with the source of their food. Access to locally grown produce also played a role in their preference to shop at the farmer's market.

***Building the foodshed.*** While conducting research, I identified several organizations working to rebuild the local food system. Information about these organizations was collected through interviews with representatives, organization websites, and from participant responses. The Phoenix Public Market, a project of the non-profit Community Food Connections, is bringing together local farmers

and Phoenix residents while providing fresh produce to residents who might not otherwise have access to local food (C. Gentry, personal communication, November 13, 2011). A problem facing low-income urbanites all over the country is that they have been left out of the global long-distance food system (Halweil, 2002). That is to say, fresh, locally grown produce is often exported and rarely available in low-income city neighborhoods if produce is available at all. One of the biggest challenges the Phoenix Public Market has faced has been getting small producers involved “because the commercial distribution had a tight lock on the region’s farms” (Ross, 2011, p. 226). Direct marketing schemes such as farmer’s markets and CSA’s (community-supported agriculture) are the easiest part of rebuilding a foodshed because they “operate under the radar of the conventional food chain” (Halweil, 2002, p. 40). As discussed in the previous section, several participants purchased food at the Phoenix Public Market.

Participants cited access to information as playing a pivotal role in their ability to simplify as expressed through food consumption and production. The Valley Permaculture Alliance (VPA) is one of many organizations that provide educational resources to residents, such as gardening and rainwater harvest workshops. In addition, they offer networking opportunities through an online forum boasting almost 7000 members (<http://www.phoenixpermaculture.org/>). The forum offers a place for people to connect and exchange ideas and information. Participants felt that the region’s unique geography made gardening challenging. Organizations such as the VPA or the county extension office proved to be excellent sources of information to help growers adapt practices to

the desert climate. Informally, information was often garnered through outlets such as online discussion forums in which simplifiers could share their knowledge and experiences. Although climate was identified as posing a challenge to food production, having access to information was more significant because it assisted them in selecting regionally appropriate crops and growing techniques.

While the community garden movement has been growing in Phoenix, efforts to transform many of the city's blighted and vacant lots into urban gardens have met with resistance. With 60% of the lots being city owned, activists have lobbied the mayor's office for the use of this space (Ross, 2011). The city has resisted allowing such activities due to concerns over how willingly gardens would be given up if and when the lots are cited for more economically promising development (K. Barrett, personal communication, November 11, 2011). Organizations such as A.R.T.S. (an acronym for Adaptive Reuse of Temporary Space) have adopted creative solutions to these challenges. For example they developed the Valley of the Sunflowers, a collaborative effort with a local Biosciences High School that introduces students to gardening through growing sunflowers for biodiesel production. The Roosevelt Grow House (Figure 14) is also an attempt at local food production, providing a community garden space in the front yard of an urban artists' collective and boutique.



*Figure 14.* Roosevelt Grow House community garden. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

In suburban areas, Harvest for Humanity provides an excellent example of how residents are supporting local food security. Harvest for Humanity (Figure 15) is a non-profit urban farm that grows food for local food banks. Food bank recipients are encouraged to participate in the gardens. Community members, schools, businesses and other organizations can also support the project in a number of ways ranging from financial contributions to sharing home grown excess, to volunteering hours (D. Philips, personal communication, November 10, 2011). These isolated efforts, while slowly gaining support, have yet to shape the mainstream culture of Phoenix.





*Figure 15.* Harvest for Humanity founder Denise Philips standing in front of row crops on the farm. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

**Time and money, the limiting factors.** Overwhelmingly, participants listed cost and time as the two primary inhibitors to simple living. During introductions at the focus group, Shereen detailed for others the various projects she was working on at her home (livestock, gardening and other green renovations) but made a point to say “I’m retired and so I have the luxury and the time to spend which makes a big difference” (Focus group, November 11, 2011). Participants said plainly that simple living was expensive and that they perceived money to be a limiting factor. Although many felt that the long-term payoff outweighed the initial investment, cost seemed to play a larger role in how they were able to manifest simplicity in their own lives. For example, Heidi explained that she would like to do more rain harvesting as a means for reducing water consumption but felt that she could not afford the necessary equipment. Carol

wanted to transform her pool into a garden space with livestock but because of the cost was unable to do so. Sharon supported the local food system by buying organic and locally produced food but felt that in order to do so, she spends a great deal more. Similarly, Shereen, who does grow her own produce and livestock, noted that she would not be able to afford the quality of food that she produces at home. Even still, she noted that the livestock she raises carry a heavy financial burden.

Participants also perceived living simply to be a time consuming lifestyle. They felt that they did not have adequate time, due to work and family obligations, to engage in simple living practices. Examples of activities that were perceived as time-intensive included preparing their meals at home instead of dining out or growing their own produce and livestock.

**Community and culture.** Community was identified as integral to practicing simplicity. Simplicity was not perceived to be a mainstay of Phoenician culture, that is to say, it participants did not perceive most citizens to practice or value its beliefs. Participants felt that having a strong social network that valued simplicity was important to their own practice. Participants found connecting with likeminded individuals to be both inspiring and motivating and, as already noted, allowed them to share information and pool resources. Emphasis was placed on their ability to foster community through formal organizations, such as the VPA or community gardens, because simplifiers felt that there were conditions in Phoenix that inhibited community building.

Participants cited the city's expansive sprawl as an inhibitor to building community. Simplifiers also felt that because so many Phoenix residents were transplants it was challenging to develop a strong sense of community and a culture of sustainability. They attributed this to several factors. Because the transplant population is also highly transient (Gober, 2010), participants felt that most residents lacked a strong connection to place and therefore were not vested in creating community. Participants also felt that transplanted residents lacked appreciation for the desert landscape resulting in unrealistic expectations of the landscape and insufficient concern for its preservation. These findings are congruent with prior research (Gober, 2006; Logan; 2006; Ross, 2012). Several participants also echoed the sentiment that for many, simplicity posed a challenge because it required that people change old habits and perceptions.

What is more telling, perhaps, is that participants offered little commentary regarding the city and region's ethnic diversity. Questions about local culture often elicited evasive responses from simplifiers. During an interview conducted with a local non-profit, I asked the respondent to speak about the local culture of sustainability. The respondent's remark was insightful, "You mean SB 1070?" (J. McDonald, personal communication, November 10, 2011). This respondent was referring to a highly controversial piece of legislation and anti-illegal immigration measure that had been recently passed by the state. It became apparent that participants interpreted 'culture' to mean 'ethnicity' and had thusly been exercising caution.



Two respondents did make comments pertaining to ethnicity. They asserted that foreign immigrants did not prioritize environmental preservation. Sam attributed this to the perception that socio-economic concerns took precedence; immigrants were preoccupied meeting basic needs and “illegals” would “trash the desert” on the trip across the border (Sam, personal communication, November 10, 2011). The Carol felt that immigrants wanted to avoid drawing attention to themselves and were therefore hesitant to get involved in environmental issues (Carol, personal communication, November 10, 2011).

**Summary.** Participants define simplicity in terms of their consumption and waste. By reducing consumption and waste, simplifiers are trying to diminish the negative impacts they have on the environment. A strong association is made between consumptive choices and their relationship to larger systems of consumption, production, and disposal. While participants view practicing simplicity as also contributing to social sustainability, or having human social impacts, these impacts are secondary to the eco-centered motivation that drives their choice to simplify.

Participants identified water as a regional challenge given the desert environment. Yet, despite acknowledging water scarcity concerns, participants did not express a greater concern for water than other resources mentioned. In other words water did not rank more prominently in their simplicity practices than energy consumption despite greater concern for water as a resource. Whereas energy and fuel consumption were often reduced, water was supplemented with

more sustainable sources. Participants discussed gray water and rain water as potential supplementation options, but these options were also cost prohibitive.

Finding alternative forms of transportation was a salient feature of participant's simplicity practices; it also proved to be one of the more difficult aspects of their lifestyle. Historically, Phoenix has been known for its sprawl and car-centered lifestyle. Little investment has been made in improving the walkability of city streets or in building a strong public transit infrastructure (Gober, 2006; Ross, 2012). Similarly, little effort has been made to coordinate employment opportunities with residential patterns (Gober, 2006). Although participants acknowledged that public transportation was inadequate, the focus of their efforts to reduce car travel was on increasing travel by bicycle. Participants agreed that sprawl, safety and climate all deterred them from bicycling regularly.

Food production and procurement were prominent topics of interest amongst simplifiers. Those that were able produced a portion of their own food while others focused energy on supporting the foodshed through purchasing locally grown produce. As noted in Chapter 4, Phoenix and surrounding areas have been suffering a great loss of farmland to growth and development. This has jeopardized the health of the foodshed. In addition, because of the hot arid climate, food producers face a unique set of challenges when choosing what to grow. Participants' manifestation of simplicity through food choices signifies a bioregional awareness. Not only did simplifiers express concern over building

their foodshed, but those attempting to grow their own food also realize the challenges they face and are grateful for local resources, such as the VPA.

Participants felt that social networks were important to practicing simplicity. Experiencing a strong sense of community tied to place was equally important. Simplifiers were sensitive to the fact that Phoenix's development as a sprawling city of transplants has impacted residents' ability to connect on a meaningful scale. In order to overcome these barriers, simplifiers have, in some instances, turned to virtual communities that allow them to connect with other simplifiers in a way that transcends physical space and locale. While participants were able to identify features of the physical landscape that influenced how they manifested simplicity, products of the built and cultural environments played a more significant role, with transportation systems and food having the highest priority.

Time and money posed significant challenges to participants' ability to practice simplicity. Reducing resource consumption, for example water and energy usage, constituted a significant portion of participants' simplicity efforts. In order to do so, participants sought to implement changes that facilitate a scaling down at the personal and household level. Examples often sighted by participants include harvesting solar energy, gray water or rainwater, but they found such home improvements to be costly as well as time consuming. Additionally, other simplicity practices, such as growing one's own food or travel by bicycle rather than car, were limited because of time constraints.

In the following section I will discuss and analyze the research conducted with simplifiers living in an intentional community in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion. I will explore if and how these simplifiers, living in a rural setting, experience place differently from those living non-communally in an urban environment. More importantly, I will discuss how the communal environment impacts their simplicity practice.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods*

## **Intentional Community**

I conducted research at Wind Spirit Community, an intentional community located in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion (SDB), in November of 2011. The purpose of this research was to determine if people living communally had a different experience of place than those living non-communally when both groups resided in the same bioregion. Did these groups define and practice simplicity in the same way and did these similarities or differences relate to the environment in which they lived? Specifically, I wanted to understand what, if any, role the infrastructure and social network provided by the community played in supporting simplicity efforts. Wind Spirit is located about 90 miles outside of Phoenix, the nearest town; Globe, AZ is approximately 20 miles away. I spent seven days living at Wind Spirit during which time I conducted structured in-depth interviews, informal interviews, focus group interviews and participant observation including participating in the community's weekly meeting, quarterly yoga retreat, work projects, weekly sauna and dance. What follows is a summary and analysis of the data collected during that stay.

**Community history and description.** Wind Spirit Community, established in 1996, is a registered Arizona non-profit corporation. The community currently has four formal members as well as non-member residents (eight at the time of research) and other temporary visitors, the details will be discussed later in this chapter. Only one of

the six founding members, Roger, still lives at Wind Spirit. Of the other core members, two passed away while living at the community. Another two have moved on to follow other interests. The final core member is now pursuing a musical career outside of the community but is still active in community affairs. According to Roger, prior to Wind Spirit, the property had been home to the Christmas Star intentional community. Wind Spirit's founders purchased the property from the owner who had taken over after Christmas Star disbanded. Attempts find information about Christmas Star Community turned up very little other than a short entry in the 1990/1991 Intentional Communities Directory. Roger explained to me that Wind Spirit purchased the land with the hopes of creating a community where residents could live communally, simply and inexpensively (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011). There was also a spiritual component and, in the early years, a focus on vegetarianism although there are currently more meat-eaters than vegetarians residing at the community. The vision and mission of Wind Spirit are formally stated on the website as follows:

- To conserve and responsibly manage the land and its resources, so that they will be improved and not diminished; and will be available to the people of the future.
- To create a viable alternative community that promotes simple living and allows for economic diversity.
- To nurture an environment that emphasizes positive human interaction, of mental, emotional and spiritual growth.
- To develop an educational component within the community to share our

mission through workshops, retreats and internships.

([http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/ws\\_overview.htm](http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/ws_overview.htm))

When the community was first forming, the initial buy-in was \$1000-\$6500. Due to financial strain, they did very little screening of new members early on. According to Roger, many people came to Wind Spirit embracing the idea of community living but found they were not suited to that lifestyle. Roger categorized many of their visitors as 'community hoppers' or people looking for a community experience who move from one community to the next with no more than a brief stint at each. While this in some ways challenges community building, members still found the interaction and variety of people beneficial.

**Site description; getting the lay of the land.** Wind Spirit comprises 16 acres in rural Arizona. Located at 2750 feet in elevation, Wind Spirit is situated in a narrow valley surrounded by mountains in the Arizona Uplands region of the SDB, about eight miles from the Gila River. The land around Wind Spirit consists mostly of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, State Land Trust, National Forest and San Carlos Apache Indian Lands as well as some privately owned properties.

The community extends along the north side of the dirt road on which it is situated. There is a main entrance near the start of the property line and an additional entrance with an enclosed parking area further down the road. Guests enter through a large, decoratively painted wooden fence gate at the main entrance. Upon entering, the first building encountered is the communal kitchen and living area. The property stretches northward and westward from the kitchen. The northern rim of the property is

lined with mountains and the community is terraced upwards from the entrance towards these peaks.

There are two main pathways for foot traffic carved out from the entrance, one heading towards the northwestern corner of the property, another extending northeastwards up the slope, running parallel to the eastern property line. Along the northeastern path there are housing structures as well as bathing, toilet and laundry facilities. The northwestern path passes additional housing and campsites ending at Bus Village. Food production facilities are also located along the northwestern path. A few steps from the main kitchen, the library sits adjacent to the gift shop. There are countless other footpaths carved into the hillside. There is no outdoor lighting except for the occasional motion light fixed to one of the permanent structures, so one must carry a flashlight if walking through the community after dark.

Housing takes several forms at Wind Spirit. Some residents live in dome houses (Figure 16). These are permanent dwellings, usually with a single room, shaped pentagonally or hexagonally and capped with a domed roof. The average square footage for one of these structures is around 200 sq. ft. Propane heaters are used in the winter months and swamp coolers, evaporative cooling devices, are used in the summer. Other residents live in tents on one of the many campsites found throughout the property. Still other residents may live in 'Bus Village' a congregation of motorized campers and defunct school buses that has been converted into residences. Some of the buses have had wood burning stoves added to them to provide winter warmth. One seasonal resident built his dwelling partially underground. There is also one slightly



larger dome house shared by two residents. This dwelling has a small outdoor food preparation area, making it the only permanent residence with a kitchen. It is also the only structure where solar energy has been implemented.



*Figure 16.* Single occupancy dome house at Wind Spirit Community. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

The kitchen and bathrooms are communal, shared by all residents and visitors. The kitchen (Figure 17) has space for communal dining and offers additional seating areas both inside and outside for other group activities. The kitchen is kept primarily vegetarian; there is a grill outside to be used when cooking meat and one pan and cutting board is kept separate for indoor meat preparation. Shared food purchased for the community is kept in open storage bins and on shelves. Personal dry goods are kept in individual bins. A large commercial kitchen refrigerator is used for cold items, with one side of the unit dedicated to communal food and the other side for personal

items. Two buckets are kept beside the sink to dispose of food waste, one goes to the compost pile and the other is for waste that can be fed to the chickens. The structure is heated with a wood-burning stove.



*Figure 17.* Communal kitchen at Wind Spirit Community. Dining area shown center, additional seating area with wood burning stove in the foreground, food preparation area in the background. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

Meetings are often conducted in the kitchen space and community members use a dry erase board located here to share information pertinent to the community such as upcoming events, work lists, scheduled visitors, and grocery lists. The Co-Creators Agreement, adopted as a guideline for conduct at Wind Spirit, is posted in the kitchen. There is also a radio and CD player with a shared music collection as well as books and magazines left around for residents to share.

There are three composting toilets on the property, all of which use leaves and other lawn waste gathered from the property. One is housed with a wash sink inside of a cloth teepee on the northeast side of the property. It is a simple design that uses a wooden seat built over a small bucket that is emptied twice a week. The other two toilets use large plastic drums that, once filled, are capped and left to fully decompose. These toilets have been built into a tall wooden, outhouse-type structure. There is also a wash sink and grooming area outside of this structure. Some composting toilets are designed with diverters that separate acidic urine so as to maintain a healthy pH in the composting waste. Because the composting toilets at Wind Spirit do not contain such a mechanism, residents are encouraged to urinate outdoors and reserve toilet use for solid excrement only.

Up the hill from the teepee there is a building that accommodates two indoor showers and an outdoor laundry washing facility. Clothing is air-dried on lines. Gray water infrastructure has been incorporated throughout the property and all running water is discharged on the natural landscape. Because of this, community rules dictate that only nontoxic cleaners, soaps and detergents may be used. There is also an outdoor shower located by the sauna and pool.

Water is obtained from a well, operated by an electric pump. The water is heated with propane hot-water heaters. The well was installed under the previous property owners. Several years after Wind Spirit purchased the property, a surveyor established that the property line had been mismarked by 15 ft., locating the well on the neighbor's side of the line. The neighbor attempted to charge Wind Spirit Community a symbolic \$1

per year for use of the well. Wind Spirit refused and the matter has not been discussed since. The community hopes to switch the well pump to solar power within the coming year. This change would dramatically cut electric costs and reduce their grid dependency.

Food production is conducted through organic methods and permaculture principles have been incorporated throughout the landscape. Thousands of native and edible trees blanket the property creating a food forest that is home to over 90 varieties of fruit and nut trees. Rich plant diversity and tree canopy provides a home for numerous bird, insect and animal species. A list of fruit and nut trees, native and non-native plants found in the community is presented in Table 3.

Table 3			
<i>Fruit and Nut Trees and Other Plant Species Present at Wind Spirit Community</i>			
Fruit and Nut Trees			
Almond	Grapefruit Pink	Loquat Nectarine	Persimmon Oriental
Apple Crab	Grapefruit Ruby	Orange Blood	Persimmon Kaki
Apple Golden Del	Red	Orange Navel	Pink Mulberry
Apple Green	Grapefruit White	Orange Pink Navel	Plum Italian
Apple Yellow	Grapes Concord	Orange <u>Valnecia</u>	Plum Japanese
Apple Rose	Grapes Red	Orange Wrinkled	Plum Santa Rose
Apricot	Seedless	Olive (black)	Plum Yellow
Bartlett Pear	Guava Pineapple	Peach Early Spring	<u>Plumcot</u>
Black Walnut	Guava Strawberry	Yellow	Pomegranate Red
Carob	Jujube	Peach White	Pomegranate
Cherries Bing	Kumquat	Peach Orange	Granada
Date palm	Lemon Ponderosa	Peach Indian Red	Purple Mulberry
English Walnut	Lemon Common	Pears Apple	Quince Apple
Figs White Medulla	Lemon Meyer	Pears Asian	Tangelo
Figs Black Mission	Lemon Orange	Pecan	Tangerine
Figs Yellow	Lime		White <u>Sapote</u>
	<u>Limequat</u>		
Native and Others			
Acacia	Magnolia	Cat Claw	
Agave-multiple varieties	Pines-multiple <u>varieties</u>	Jojoba	
Aloe- Multiple Varieties	Roses-multiple varieties	Indian Hawthorne	
Bamboo-Multiple Varieties	Saguaro Cactus	Hackberry	
Barrel Cactus	Tobacco (wild)	Wolfberry	
Blue Spruce	Bottlebrush	Ocotillo	
Butterfly Bushes	Texas Mountain Laurel	Prickly Pear	
<u>Cholla Cactus</u>	Blue Palo Verde	Night Blooming Cactus	
Hedgehog Cactus	Chaparral	Mormon tea	
Italian Cyprus	Mesquite	Soap Tree Yucca	
Fan Palms		San Pedro Cactus	
Juniper			
<i>Note: Adapted with permission from "Gardens and Fruit Trees," Wind Spirit Community (n.d.a), <a href="http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/Garden.htm">http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/Garden.htm</a></i>			

In addition to the orchard, food is grown in two gardens on the property. There is a large main garden (Figure 18) located near the pool and sauna and another garden built around one of the member-resident homes. At the time of my visit, food production was in decline. The fruit trees, and even some of the native species, had suffered due to extensive drought and record low temperatures in the preceding years. The garden crops had also failed for unknown reasons. The only exception to this was the abundant



mesquite, the pods of which could be harvested and ground into flour using a special grinder. Wind Spirit residents would harvest this mesquite and take it to a yearly mesquite-grinding meeting held in Tucson.



*Figure 18.* Main garden at Wind Spirit Community. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

A small area to the south of the main path northwestern path is home to several additional food production services and structures. Here a root cellar provides low energy food preservation, a greenhouse is used for seed starts, and a compost pile allows for the self-contained disposal of food waste and yard waste. This is also where the solar water distiller is located. Chickens are kept for egg production in a permanent coop and pen near the main garden. At one point in time, the community also kept goats but found the desert landscape did not offer these creatures enough forage, making the endeavor costly and impractical.

Several locations throughout the complex offer recreation opportunities. An underground sauna and above ground pool offer warmth and refreshment. Both amenities are clothing optional. A fire pit sits adjacent to these facilities. Half way between the communal kitchen and Bus Village, signs mark a large area as the Holistic Healing Center. There are a number of religious icons and statuary representing both Eastern belief systems and Western faiths; these are also sprinkled throughout the property. The area includes the Ceremony Circle, a large grassy knoll surrounded by tall pines, as well as the recently added yoga deck. Dances, meditations and the quarterly yoga retreat are held on the yoga deck and in the Ceremony Circle, weather permitting. Residents and visitors can also use this space for other recreational purposes, several enjoyed hoola-hooping or 'hooping' here during my stay.

Residents have access to the community library where computers are available for use; wireless Internet is broadcast throughout the community for those with personal computers. There are also books, DVD's and magazines that residents may borrow as well as a lounging area. Near the library is the gift shop used to generate income for the community. Here visitors can purchase value-added items such as jams or salsas made from fruit harvested on site as well as books and other informational materials. It is also here at the gift shop where visitors sign a safety waiver upon arrival. Community visitors will be discussed in the next section.

Across the dirt road from the community lies the Sanctuary, a former Christian church now used by the community for storage and to host events. Here there are numerous musical instruments, books and craft materials including a sewing station. A

fireplace stretches up from the center of the large main room. At the opposite end of the room there are stained glass French doors that open onto a courtyard with Christian statuary and an expansive mountain view. A well-used dry erase board and altar in the Sanctuary suggested the space was used for meetings, though whether these meetings were of a spiritual nature was unclear. During my stay, yoga retreat sessions were held in this space rather than on the outdoor yoga deck due to cold, rainy weather.

**Membership structure.** There are currently four formal members at Wind Spirit; Roger is the only member who lives at the community full-time. A formal member is someone who has purchased a share in the community, which also entitles them to have land on which they can build a permanent dwelling. If a member chooses to leave, they can either donate their share, sell their share to someone outside the community or be bought out by other community members. If a member chooses to sell their share, or if they pass away, the other community members get a voice in deciding on the purchaser. People can visit or even live at Wind Spirit without being formal members but residents must live at Wind Spirit for one year before they are eligible to become members. This trial year is to determine if they are a good fit for the community and vice versa.

Non-member residents are considered visitors and either pay rent or do work trade to live at Wind Spirit. Visitor classifications and associated monthly dues are shown in Table 4.



Table 4 <i>Resident Classifications at Wind Spirit Community</i>			
Member			
	Resident	Non-resident	
Visitor (Non-Member Resident)			
	Long term	> 6 months	Base fee \$150-\$200. Fee depends on season and accommodations
	Seasonal	3-6 months	
	Work trade or WWOOFer	1 month minimum	Minimum 30 hours/week
	Short term	< 1 month	\$10-\$25/day
	Passing through	1 day or a tour	\$10-\$25/day
*All visitors contribute 15-hours/week community service. 'Work free' visits available for \$500/month base fee			

Residents and visitors may live in one of the housing options outlined above or even build a permanent dwelling on the property. At the time of this research, only one renter had built his own permanent dome house residence, the rest either camped in tents or lived in a bus or R.V. in Bus Village. Another visitor who was only passing through for a week rented an unoccupied dome house. The cost depends on the accommodations and includes rent and utility costs (electric, water, gas, internet) and access to all community facilities. Food is donated to the community weekly by a grocery store in town and although it is primarily used to make community meals or meals for events, residents' monthly fee includes use of this food. Wood burning stoves are the primary source of heat in the wintertime but residents are expected to share in the burden of harvesting firewood. Propane and electric heaters are available for use but residents choosing to use these appliances must pay for the propane or electric used in addition to monthly fees. This policy also applies to individuals using swamp coolers in the

summer or personal refrigerators as they incur higher-than-normal electricity costs. Residents trading work for stay are expected to work 30 hours minimum a week and all other residents and visitors are expected to contribute 15 hours of community service unless other arrangements have been made. There is also a contribution jar in the kitchen where residents are encouraged to pitch in \$10 a week for staple food items such as grains, coffee and tea, spices, oil and milk (Wind Spirit Community, n.d.c; Wind Spirit Community, n.d.d).

Prospective residents and visitors must first go through an informal screening process. Past experiences have proven that taking the necessary time for the screening process is key to building a successful community. The screening process consists of a short interview with Roger, usually conducted over the phone. The interview is meant to discern a person's intentions for wanting to live communally, to determine if there are any underlying social or mental issues that could be of concern, and on a basic level to decide if the person is a good fit for the community and its mission and vision. Roger emphasized the importance of intuition in the screening process, commenting that he could often tell if someone was a good candidate within the first few minutes of speaking with them. A handful of visitation inquiries come from families, the rest are single individuals or couples. Roger estimated that about 60% of the people who contact Wind Spirit make it through the screening process.

Wind Spirit is also a World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) destination. The WWOOF network connects individuals interested in organic agriculture (WWOOFers) with farms and gardens practicing organic farming techniques.

WWOOFers then exchange work for room and board and the opportunity to learn organic food production techniques (WWOOF, 2012). It was noted that in prior years, Wind Spirit had attracted a great deal of WWOOFer traffic though at the time of research there was only one WWOOFer. An ongoing problem faced by the community was that despite many inquiries, few WWOOFers followed through with their plans to visit.

**Decision-making and bylaws.** Members make all major community decisions but residents have a say in the day-to-day operations of the community. Community affairs are discussed at the weekly group meeting. For example, during the meeting I attended residents discussed what projects needed work around the community and how to develop a better system for sharing project ideas, as well as how to improve the WWOOFer program so as to get a higher turnout rate. Important decisions are made through a consensus minus one voting system. This means they must attempt to come to a decision as a group, but the decision can still pass if only one member disagrees. Community meetings are run by a facilitator, usually Roger though not always, and held on Tuesday mornings. Helen, a non-member resident and Roger's partner, sometimes helps Roger facilitate the meetings. Residents are also free to call a meeting to discuss topics of their choice, but attendance by other residents is not compulsory. Financial matters regarding major expenses are discussed with members but otherwise, community financial information is not widely shared or discussed. This is not to say the community lacks financial transparency, it is more a function of the fact that nobody inquires about these matters.

Roger wrote the original bylaws for the community. After many updates and revisions to account for new situations and circumstances, the community decided to adopt the Co-creators Agreement (originally drafted by the Geneva Group of Boulder, CO) as a guideline for conduct (Appendix E). Rather than setting rigid rules that dictate what individuals can and cannot do, the Co-creators Agreements is a set of values and practices that encourage responsibility, communication, integrity, tolerance and acceptance.

Although there is no formally established means for removing a resident should an issue arise, Wind Spirit has, over the years, had a few of these instances occur. Examples of troublesome behaviors that might incite such removal include stealing or engaging in substance abuse or other activities that are disruptive to daily life for other residents and the community as a whole. In one instance, an individual was kicked out on their first day at the community. This is highly uncommon however. Generally, if the issue is with a resident who has lived at the community for awhile, they will attempt to resolve the issue before resorting to such harsh measures. In such cases, group meetings are held to discuss how best to resolve the problem.

**Community activities.** Although life is relatively unscheduled and flexible at the community, there are weekly events such as the Tuesday group meeting, or the shared meal occurring on Sunday and/or Monday evenings. Wednesday and Saturday evenings are reserved for saunas and fire pits. Group members also make a weekly shopping trip in town to purchase community goods or special items for other residents. The community also gathers to celebrate holidays events such as solstices and

equinoxes and may hold a sauna, fire pit, or dance on such occasions. Only Tuesday group meetings are mandatory.

Four times a year the community hosts a yoga retreat that is attended by visitors from Tucson, Phoenix and other parts of Arizona. The yoga retreat is a way for the community to generate income and gain exposure. It also provides an opportunity for community residents to share their way of life and values with outsiders. At the time of my visit, there was discussion at the group meeting of other events that the community could host that would serve as revenue generating and educational opportunities. One suggestion was to host the Dances of Universal Peace, a form of sacred dance (<http://www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org/>). According to the Wind Spirit website, this event took place in October of 2012, after this research was completed, with a follow-up dance scheduled for April of 2013.

**Resident responsibilities.** Only at times when there are a large number of residents are chores and duties formally assigned. Otherwise, residents are expected to clean up after themselves and do what needs to be done to keep common areas tidy. One of the residents at the time of research had taken on the responsibilities of tending to the chickens, compost and composting toilets. He also served as a handyman around the property. When special projects need to be done for the benefit of the community, for example campsite or food preparation in advance of a yoga retreat, a list is posted on the community board or the tasks are discussed at the group meeting. Residents are expected to volunteer and contribute to the best of their abilities.

**Current residents: Participant profiles.** At times, Wind Spirit has had as many as 15 residents. During the course of this study, there were nine residents, including one child and one WWOOFer. There was also one temporary visitor who was visiting the community for the week and one non-resident member who was staying for the weekend. About one-third of this group was over the age of 50 and the other two-thirds were under the age of 35. All but one resident were Caucasian with the other resident being of black Haitian descent. There were an additional seven people visiting the community who were attending a yoga retreat. Retreat attendees were not included in the sample. It is important to note that none of the current residents have lived in an intentional community prior to Wind Spirit. Only two of Wind Spirit's four members were present at the time of research. All participant and resident names have been changed for the purposes of this discussion. Participants and their respective residence statuses are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5 <i>Residency Classification of Wind Spirit Community Participants</i>		
<b>Formal Member-</b>		
	Resident	Roger
	Non-resident	Kevin
<b>Visitor (Non-Member Resident)</b>		
	Long term	Helen, Grace, Jim, Abby (with Son)
	Seasonal	Ganessa, Jaime
	Work trade or WWOOFer	Sante
	Short term	Falla
	Passing through	
*Baron was a community friend, classified as a 'guest' rather than a 'visitor'		

Roger is one of the founding members and has lived on the Wind Spirit property for 18 years making him the longest standing resident of the community. Roger grew up in the Northeast where he spent summers on a farm. After leaving New York, he spent several years in Miami operating an organic plant nursery. Eventually, Roger ended up living on a sailboat off the southern tip of Florida. As a young man, Roger had run a successful manufacturing business. The loss of this business in a hostile takeover sparked his shift to a simplicity-based lifestyle.

While the community does not have a structured leadership system, it is clear that Roger informally fills this role. The responsibility primarily falls on him to organize and lead projects or other community activities. As the only resident member and longest standing resident he has a great deal of knowledge and experience and residents look to him to ensure the functioning and success of the community. He contracted Lyme disease eight years ago and his declining health has had an impact on the community. His loss of energy due to illness has prevented him from being able to keep the community running as he has in the past. Projects are not getting done because he is unable to offer leadership or his knowledge and expertise. Roger seemed uncertain as to who would step up to fill his shoes should something happen to him, leaving the future of the community in question. Helen feels that Roger forms the backbone of the community and were he not there the community would not last. During our interview she also alluded to the fact that his declining health has impacted the health of the community in terms of its viability.

Kevin, the non-resident member who was visiting the community during the time of this research, has a permanent partially subterranean dwelling built on the land. He lives in a large city about 90 miles away, where he works in the construction and contracting industry, making periodic weekend and extended visits to Wind Spirit. Kevin and Roger grew up together in New York and Kevin cites his lifelong friend as the reason he moved to Arizona 18 years ago.

Helen has been living at Wind Spirit three-quarter time for one year. This means she spends three weeks per month at Wind Spirit and one week per month at her other home in a city located about 90 miles away where she runs a business. Helen is Roger's partner and they share a slightly larger dome house. She had been spending occasional weekends at Wind Spirit for four months prior to joining the community. Helen is from the East Coast originally and has lived in several cities along the coast, including Miami for many years. She also spent time in California, but has now lived in Arizona for 22 years. Her background is in the arts although she has also studied biological sciences. She has also worked with nonprofits serving both the arts and the environment.

Jim has lived at Wind Spirit for two years in a dome house that he built himself. Jim tends to the chickens, compost and garden and does a lot of handyman work around the property. Originally from Canada, Jim has worked in a number of different fields, most recently in the computer industry. Although he enjoyed computer work, Jim left his career after becoming disenchanted with the waged work system. Jim felt that he



would be able to contribute in an intentional community and moved to Wind Spirit after finding the community on the Internet.

Grace has been camping with her dog at the community for four months. She left her home and successful business on the West Coast to join Wind Spirit. Grace felt she needed a change and came to the community because she wanted to simplify her life. In speaking about her career-centered life in California she felt that although she “was making a good living, [she] wasn’t living” (Grace, personal communication, November 2, 2011). Despite being self-employed, Grace felt that business owners did not have the freedom so many assume because “everyone’s your boss” (Grace, personal communication, November 2, 2011). She did not say this in a negative way, in fact she spoke very affectionately of her former clients, particularly the women who she felt had supported her as she developed her business.

Abby has been living at Wind Spirit with her three year old son for two years. They moved to Wind Spirit from Oregon and Abby noted that she likes the weather and abundant sunshine that Arizona offers. She and her son Zech live in a camper near Bus Village. For employment, Abby works remotely out of the community via the Internet.

Ganessa and Jaime live on one of the tent campsites. They have been at Wind Spirit for two months now. This is Ganessa’s first time at the community and Jaime’s second. Both Ganessa and Jaime are from the East Coast and arrived at Wind Spirit together after spending some time traveling across the U.S. Neither are currently employed. Jaime has a background in architecture, and was in the process of finishing an advanced degree in the field before deciding to leave university. Ganessa has a

military background and has spent time traveling overseas in this capacity. It was not clear how long Ganessa and Jaime planned to stay at Wind Spirit.

Falla is a short-term visitor to the community, staying for only a week. From Quebec originally, Falla had been traveling the U.S. with her significant other. After they separated during the trip, Falla came to Wind Spirit so that she could spend some time alone, have time to meditate and to clear her head after the breakup. Falla comes from a family of farmers but she is a photographer and traveler with an advanced degree in photojournalism.

Sante found Wind Spirit through the WWOOF network. She is originally from Portland, Oregon but has also spent time living in Los Angeles. Sante wants to be a farmer and herbalist and is interested in learning organic farming practices at Wind Spirit. She plans to spend a few months during the winter at Wind Spirit before going on to an herbalist-training program in northern California. This is Sante's first time living in a rural setting. Only 20 years old, she views her trip to Wind Spirit as part of a journey of self-discovery. During her visit, Sante will stay with her two kittens in the Fairieland bus, the former home of one of the community's core members.

One non-resident attended the focus group. Barron has lived in the desert for many years. Although he lives outside of Flagstaff, he also has property not far from Wind Spirit where he spends a great deal of time. Barron and Don have known each other for over 30 years. They met while attending a desert plant medicine course and reconnected years later through Kevin.

Overall, resident numbers fluctuate dramatically and Helen felt that the community needed more permanent members in order to sustain itself long-term. It was presumed that several conditions precluded visitors and residents from becoming formal members. Because there are so few unoccupied permanent structures, residents must camp or live in a bus while building their home at Wind Spirit. Helen felt that camping for the duration of construction posed too many challenges for individuals, causing them to lose steam before they completed housing. Though she did not specifically mention it, my experience led me to believe that camping in colder winter months could also be challenging in and of itself. Helen felt that to encourage residents to become members, or to extend their stay, Wind Spirit should have more permanent housing options.

**Practicing voluntary simplicity.** Although both Roger and Helen had been practicing sustainably for most of their lives, almost all of the other residents were new to simplicity. When Grace and I discuss her move towards a simpler life, she placed a lot of emphasis on how much she had to downsize during the process. Grace explained that she had preferred to give away her things rather than sell them, and that she had given sentimental or special items to long-term clients whom she felt had contributed to her professional success. Ganessa had also given away a lot of her clothing prior to coming to Wind Spirit and expressed great satisfaction at how much joy these gifts brought to the young lady who received them. Grace acknowledged that simplifying can mean something different to each person. She gave the tongue-in-cheek example of her moving to Wind Spirit with a U-haul full of her things, despite having already downsized substantially, into a tent that had more square footage than Jim's permanent dwelling.

Jim doesn't believe in material goods and enjoys living simply; his home is only 170 sq. ft. Jim said during our interview that he had never been exposed to simplicity practices prior to Wind Spirit. This was interesting given leaving the rat race of waged work, Jim's motivation for coming to Wind Spirit in the first place, is one of the basic tenets of simplicity (Elgin, 1993). For Jim, simplicity was about things being functional rather than perfect. It was about making due with what you had, not throwing things away and finding alternative solutions given limited resources.

Although simplicity was a departure from the lifestyle she had been accustomed too, Grace did recall one story about her frugal Irish grandmother. Her grandmother had always gardened and canned the fruits of her harvest because she hated to buy things out (Grace, personal communication, November 3, 2011). Both Helen and Roger had practiced simplicity for most or all of their lives. Roger, as previously discussed, began simplifying after he lost his business in a hostile takeover. Still, Roger indicated that his summers as a youth spent in rural New York have had a lot of influence on his desire and ability to adjust to the simple life he lives at Wind Spirit.

Helen was raised in a frugal household that recycled and was conscious of resource use. She notes "we didn't call it that" but simplicity has been a common thread throughout her life (Helen, personal communication, November 8, 2011). Helen's motivation for coming to Wind Spirit was that she wanted to get more in touch with her consumption through living simply. She felt that a sea change was needed in terms of the structures and institutions that our culture is predicated on and that Wind Spirit was working towards this change. Like Jim, she found living in a small space very easy and

comfortable. In fact, she was surprised at how effortlessly she was able to transition to sharing a tiny home.

***Living on less.*** During one of our conversations, Roger posited that Wind Spirit Community members live on less (in terms of resource use) as a group than a single individual living alone in a neighboring city such as Tucson. This low impact is attributed to the energy efficiency of the small dwellings, and the sharing of resources through communal space. Kevin also emphasized during the focus group that although Wind Spirit could not sustain themselves in terms of food and energy production, the community could still live very conservatively, in terms of resource use. He attributed this to the infrastructure in place and the small dwellings.

Living simply and communally is also very cost efficient for residents. Many residents remarked on the low cost of living at Wind Spirit. In referring to both resource use and cost, one resident commented, “it’s amazing how little you can live on” (Jim, personal communication, November 2, 2011). Roger pointed out that community living helps to defray the costs of property ownership. It also seemed to me that sharing traditionally private spaces, such as kitchen and bathrooms frees up land for recreational use or green space. According to Helen, after moving to Wind Spirit she became more aware of how much money she was spending in the city. She noticed that in the city, money was going to food, entertainment and luxury items such as yoga lessons and dining out. At Wind Spirit, one small monthly fee is paid for rent and utilities and the only other expense is the occasional trip to town to purchase grocery supplies. Helen was surprised at how easily she was able to reduce her workload when she

moved to Wind Spirit, while still being able to afford to live comfortably. Kevin felt that the lack of financial pressure was one of the easiest aspects of the simplicity lifestyle at Wind Spirit. During the focus group he pointed out that because cost of living was very low, residents did not need to work a standard 40-hour work week.

Despite the relatively low cost of living, the lack of economic opportunities at the community was viewed as an obstacle for prospective residents. Because the community is in such a remote location, jobs are scarce. If a resident was able to find work in one of the small neighboring towns, they would face a substantial daily commute. There is Internet access at the community so residents could potentially work remotely, but bandwidth is limited making even this option somewhat challenging. As noted, one resident was working remotely at the time of research, but due to the restrictions on Internet bandwidth, it was not clear how many people could support themselves in this way.

Employment is a common issue faced by remote or rural communities. Often communities will develop onsite businesses or cottage industries so that the community can generate revenue while employing residents in need of income (Christian, 2003). One resident felt that Wind Spirit should be considering onsite business ventures but, according to Roger, such enterprises have been attempted though not well received by residents in the past and overall have been unsuccessful.

Residents are also able to share knowledge, skills and labor, relying less on outside resources to fulfill these services. Helen spoke to this during our interview. She found it much easier to make sustainable infrastructure changes at Wind Spirit than at

her home in the city because she had access to knowledge and technology. Using the example of converting to solar, she commented that in the city she would need to have a professional do the work and that this would be quite costly. Whereas at Wind Spirit, there would be still be a cost associated with the materials but she could tap into the knowledge resources of other residents to manage the installation.

***The decline of society.*** The example of solar installation illustrates what Helen views as a big difference between Wind Spirit and the larger society. Society, she said, instills in people that they should become highly specialized in a particular field so they are able to earn enough income to pay others for similarly specialized services. At Wind Spirit, the guiding principal is that rather than specializing with a focus on earning, one should develop self-reliance by learning to complete a variety of tasks and services on one's own. This makes the community more resilient as a whole.

Helen felt that life at Wind Spirit was like being part of a counterculture because many residents had the mentality that the larger society was going to “crash and burn”, necessitating self reliance and survival skills (Helen, personal communication, November 8, 2011). Several other residents articulated this “crash and burn” mentality during my stay. Roger stated several times that he thought Wind Spirit would be an enticing location for people should society fall, given their food stores and ability to survive almost completely off-grid. He felt that because of this it was important to keep the community under the radar. Jim had also expressed concern over the community's reliance on an electric powered water pump. He was eager to convert the pump to solar

so that if the “crash” comes they would be able to survive off-grid (Jim, personal communication, November 7, 2011).

It was not uncommon during my stay for conversations to drift to topics related to current social issues, for example the dire state of the economy and its impact on the poor. These topics seemed to coincide with the general view held by residents that society was on a path to collapse and were framed as such. There was a clear delineation between what was happening in the world ‘outside’ (corruption, economic decline) and life inside the community. For residents, their decision to live simply and in community was how they protested these social ills and their causes. Helen explained that Wind Spirit offered residents an opportunity to learn how to become less dependent on a system that they don’t support. She admitted that while it might seem farfetched to think that eight people trying to live in a more sustainable fashion could make a difference, it was significant because it allowed residents to live a life that they respected.

*The Occupy Movement.* September 17, 2011 marked the start of the Occupy Wall Street protest. Beginning as an ‘occupation’ of New York’s financial sector, the protest swiftly spread to be a nationwide movement, with Occupy encampments sprouting up in cities all over the country (Eckholm & Williams, 2011; Skinner, 2011). Research at Wind Spirit was conducted about shortly after the Occupy Movement had spread to the neighboring cities of Tucson and Phoenix, where encampments were established simultaneously on October 15, 2011 according to the Occupy Directory (n.d.). The Occupy Movement came up in conversation several times during my stay.



Several of the residents had spent time at the Occupy Tucson encampment. Both Kevin and Roger made several references to this and the other encampments functioning as intentional communities of their own. Kevin, in particular, was emphatic that I should visit the camp. I sensed that residents identified with the Occupy Movement insofar as they felt that Occupiers were also trying to change a corrupt and money driven world.

***Work for wage.*** Several residents spoke about their disdain for the waged-work system. This is not to say they did not like work, more specifically it is the current system in which work, and time, are compensated for monetary wage. Jaime, for example, left architecture school because he was tired of the 'grind' and of a life driven by earning potential. He felt that people spend too much time working and not enough time enjoying life. Jim echoed these sentiments, maintaining that since he left work, he's the happiest he's ever been. Jim came to Wind Spirit because he wanted to leave waged work. He felt that while he was still employed, he was just waiting for the future so that he could retire and that this was not how he wanted to live his life. In referring to the work culture, Jim commented, "the more you make, the further you are in the hole" (Jim, personal communication, November 2, 2011). Jim's adult children no longer speak to him because of his decision to leave waged work. For those not also adhering to Jim's lifestyle, his decision to, essentially, take a vow of poverty might seem extreme or at least a radical departure from the personality they had known. Another resident told me during a private conversation that before coming to Wind Spirit, they had an unhealthy relationship to work and had viewed their body as a 'work machine', hence their decision to leave the employment world.

Roger felt that Western culture was 'corrupt', a sentiment that was echoed by several other residents. To him, most people lived bloated lifestyles centered on materialism, mistakenly believing that these things will bring them happiness, and in order to maintain these lifestyles people spend their lives working for wages in unfulfilling jobs. He had been a successful and wealthy business owner for many years, at times enjoying an extravagant lifestyle. According to Roger, a hostile business takeover woke him up and he adopted a simpler lifestyle. During one of our interviews, Roger recalled a friend's response to his decision to live simply. The friend was concerned Roger was "losing [his] peak earning years" (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011). As previously noted, Jim's decision to no longer work was also not well received. According to Jim, his family thinks he should be working and resents the fact that he has no financial wealth.

***Misconceptions.*** These examples illustrate what Roger views as Western culture's mentality towards simplicity. In a culture built on commodity consumption and accumulation through waged work, simplicity runs contrary to everything people have been taught. This mindset was perceived to be at the root of some of the difficulties Wind Spirit had with the surrounding community. Roger felt that neighbors harbored resentment towards Wind Spirit because residents didn't have to work the standard 40-hour work week.

Roger also felt that simplicity was erroneously assumed to be extremist or "all or nothing" (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011). The example he gave was that people assume that if you practice simplicity you must hate all technology.

Roger felt it was only necessary to change the things that needed to be changed in your own life. Both Helen and Grace reiterated this point by saying simplicity means different things to different people.

***Convenience, time and money.*** There was the perception among residents that 'people' (meaning non-Wind Spirit residents) found living simply inconvenient, which came as somewhat of a contradiction since they did not themselves view it in this way. Roger maintained that living simply, as a practice, was hard, time-consuming work, especially when you consider that life in the developed world has "gotten easy and convenient" (Roger, personal communication, November 6, 2011). Several participants also alluded to the fact that all residents did not always contribute enough or equally in helping complete the work that needed to get done around the community (no specific examples were given). Yet, when asked what they found to be most challenging about their lifestyle, no one complained of the day-to-day tasks or the work required to live on the farm. In fact, during our interview Jim commented that the utilitarian aspects of life at Wind Spirit (for example composting, keeping chickens, using the outdoors or composting toilets) were easy. Helen did note that living rurally posed challenges, requiring additional planning for supplies, but this seemed more logistical than specific to the simplicity practices at the community.

During the focus group, Barron said that in addition to being inconvenient, economic challenges posed barriers to living simply. During our interview, Helen mentioned cost as posing a challenge although she also identified time as a limiting factor. While economic cost for implementing sustainable changes was considered a

limiting factor for many, it was also posited that cost raised awareness insofar as people don't care or are unaware of their resource use until there is a cost associated with that use. For example, Roger noted that residents become much more aware of their heating usage at Wind Spirit because they must pay directly for the gas used to heat their structures rather than having it factored into a larger electric bill. Still, another resident countered that some people can afford to be spendthrifts and therefore not even cost will encourage them to use resources conservatively. The community as a whole does face its own economic challenges. They have been unable to convert to solar energy because of the cost and also limited labor resources. Both Helen and Kevin addressed this issue during the focus group.

**Living in community.** During the focus group, several residents agreed that living in community forces people to face, and cope with, problems that they have with one another. Both Helen and Roger felt that one of the biggest challenges to building a sustainable community was getting people to communicate, and to communicate honestly. They felt that society taught people to run from interpersonal issues, escaping to private homes and spaces, and that community life had to "unteach" these behaviors. Helen said that one of the reasons she liked living communally was that it forced her to be social and communicate with others, particularly with those having opposing viewpoints. She felt that being forced to interact with people of differing values and opinions was one of the benefits of living in community, although finding her way through these interactions was also one of the more challenging elements. Jim acknowledged that living so close to such a variety of people has been the biggest challenge he's faced at Wind Spirit. Helen felt that being surrounded by such a limited

yet diverse group of people could challenge self-identity noting that “just because you don’t see yourself reflected in someone else doesn’t mean your ‘self’ isn’t valid” (Helen, personal communication, November 8, 2011). In an urban setting, Helen felt there was more overall variety in terms of the people you could choose to spend your time with. Despite coming together for a common purpose, community residents may have different interests and beliefs. Helen felt that with such a limited number of community residents and few opportunities to interact with the outside community, companionship was sometimes a challenge. On the other hand, Jim believed that living communally could go a long way towards fulfilling people’s need for companionship.

For Grace, who had always lived alone and self-identified as being very independent, acclimating to community life was a big adjustment. During one of our earliest conversations, Grace first spoke about having to develop new ideas regarding ownership. She gave the example that when she was living alone, “my kitchen was *my* kitchen” comparing this to her current situation in which she shares the communal kitchen with other residents (Grace, personal communication, November 2, 2011). It was interesting that Grace used this example; Roger commented during several of our conversations that his experience has been that arguments at Wind Spirit always start in the kitchen. Helen echoed Roger’s observation. In an independent conversation, Jim shared with me three instances of issues he has had with residents, all of which revolved around the communal kitchen. On one occasion, another resident had gotten so upset about Jim’s choice to reheat meat in the communal (and vegetarian) kitchen that the other resident refused to use the kitchen again. Another issue involved a resident consuming all of a particular food item of Jim’s that had been clearly

designated personal. In the last example Jim gave, he had developed a dislike for a particular resident and noted that this emotion was so strong, he would not enter the communal kitchen if the man were there (Jim, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

In Roger's opinion, many people have a fantasy about what community life is like; in order to succeed residents must look beyond the fantasy and set realistic expectations. Roger maintains, "don't sweat the small stuff" (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011), if one wants to make community work. He felt that community-wide or group activities, such as group discussions or communal meals, were useful tools for bringing residents together. In Roger's experience, interactions such as these strengthen relationships and the social network of the community and are integral to the community's overall success. The better people feel about the group, the easier it is to achieve social sustainability. Roger noted that more recent attempts at scheduling a regular discussion night were met with a lukewarm response from other residents although he did not hypothesize as to why this was the case.

***Community-community relations.*** Wind Spirit residents felt very disconnected from their more conservative neighbors. Locals have been known to refer to Wind Spirit as 'nudist colony' and 'hippy camp'. In fact, it's not uncommon for Wind Spirit to receive mail addressed simply "Hippy Camp Winkleman, AZ". Still others have called Wind Spirit a "piece of paradise" or "heaven on Earth" (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011). While these differences haven't prevented them from befriending their neighbors, relations are strained.

Though it's believed that some neighbors know and understand what Wind Spirit is, many others are thought to misunderstand and therefore fear the community. An incident occurring ten years prior to this study demonstrates how misperceptions have strained relations. In an attempt to have the community shut down, a group of neighbors went to City Hall claiming that Wind Spirit was housing unruly and unschooled children and that residents were 'medieval'. Upon inspecting such charges, zoning officials instead found the property and the residents quite enjoyable, citing them only for a lack of backflow preventers. Despite the happy ending to this story, it left Wind Spirit leery of its neighbors. They maintain a closed-door policy when it comes to the local community and have no interest in trying to integrate with the surrounding community. This is due to concern over not only misunderstanding but also that they might be preyed upon given the lack of security on the premises.

One resident felt that Wind Spirit needed to gain more exposure, not only to bring more visitors and potential members but also to increase attendance, and income, at yoga retreats. Currently retreats are primarily marketed to residents living in Phoenix and Tucson. Helen thought one approach might be to market retreats to residents of colder states, drawing them to the warm and hospitable Arizona climate. Roger expressed concern over drawing too much attention to Wind Spirit, saying that he wasn't sure he wanted to put them "on the map" (Roger, personal communication, November 5, 2011). He was worried that, should the end times be near, Wind Spirit would be a prime destination given its comparative self-reliance and resiliency and that they were vulnerable to takeover. On this note, he did comment that many of the community's neighbors were heavily armed and that, despite somewhat strained

relations, he was inclined to believe that a particular set of immediate neighbors would offer them protection should the community need it.

**Living close to the land.** The combination of living rurally and 'close to land' can be a sharp contrast to the urban lives many people lead resulting for many in a life changing experience. Roger maintained that he has seen visitors to Wind Spirit become more in tune with the natural cycles while living at the community. He felt that residents who had lived rurally prior to their stay had a much better idea of what it took to live at Wind Spirit. Helen had never lived rurally prior to Wind Spirit. During the focus group, Helen expressed that living rurally was not as simple as she might have thought. Given that trips to town are usually limited to once a week, a lot of planning was necessary to ensure that they had the necessary supplies. Despite this concession, Helen had always wanted to live on a farm and loved the outdoors and being close to nature. Jim too enjoyed the opportunity at Wind Spirit to be closer to nature. Conversely, Roger also noted the engulfing silence and sound of nature one finds at Wind Spirit can be too much for those more adapted to the noises of the city.

Although situating the community in a rural setting has, as previously discussed, made income generation challenging it does afford the community other benefits. It was generally believed that cities posed problems for those trying to live sustainably by limiting what they could do. Roger pointed out that code and building requirements found in urban environments would challenge Wind Spirit's alternative lifestyle. For example, the community's beloved small dwellings, lacking kitchens and bathrooms, would not be permitted in the city. In addition, it is difficult and/or impossible to



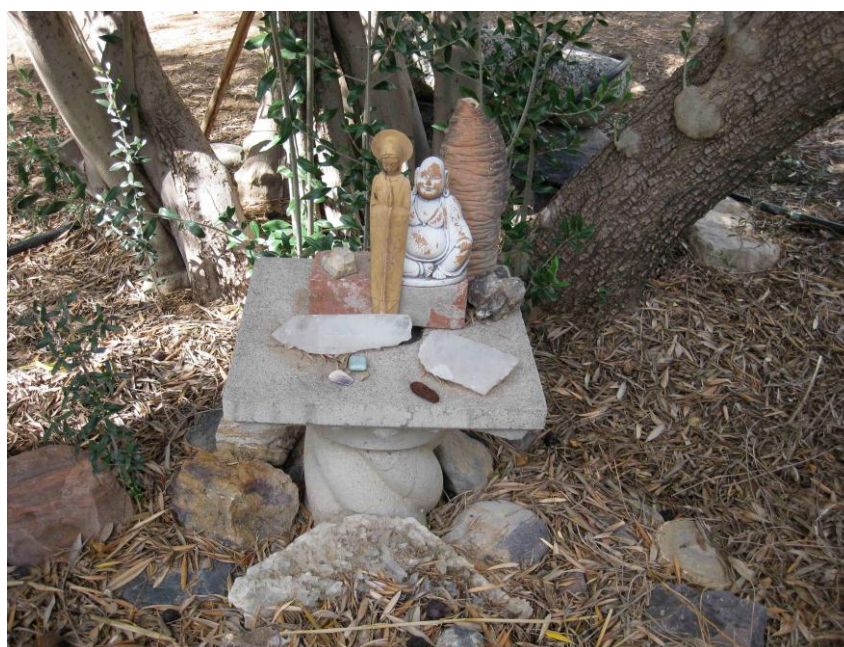
implement in the city such resource saving mechanisms as gray water, rainwater harvesting, and composting toilets due to city codes. These factors make it difficult to keep costs and energy usage as low as what they are for the community. In fact, Roger was aware of an intentional community that had been situated in Tucson that had been shut down due to code restrictions and violations. Residents admitted, though, that the downside to their rural locale was government support of the mining industry, an important and lucrative interest for many in the area. It is feared that the industry, known for degrading the environment, will jeopardize the health of the community.

**Climate.** Residents found the climate to be conducive to their lifestyle. During one of our conversations, Abby commented to me that she didn't realize how much the dreary Oregon weather had affected her mood until she moved to Wind Spirit. Jim pointed out that the generally mild temperatures allow for less energy use and a year round growing season. The focus group turned up several similar comments. Both Barron and Kevin noted that the local climate allows community residents to live conservatively in terms of energy use. Still, Roger acknowledged that because the region was drought prone, it required them to be adaptive.

**Arts, healing, and spirituality.** From the moment you approach the front gate, it becomes clear that artistic expression and spirituality have had strong influence at Wind Spirit. On the gate and throughout the property, are left the creative marks of past and current residents. Colorful murals adorn the walls of buildings and buses. Doors, gates and signs are unassuming canvases. The images are sometimes designs or patterns; in other cases they are elaborate scenes depicting mystical and/or spiritual creatures. The

communal kitchen is embellished with tiles painted with images symbolizing yogic chakras. Art and poetry hang on the walls here and in other shared spaces.

Religious and spiritual objects are scattered throughout the landscape (Figure 19). Christian religious statuary of saints and angels might be situated next to a bust of the Buddha. Natural objects such as stones and crystals form a shrine to earth and animal spirits. In many instances, as noted above, art gives shape and form to religious and spiritual beliefs held by the artist.



*Figure 19.* Example of Spiritual statuary and objects found at Wind Spirit Community. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

The community has drawn a number of artists and musicians. Drum circles were at one point a regular occurrence. During my stay, half of the residents had ties to art through music, photography, painting, and dance or performance. Self-expression through these outlets is celebrated, shared and encouraged by and amongst residents.

Several experiences illustrate this phenomena. Ganessa comes from a family of artists and is herself very interested in fashion and dance. She is an avid hoola-hooper (hooper) and had been hooping for over three years. She made her own hoops and also combined hooping with other movement to perform a hoop-dance. During the evening of the community dance, Ganessa performed her hoop-dance for other residents and proceeded to teach several how to use the hoop. Later she also instructed a resident on how to make her own hoop. In another instance, Falla shared her love of photography film and journalism to help the community. In hopes of generating promotional materials that could be used to advertise the yoga retreats, Falla recorded a number of interviews with retreat participants.

Health and healing were also underlying themes in the community. Overtly, there is of course the yoga retreat that is held quarterly. During this event a yoga instructor from either Tucson or Phoenix comes to the community and offers yoga sessions in conjunction with guided meditation practices. Additionally, the community advocates a healthy diet rich in whole natural foods. One participant noted that she was in the midst of a special diet specific for healing. Helen pointed out during the focus group that it was easier to stay healthy at the community because the rural setting meant less pollution and more opportunities to be physically active.

During our interview, Helen expressed that she viewed the community's healing component as playing a significant role in many residents' decisions to come to Wind Spirit. For example, while traveling through Costa Rica and undergoing what he referred to as an internal awakening process, Jaime met people living at a community centered

on spiritualism, mediation and healing. It was through this community that Jaime found out about Wind Spirit. Falla came to Wind Spirit to emotionally heal after a difficult breakup. Another resident spoke about how community life was helping him to overcome their agoraphobia. Previously, they had turned to alcohol to cope with the pathology. Living at Wind Spirit had been a challenge at first but he was slowly able to get used to be around so many people.

**Summary.** Consistent with the literature on simplicity, residents view simplicity as a very personal choice to be determined and defined by the individual (Elgin, 1993; Grigsby, 2004). While they acknowledged that choosing to live simply meant challenges in terms of time, money and convenience, they felt that the infrastructure in place at the community assisted residents in overcoming these challenges. That being said, there was a tradeoff in terms of other logistical challenges due to the community's rural location. While living simply and in community meant a much lower overall cost of living, residents had limited resources available to them for generating income and ensuring personal economic viability. In addition, the community as a whole faced economic challenges in terms of their ability to make infrastructure improvements that would in turn improve their ability to live simply in the long run.

Residents rejected materialism and a life centered on economic wealth because they felt that these things were leading to the corruption and eventual destruction of society. In this way residents' lifestyles were an act of protest that disassociated them from what they believed to be causing the decline of civilization. The practices they adhered to in doing so were actually facilitating the development of skills that would

prepare them for this collapse. Residents also believed that by living in community, they were building social sustainability, without which efforts towards environmental sustainability would be in vain. Because residents were able to overcome many of the challenges to simplicity with the help of community resources, they were able to shift their focus to the communal aspects of their lives. Living in community proved both challenging and rewarding. Residents felt that living in community taught them to communicate with others and become more tolerant of differences. This is interesting given that cultural differences, and the misunderstanding that resulted, were the prime reason Wind Spirit residents limited contact with the surrounding community. Although this might seem contradictory, residents' inherent distrust of the larger society and prior experiences with the neighboring community have pushed them towards this isolation.

When issues do arise in the community, it most often occurs in or pertaining to the primary shared space, the kitchen. This could be due to several factors. Given that the kitchen is the main communal area, residents likely conduct a larger percentage of their interactions in this space. Additionally, the kitchen is traditionally viewed as a personal space, though not a private space. In other words, one individual takes ownership and control over what happens in that space although they are given to occupying that space with others, unlike a bathroom for example that is more of a private space both owned and occupied by one individual. As residents transition into community members, they must unlearn culturally ingrained ideas regarding the ownership of space and place, an act that is played out through interactions with other community members with the kitchen as classroom and battleground.

The climate and geography of the region dramatically impacted how residents were able to practice simplicity. Conservative energy usage and a year round growing season were widely touted benefits of the mild climate. Additionally, trees and scrub present on the landscape provided food and firewood, which also helped to keep costs low. Unfortunately though, the community's ability to produce its own food has already suffered due to extreme weather in recent years. At this point it is not clear what would happen to the community should the climate get hotter and dryer. Residents are all too aware of the fact that impending climate change puts their future at risk.

Many are motivated to come to Wind Spirit by hopes of improved health and wellbeing. They view the mild climate and outdoor lifestyle as life giving amenities. The community has for a long time relied on the quarterly yoga retreat for income generation and exposure to potential future residents. This is reminiscent of the region's early development when the focus was on the wellness tourism industry. Health seekers from cold climates would come with the hopes that abundant sunshine and aridity would heal their sick and, in later years, aging bodies. There is also the potential for parallels between Arizona's early 'agritainment' industry and the community as a WWOOF destination. In keeping with the region's historic ties to farming and ranching, and later tourism associated with such industries, Wind Spirit draws many visitors by offering an opportunity to get a 'real' Western farm experience.

For the purposes of this study, I was specifically interested in what characteristics were most significant at the geographic scale of bioregion. For the community as a whole, the physical geography of the bioregion has been extremely important. The

climate has been significant in facilitating food production and reducing energy consumption. Cultural characteristics have challenged the community's efforts towards creating social sustainability as another manifestation of simplicity at the bioregional scale.

In the following section I will introduce the Greater Everglades Bioregion, the second of the two bioregions studied. In this region, research was conducted in the city of Miami with both communal and non-communal residents. By comparing these findings with results found in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, I will better understand what aspects of simplicity practice are place-based and how these are considered on the scale of bioregion.

## **Part II—Greater Everglades Bioregion**

### **Chapter Five:**

#### **Bioregional Profile**

The following chapter will provide context for research conducted in the Greater Everglades Bioregion. I have developed a profile of the bioregion, discussing the region's physical evolution as well as the evolution of the human cultures that reside there. The bioregional profile provides a geographic and historical lens through which the responses of regional participants can be understood and analyzed. By understanding the processes that have shaped the complex human and physical landscape now present in the Greater Everglades Bioregion generally and Miami specifically, I can understand how these processes have subsequently shaped the simplicity practices of regional residents.

#### **Physical Geography**

**Climate and biome.** The Greater Everglades Bioregion (GEB), shown in Figure 20, is defined as the bottom third of South Florida from Lake Okeechobee south down to Florida Bay, bounded by the Caloosahatchee River to the west and the St. Lucie River to the east. The bioregion also includes the Kissimmee River valley north of Lake Okeechobee as well as the estuarine and near-shore marine ecosystem to the east and south. The bioregion roughly corresponds to the area designated as the South Florida



Water Management District (SFWMD), which I will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter. With a land area of about 18,000 square miles, the GEB is roughly one-fifth the area of the Sonoran Desert Bioregion (SFWMD, n.d).

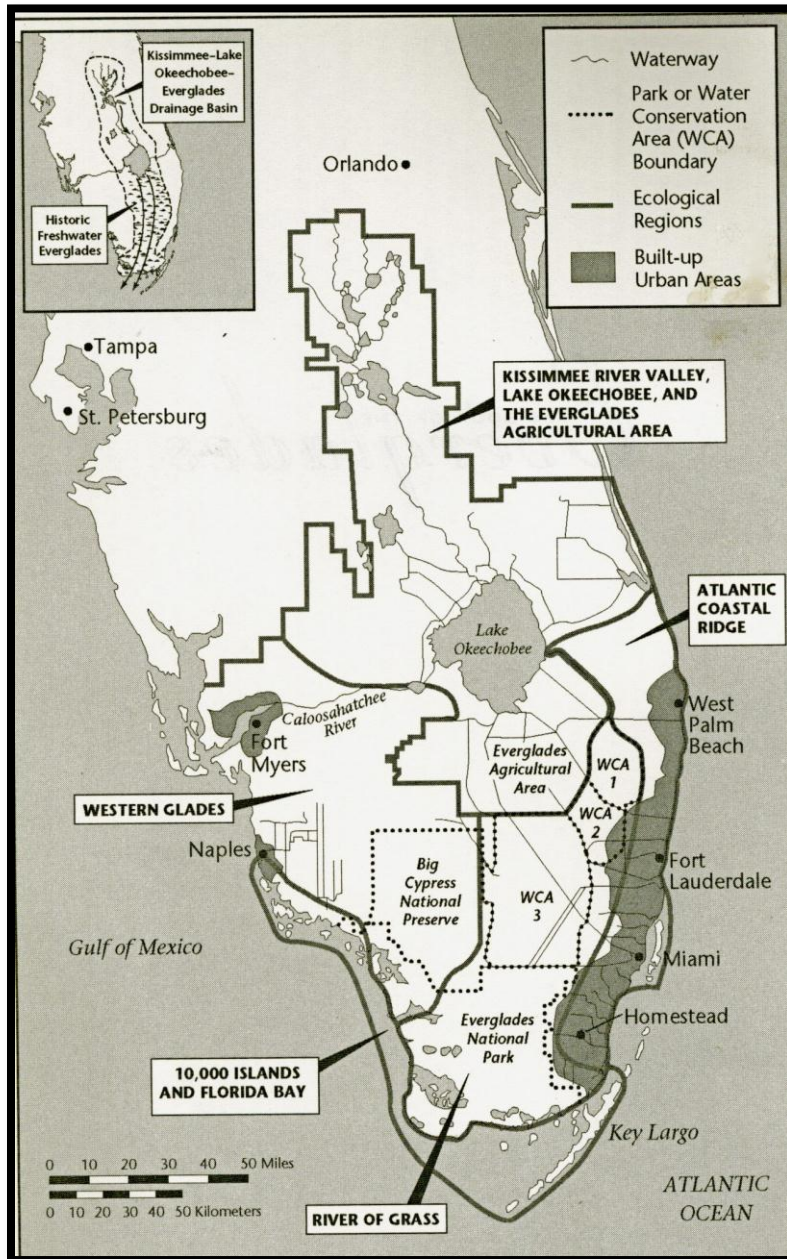


Figure 20. Map of the Greater Everglades Bioregion natural and manmade features. Reprinted from *The Book of the Everglades* (p. ii), S. Cerulean (Ed.), 2002, Canada: Milkweed Editions. Copyright Patti Isaacs, Parrot Graphics. Reprinted with permission.

The region's climate is unique to other parts of Florida. The Köppen climate classification system classifies most of this region as tropical savanna due to pronounced wet and dry seasons and an average monthly temperature above 64°F, with the rest of Florida classified as humid subtropical (Lodge, 2004; Purdum, 2002). Others, however, deem only the small swath of land stretching south and west from Miami as Tropical, or lacking temperatures below freezing (Chen, 1990; Lodge, 2004).

Rainfall is highly variable and annual rainfall ranges from 50-60 inches with the higher averages occurring along the east coast (Lodge, 2004). The wet and dry cycles that prevail in South Florida are more distinctive than the region's patterns of summer and winter, and have played a significant role in the formation of the Everglades. Generally, three-quarters of the annual rain falls during the wet period from May-October with only a quarter falling during the dry months from November-April (Lodge, 2004). Regular cold fronts push through, drying out the region during these latter winter months. Under the influence of the trade winds, summer rainy months are characterized by high humidity and heat. Regular afternoon thunderstorms bring most of the yearly rainfall during the peak of the rainy season between June and September (Duever, Meeder, Meeder, & McCollom, 1994). It is during this time that tropical weather events, in the form of tropical depressions, tropical storms and hurricanes, are most frequent (Lodge, 2004).

Biotic communities of the region are numerous and diverse. Marjorie Stoneman Douglas (1988) popularized the Everglades in her seminal work *The Everglades: River of Grass*, evoking an image of an expansive saw grass marsh, flowing at an almost

imperceptible pace through the southern portion of the state. McCally (1999) argues that though Douglas's work was instrumental in raising public awareness regarding the need for Everglades restoration, it has "indelibly imprinted the inaccurate metaphor "river of grass" on the American collective psyche, with the result that a literary expression has been assigned a physical reality that never truly existed" (p. 180). He goes on to say that the adoption of this metaphor "hinders restoration of the complex wetlands system it so imperfectly describes" (McCally, 1999, p. 180). The freshwater marsh that once ran from the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee to the southern end of the Florida peninsula, an area that historically measured 4,000 square miles, is but one of many plant communities that exists within the bounds of the GEB (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999). Lodge (2004) notes that while researchers are not always in agreement over the names or divisions of the plant communities found in the region, the system of categorization is merely for one's convenience in attempting to describe and understand the natural world and not a substitute for the environment it seeks to define.

I have adopted the classification system employed by Lodge (2004) (for other examples of classification systems see Derr, 1998; Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2010; Olmsted & Loope, 1984). Lodge (2004) identifies the following plant communities as currently found in the GEB:

- Freshwater marshes
- Wetland tree islands (broad-leaved types)
- Cypress heads, domes, and dwarf cypress forests
- Tropical hardwood hammocks

- Pinelands
- Mangrove swamps and mangrove islands
- Coastal saline flats, prairies and forests
- Tidal creeks and bays
- Shallow, coastal marine waters

(Lodge, 2004, p. 12)

These communities will be discussed in greater depth in the 'Flora and fauna' section of this chapter. For now it is important to note that historically, the Everglades was a dynamic sheet flow system (having a slow moving 'sheet' of surface water). Unlike any other sheet flow system in the world; the primary source of nutrients for the Everglades system has been rainfall, rather than rivers or streams, except for the occasional overflow from Lake Okeechobee (Lodge, 2004). Although the bioregion is relatively flat, even the small changes in elevation have given rise to the large variety of plant communities (Derr, 1998). It is important to note that all of this has changed with drainage and flood control efforts that have occurred over the last century. These efforts will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The pre-drainage Everglades was one segment of the larger Kissimmee-Lake Okeechobee-Everglades Watershed, hence the inclusion of these water bodies in the GEB for the purposes of this study (Lodge, 2004).

Although numerous plant communities are present, wetlands predominate in the region. A wetland environment is an area that is periodically covered with water or has enough ground water present, in the absence of surface water, to maintain a hydric or

saturated soil that is hospitable to moist soil plants (Lodge, 2004; Purdum, 2002).

Determining the exact boundaries of a wetland is challenging given that their inundation is periodic and fluctuates in degree from year to year (Meindl, 2005; Purdum, 2002).

Prior to drainage, more than half of the state's land acreage was wetland with 90% of Florida's mangrove swamps located in the GEB, specifically in Lee, Collier, Monroe and Miami-Dade counties (Meindl, 2005).

**Geologic origins.** Despite the relatively recent emergence of the Everglades 5,000 years ago, the events leading up to its birth span hundreds of millions of years (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002). It is believed that the Florida Platform, the landmass that separates the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean and of which Florida is the emergent portion, was once attached to Africa. The Florida Platform became fixed in its current position on the south eastern corner of North America between 300-350 million years ago (mya) when the continents of Laurasia (which included the present continents of North America and Eurasia) and Gondwana (made up of now South America, Africa, India, Australia, and Antarctica) joined together as Pangaea, the former supercontinent that is thought to have at one time joined all the earth's landmass. Around 200 mya, volcanic activity brought on the breakup of Pangaea into its respective continental parts, with the Florida Platform attached to North America (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999; Webb, 1990). Despite having been at a point of continental convergence, the platform remained relatively flat. It did develop a slight westward tilt, perhaps due to volcanic activity occurring in the region of the Bahamas, a point that would later impact the Everglades drainage pattern (McCally, 199; Webb, 1990).

At this point, the Florida Platform was submerged under ocean waters and would remain so until 25 mya. According to Webb (1990) the land mass has spent approximately 95% of its geologic history as a marine environment. Between 225-65 mya, a thick layer of limestone began accumulating on the igneous basement rock (McCally, 1999). Under this weight, the basement rock eventually began to subside, and did so at a rate equaling that of limestone accumulation maintaining the landmass' inundated state. Millions of years of this cycle of limestone accumulation matched by subsidence eventually resulted in what is found under the region today, a flat limestone strata ranging from 13,000-20,000 feet in thickness (McCally, 1999). The limestone deposits forming during this time, between 70-25 mya, are home to the Florida Aquifer (aquifer and groundwater storage will be covered later in this chapter) (Lodge, 2004). Eventually, sea level variations and limestone buildup led to the emergence of parts of the Florida Platform, beginning in north Florida (McCally, 1999).

During the Pleistocene Epoch, which began about 2.5 mya and lasted until roughly 12,000 years ago, glacial periods forced the Florida landmass, particularly the southern tip, through repeated cycles of inundation and emergence (McCally, 1999). During times of expansion, the peninsula was much cooler and more arid than it is today. The dramatic changes in sea level resulted in limestone strata that are highly variable, and allowed for the development of the "mosaic of wetland environments" that define the region today (McCally, 1999, p. 8).

The processes that created the region's diverse and abundant water features began thousands of years ago. At the end of the last ice age, sea level rose pushing

fresh water up through the porous limestone surface and allowing for the development of habitats around springs and sinkholes. Solution of limestone deposits from rainwater and groundwater further contributed to this process of wetland habitat creation.

Development of the Kissimmee River Valley was also a result when groundwater dissolved limestone from below causing the surface to sag. The Kissimmee River, the only major Florida river system that doesn't drain to the coast, began draining into a bedrock trough, formed as a result of subsidence, at the southern end of the valley. This drainage, combined with rising sea levels and rainwater, formed what would eventually become Lake Okeechobee (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999; Nordie, 1990). Although this process began roughly 6,000 years ago, the lake did not reach its current size, the second largest in the country, until about 4,000 years ago (McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002).

**Fire, soil and hydroperiod: The development and maintenance of plant communities.** The rich and diverse assemblage of plant communities found in the GEB owe their existence in large part to the relationship between fire and hydroperiod, or the period of time when a wetland is flooded; defined by the presence of surface water rather than its depth. Additionally, these factors have aided in the creation of soils that have further fostered the growth of their respective plant communities.

Fire has played a pivotal role in shaping the Everglades. Fire controls the distribution of plant communities by preventing the invasion of woody plant species in grassy marshes. Fires also release nutrients faster than natural decay and aid in the formation, as well as the destruction, of soils. Fires are primarily the result of rainy

season lightning strikes. Because the rainy season means the onset of the Everglades hydroperiod, the soil and roots of fire resistant plants are saturated; hence, the fire does little deep damage. A long hydroperiod, for the Everglades occurs when the land has been continuously flooded for more than 10 months at a time over the span of several years, whereas a short hydroperiod occurs when continued inundation lasts fewer than seven months (Lodge, 2004). In instances when fire occurs during the dry season, or in the absence of hydroperiod, much greater damage ensues. Soils are burned up and destroyed and even fire resistant plants can die off, inducing plant succession (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999).

Soils are both created and destroyed by fire. There are two types of soils found in the Everglades: marl, or calcitic mud, and peat, the famous Everglades muck soil in areas where it has been enriched with sediment. Marl can be found in areas where the bedrock is close to the surface and is the product of periphyton (algae). Peat soils are found in areas with deep bedrock layers and long hydroperiods, creating anaerobic environments where dead matter accumulates faster than it can decompose. The rich Everglades peat and muck soils were, at one time, 14 feet deep and inspired much of the efforts to drain the Everglades as I will later illustrate (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999).

**Flora and fauna.** As previously outlined, the GEB is home to several plant communities. Freshwater marshes make up a large portion of the Everglades. Marshes are differentiated from swamps, which are also found in the GEB, by their prairie like landscape and abundance of herbaceous vegetation that stays low to the ground. Larger trees and tree islands, on the other hand, dominate the swamp environment.



Sawgrass predominates in freshwater marshes (Figure 21) although over 100 other species of marsh plants can be found in this community. While sawgrass is extremely fire resistant and thrives in the wetland environment, dry season fires or instances of prolonged extreme flooding can be devastating to this otherwise hardy plant (Lodge, 2004).



*Figure 21.. Sawgrass marsh in Taylor Slough with tree islands in the background. From "Everglades National Park: Northern Section, Tree Islands," by U.S. Geological Survey, South Florida Information Access (SOFIA) retrieved from [http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual\\_tour/enp/index.html](http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual_tour/enp/index.html).*

There are a variety of tree communities found in the GEB. Wetland tree islands are forested areas in marshes and swamps that resemble 'islands' due to surrounding water levels. Tree islands are dominated by temperate, wetland species such as

cypress or swamp bay and are named for the predominant species (e.g. cypress head, bayhead). While tree islands tend to have soils that are completely saturated, if not immersed, during rainy season, some form high enough above the water level to support upland species. Mangrove swamp covers more than 500 square miles in the GEB and constitutes the largest contiguous community of its kind in the world (Lodge, 2004). Mangrove swamps occur in intertidal zones where they are protected from direct wave action. These habitats are dominated by three species of mangrove: red, white and black. Mangroves are tropical trees adapted to changing water levels and salinity. Adaptations include prop roots that extend out and down from the trunk and not only protect from tidal action but also aid in bringing oxygen to submerged roots in the flooded anaerobic environment (cypress have a similar adaptation known as a 'knee'). Similarly, pneumatophores, found in black mangrove forests, are root extensions that rise up from the soil to exchange gases. Some species of mangrove prevent salt intrusion into the plant whereas black mangrove controls internal salinity by excreting excess salt through their leaves (Lodge, 2012).

Pinelands are found throughout the region and used to cover the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, a rock formation that runs down the Atlantic coast separating the Everglades from the Atlantic Ocean. The predominate species, and the only true pine found here, is slash pine with a regional variety, Dade County Pine as it's locally known, being a particularly hard wood. Surviving in a range of wet to dry environments, pines are extremely fire resistant and are, in fact, maintained by regular fire occurrences. Pine can grow on flat sandy soils giving rise to the name 'flatwoods' to describe the community. It is also found growing on hard porous limestone from Miami southward, these areas are

known as 'pine rocklands' (Figure 22). The rocklands are unique to other plant communities in the GEB due to a prevalence of endemic species. Pine has played an important role in the region's development both for its use in the pulp industry and in the making of turpentine as well as providing building materials during times of rapid development in Miami (Lodge, 2004; National Park Service, 2012). The harvesting of timber for the lumber industry was so thorough in the early years of the region's development that as early as 1943, Davis (1943) reports that the pine forests had "been so thoroughly logged, burned or otherwise depleted that only about 10% contain mature uncut timber" (p.155).



*Figure 22.* Pine rocklands (pinelands) in Everglades National Park. Reprinted from "Everglades: Pine Rocklands" by the National Park Service, retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/forkids/pine-rocklands.htm>. In the public domain.



Hardwood hammocks (Figure 23), another tree community, are known as such because of the prevalence of broad-leaved as opposed to pine trees. In the northern part of the region, temperate species such as hackberry and live oak can be found, but from Miami southwards tropical species dominate the hammocks (hence the often used name ‘tropical hardwood hammock’) with the exception of live oak, which is also present in the south. Many of the tropical southern species found in the GEB, gumbo-limbo and cocoplum for example, originated in the West Indies (Derr, 1998; Lodge, 2004; National Park Service, 2012).



*Figure 23.* Harwood hammock in Everglades National Park. Reprinted from “Everglades: Hardwood Hammock” by the National Park Service, retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/forkids/hardwood-hammock.htm>. In the public domain.

The GEB also has an abundance of coastal lowland habitats, often the result of destruction of other habitats such as mangrove swamp brought on by hurricanes. Such habitats include plant communities ranging from marl prairie to saltwort marsh and black rush marsh. Species common to coastal lowland communities include drought tolerant succulents as well as epiphytes such as air plants and orchids, which make their home on the buttonwoods and dead, driftwood mangroves common throughout these communities. In addition, there are thousands of barrier islands of varying acreage that line the coast (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

Marine and estuarine waters including tidal creeks and bays line the coast and constitute yet another rich and diverse habitat. Florida Bay, located in Everglades National Park, has 800 square miles of marine floor (National Park Service, 2012). Aquatic habitats of the GEB are home to numerous plant species including five species of marine grasses and numerous species of algae (Lodge, 2004).

The GEB hosts a diverse array of terrestrial and aquatic fauna. Crustaceans and mollusks, such as shrimps, crabs, lobsters and oysters, are important not only to the aquatic ecosystem but also to the commercial and recreational fisheries of the region. Over 500 species of fresh and saltwater fishes are present (Lodge, 2004). Unfortunately this number includes several exotic species introduced from the tropical and aquarium trade (Lodge, 2004; National Park Service, 2012). Other life that plays a pivotal role in the ecosystem and food chain of these habitats include aquatic insects, both fully aquatic species as well those as those that fly but live in the water during their larval stages (e.g. mosquitoes) and 15 native species of amphibian (Lodge, 2004).

Terrestrial invertebrates in the bioregion include spiders as well as flying insects such as butterflies. Reptiles found in the region are adapted to a variety of environments ranging from terrestrial to aquatic and also have varying tolerances to salinity. For example, sea turtles are completely marine whereas other turtle species such as the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), an endangered species, is terrestrial. Similarly both the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) (Figure 24) and the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) can tolerate both fresh and salt-water environments but crocodiles thrive in saltwater and brackish environments, while alligators prefer freshwater (Lodge, 2004; National Park Service, 2012).



Figure 24. American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) on top of alligator nest. Reprinted from “Everglades: American Alligator, In-depth,” by the National Park Service, retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/alligatorindepth.htm>. In the public domain.

Marine mammals such as the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) can be found in bays, estuaries and near shore

coastal waters. Manatees are vegetarian, feeding on the aquatic vegetation of the region whereas dolphins live on the abundant fish found in these waters. Both species face threats from humans such as injuries sustained from boat propellers and habitat disruption and loss due to development and pollution. Only the manatee is listed as an endangered species at this time. Land mammals are similarly threatened due to habitat loss caused by urban development and threats from motorized vehicles. The Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) (Figure 25) is at a high risk for extinction and believed to have fewer than 100 individuals left in the wilds of South Florida (National Park Service, 2012). Mercury accumulation in the fish found in Everglades waters also jeopardizes the health of the panthers that rely on these fish as a food source. Other, more common terrestrial mammals in the GEB include the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), the opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*), marsh rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*) and Everglades mink (*Mustela vison*) (Lodge, 2004; National Park Service, 2012).



Figure 25. Florida Panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). Reprinted from “Everglades: Florida Panther, Species Profile,” by the National Park Service, retrieved February 26, 2013 from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/floridapanther.htm>. In the public domain.



Of the 400 species of birds found in the GEB, about 40%, or 116 species are native (Robertson & Kushlan, 1984). Many of these, both native and non-native, are only seasonal residents. Renowned for its rookeries, Florida has more species of water birds, those that rely heavily on marine and estuarine habitats, than other state, with 120 species found in south Florida alone (Lodge, 2004). Fourteen species of wading bird are native to the GEB. Examples of wading birds found in the region include several species of ibis, heron, and egret as well as the endangered Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) (Figure 26). The plume trade of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries decimated wading bird populations in the GEB. Many species' numbers never recovered as they also suffered subsequent habitat loss at the hands of unbridled development (Derr, 1998; Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999).



Figure 26. Wood stork (*Mycteria americana*). Reprinted from “Everglades: Woodstork, Species Profile,” by the National Park Service, retrieved February 26, 2013 from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/woodstork.htm>. In the public domain.



***Invasive species.*** As humans have migrated to the GEB from other parts of the world, they have introduced almost 1,000 species from abroad, over 100 of which have been deemed invasive exotics (Derr, 1998; Lodge, 2004). Invasive exotics have adapted so well to the environment of south Florida that they are crowding out and threatening the survival of native species. Some of the most significant threats to the flora of the GEB are melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) (Figure 27), Australian pine (*Casuarina spp.*) and Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*) (Figure 28) (Lodge, 2004; Rauch, 2002). The first three are trees that develop tall dense forests that block sunlight from native species effectively supplanting entire plant communities. Old world climbing fern also shades out other species by climbing over existing trees, tree islands and even over sawgrass in wetlands. It poses additional risks by enabling the spread of what would otherwise be a small ground fire to the tree canopy (Lodge, 2004; Rauch, 2002). Faunal exotic invasives include the walking catfish (*Clarias batrachus*), blue tilapia (*Oreochromis aureus*), and Burmese python (*Python molurus bivittatus*) (Lodge, 2004).



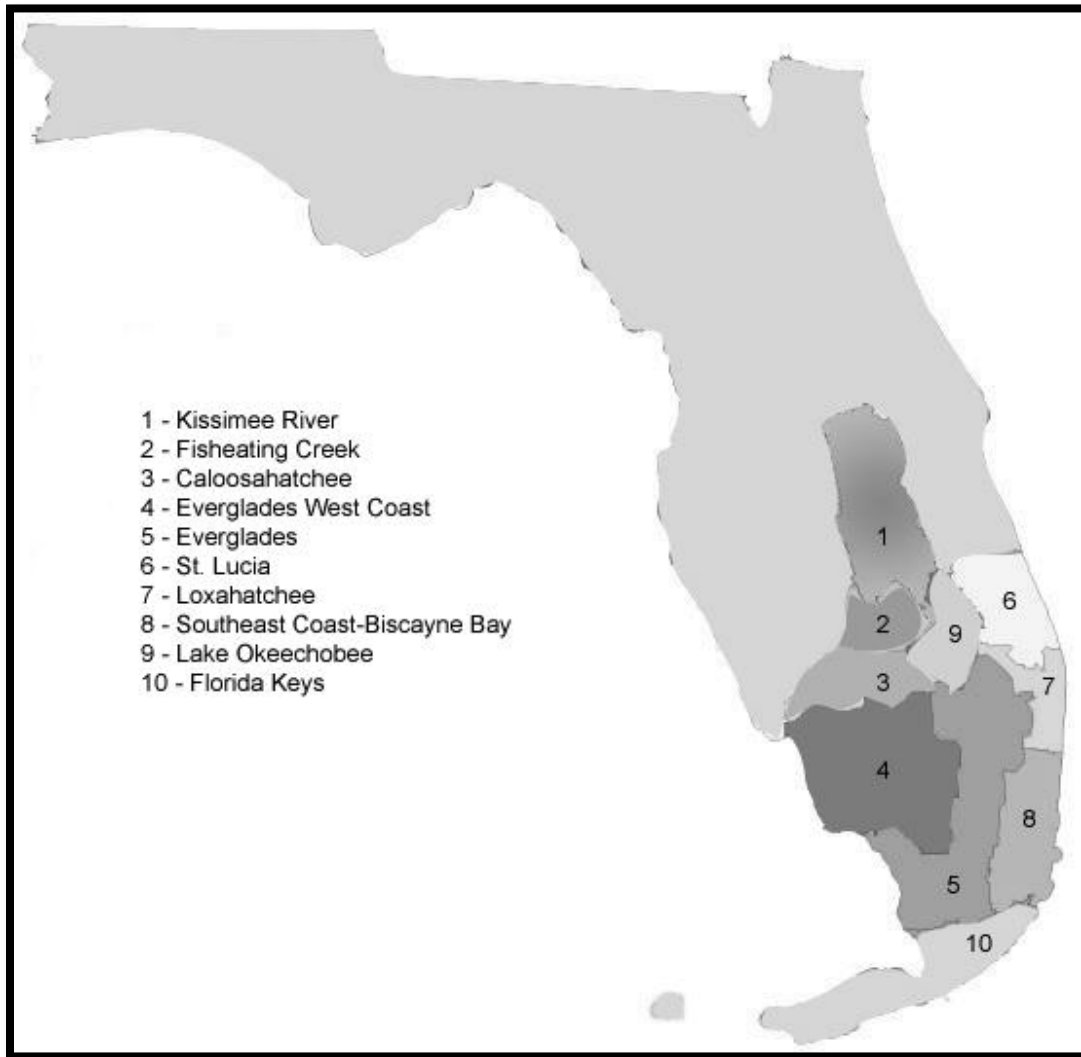
*Figure 27. Brazilian Pepper (Schinus terebinthifolius).* Reprinted from “Everglades: Brazilian Pepper,” by the National Park Service, retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=170163>. In the public domain.



*Figure 28. Old World Climbing Fern (Lygodium microphyllum).* Reprinted from “Everglades: Old world climbing fern,” by the National Park Service, retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/upload/OldWorldClimbingFern.pdf>. In the public domain.

**Watersheds.** Several watersheds contribute to the larger drainage basin of the GEB and these are displayed in Figure 29. These watersheds include the Everglades, Everglades West Coast, Caloosahatchee, Fisheating Creek, Lake Okeechobee, Kissimmee River, St. Lucie-Loxahatchee, Lake Worth Lagoon-Palm Beach Coast,

Southeast Coast-Biscayne Bay, and the Florida Keys (Florida DEP, 2012). As with the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, I will focus here on only the watersheds directly impacting or of significance to the study area.



*Figure29.* Watersheds of the Greater Everglades Bioregion. Adapted from “Watershed Monitoring Basins,” by Florida Department of Environmental Protection, retrieved from <http://www.floridadep.org/water/monitoring/basins.htm>. Adapted with permission.

The city of Miami is situated within the Southeast Coast-Biscayne Bay watershed. The watershed extends south from the Everglades Water Conservation

Areas 1 and 2 and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Everglades National Park. Covering 1,200 square miles, the watershed lies primarily in Miami-Dade County, although it also covers parts of Broward County and a small section of Monroe County (Florida Department of Environmental Protection [FDEP], 2013b). The Southeast Coast-Biscayne Bay watershed has several major water bodies including the Miami River, New River, and Taylor Slough as well as numerous other canals and streams for a total of over 800 miles of waterways (FDEP, 2013b). The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, Biscayne Bay, and Atlantic nearshore waters off the coast are also included in this watershed's basin.

West of the Atlantic coastal ridge, much of this area was at one time wetland, drained for development and agricultural uses and many canals possess pumping stations to both prevent flood and saltwater intrusion. The primary source of water in the watershed is the Biscayne aquifer, a shallow surficial unconfined aquifer. The Floridan aquifer system that lies deep under the region is not a useful supply due to mineralization and confinement. Urbanization is the primary land use in the basin occupying about 50% of the land area and agriculture is also significant occupying 10%. Both contribute pollutants that threaten water quality in the form of storm water runoff and septic seepage as well as runoff from fertilizers and agrochemicals (FDEP, n.d.a; FDEP, 2013b).

Historically, the Everglades watershed was a 4,000 square mile unimpeded sheet flow system. Currently, the watershed covers about the same total area but only about half of the original ecosystem remains in the form of the 2,300 square miles of the

Everglades National Park (FDEP, n.d.b). Comprising an additional 1,400 square miles, the three Water Conservation Area's (WCA) are considered to have returned the land to a nearly natural state, but the wetland ecosystem is not free to follow natural flow patterns in these areas as it is controlled with pumps and levees (USGS, 2013a). The watershed runs from Lake Okeechobee south to Florida Bay through the center of the state and covers parts of Palm Beach, Hendry, Broward, Miami-Dade, and Collier counties. With over 3,500 miles of rivers, canals and streams, some manmade and some natural, major features include Florida Bay, Water Conservation Areas (WCA) 1, 2 and 3, Taylor and Shark River Slough and the Hillsboro and Miami Canals. The two most significant land uses within the watershed are wetlands with 72% and agriculture, which makes up 20% (FDEP, n.d.b). Nutrient enrichment and hydrological changes are some of the biggest threats to Florida Bay and Everglades National Park. The Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA), a region within the watershed used for agriculture and maintained by canals and water control structures, contributes significant concentrations of nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen. Additionally, as will be discussed later, drainage efforts and flood control measures have significantly disrupted hydrologic flows impacting ecosystem functioning (FDEP, n.d.b; FDEP, 2013a; Lodge, 2004).

## **Human Geography**

**Indigenous populations.** The prehistoric settlement and occupation of the GEB has been categorized as having three cultural periods: Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and local adaption, also known as the Glades period (McCally, 1999). Paleo-Indians are thought

to have first arrived in the GEB between 12,000-14,000 years ago (McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002) although Derr (1998) puts the estimate even earlier putting the range at 15,000-20,000 years ago. These groups primarily subsisted by hunting large game animals and supplemented this diet with scavenged vegetation and occasional small game. Due to glaciation, the landscape was very different and lacked many of the freshwater bodies found there today. Therefore, these groups lived and hunted near the then limited freshwater sources such as streams, springs and lakes. Between 9,000-6,500 B.C., sea level rose and the climate began getting wetter which, in conjunction with human predation, brought on the extinction of Pleistocene megafauna and subsequently the decline of the Paleo-Indian cultural period (McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002). The region experienced yet another drought cycle between 6,000-3,000 B.C. during which time the Archaic cultural tradition of hunter and gatherers took hold, despite population decline and overall poor health in the harsh dry conditions (McCally, 1999).

Around 3,000 B.C. the region's climate and sea level stabilized to approximately what one finds there today (McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002). Because of the increase in freshwater, modern flora and fauna communities, such as those discussed previously, began to establish. The increase in productivity and abundance of food sources revolutionized the indigenous cultures of the region triggering the rise of the Glades tradition. A number of different tribes belonged to the Glades tradition and they had settlements in several areas of south Florida, all outside of the Everglades proper. Of these tribes, the Calusa, a group that settled along the southwestern coast and after whom the Caloosahatchee River was named, were the most powerful and had the

largest numbers. McCally (1999) attributes their greater numbers to the highly productive coastal waters and harbors on which they lived. The Calusa lived in dense settlements on shell hammocks along the coast. With very little arable land and abundant aquatic resources, the Calusa are one of the few groups in the world to have had a highly organized permanent society in the absence of agriculture. Instead, they relied heavily on shellfish, net fishing, the gathering of wild edibles and some trade with the Okeechobee tribes who practiced a form of non-domesticated agriculture to raise tubers for flour (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999). The Tequesta were the second most formidable group, related to the Calusa through their caciques, or tribal chiefs. They lived along the Atlantic coastal ridge in the southeastern part of the GEB, in present day Miami and occupied the Everglades tree islands seasonally. As with the Calusa, the Tequesta had no agriculture and subsisted primarily through fishing, hunting and gathering (Derr, 1998; Lodge, 2004).

**European settlement.** As with the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, the Spanish were the first to explore the GEB. Although Ponce de Leon is well known as the first Spaniard to reach Florida, McCally (1999) gives credit to Pedro Menendez as the first to take interest in the southern portion of the state. Having defeated the French in 1565 at St. Augustine, a settlement on the northern Atlantic coast of the state, Menendez effectively won control of Florida for Spain. He then proceeded to systematically explore the coast as Adelantado, a title that would allow him to exploit the riches he hoped to find were he able to colonize the region. Florida was an important strategic point for Spain on trips made between Spain and other Spanish colonies in the America's. Menendez hoped to find a passage through the state on one of the region's many waterways and to harvest

goods for trade such as timber, hides and sugar. Although his hopes quickly faded, the Spanish, and later English, still managed to decimate indigenous populations in the region within the first 200 years of contact (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999). It is estimated that when the Spanish arrived in the GEB, Calusa and Tequesta populations were between 10,000 to 20,000 (Lodge, 2004; McCally, 1999). Ravaged by disease, war and slavery, none but a few remained by the time the Spanish left in 1763 (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

**American settlement.** Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821. Although at this point U.S. settlements had already been established in the northern part of the state, the GEB remained unexplored until decades later. Buckingham Smith was the first to conduct a research trip through the Everglades region in 1847, two years after Florida achieved statehood and was bequeathed 500,000 acres by the federal government for development. Sent by the U.S. Senate, he was trying to determine the feasibility of Everglades drainage for agriculture and settlement. He determined that drainage was feasible both technically and economically and, despite later warnings from others who went to the region for similar pursuits, put in motion the region's long history of drainage and reclamation efforts (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

Before railroads reached the region, travel occurred primarily by boat; early settlements developed along coastlines and waterways in hardwood hammocks, pinelands and rocklands. Once American settlement took hold, Florida "natives", (the Anglo-Saxon first-borns of Celtic or Scottish descent that inhabited backwoods areas) were known as Crackers, whereas those originating in the Florida Keys called



themselves Conchs. Pioneers lived off of game they could hunt or fish or plants they could gather or grow. To earn money, residents worked in timber, trading pelts, alligator skins and plumes, and as hunting and fishing guides. Sadly, many of these endeavors saw the hunting and harvesting of resources to near total depletion as populations increased in the region (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

**The Seminole and Miccosukee.** When the Spanish left in 1763, Florida fell briefly into the hands of the British. With the end of the American Revolution and the Treaty of Paris, Florida was returned to Spain although firm rule was never established the second time around. Native Americans belonging to the Creek nation, fleeing persecution and removal from their lands to reservations in the West by the U.S. government, sought refuge in Spanish Florida, taking advantage of the relaxed Spanish rule. These individuals were composed of two language groups, Hitchiti and Muscogee. The Hitchiti people eventually took on the name Miccosukee, and the Muscogee, in conjunction with freed and escaped slaves and remnant Spanish and individuals of Spanish and native descent, formed the Seminole tribe. Despite the fact that they were different groups who spoke different languages, and who historically despised each other, the Miccosukee were lumped together with the Seminoles by whites until they forced the U.S. government to recognize their distinction in 1962 (Derr, 1998; Klinkenberg, 2002). With American acquisition of the Florida territory, Andrew Jackson began a campaign against the Seminoles that pushed them off the rich agricultural land they had settled in the northern part of the state and into the southern part of the state, where they ended up eventually in the depths of the Everglades (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

This campaign, known as the Seminole War, lasted many decades, although there were two periods of peace leading to the distinction between the First, Second and Third Seminole Wars. During this time many natives were sent to live on reservations in Oklahoma. This was accomplished through capture as well as through deceit and treachery on the part of the U.S. government. Drought and frost in conjunction with trying to evade U.S. forces brought on famine and poor health amongst the tribes and in some instances forced them to hunt cattle belonging to white settlers. Tensions erupted between the tribes and whites and many pioneers fled their homesteads out of fear of native attacks. The U.S. government provided rations to these fleeing settlers as well as compensation to white slave owners who had lost slaves to Seminole conversion. This brought many to the conclusion that war with the Seminoles was profitable and best continued (Derr, 1998). This is not so unlike the narrative unraveling in the SDB around the same time (see Chapter 4 Bioregional Ethnography: The Sonoran Desert Bioregion).

By the end of the Second Seminole War in 1842, between 300-400 Seminoles remained in the GEB and these individuals had hidden themselves deep in the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. The U.S. government initially planned to leave these natives alone, but tensions once again ensued and the Third Seminole War began as an effort to wipe out these remaining families. The onset of the American Civil War drew attention away from these endeavors, and it wasn't until the 1930's that treaties were signed to put a formal end to the war and establish boundaries for the Florida native reservations. The Seminoles established four reservations in Brighton,

Big Cypress, Immokalee, and Hollywood and the Miccosukee established reservations at Forty Mile Bend and Big Cypress Preserve.

Native populations in the GEB face ongoing issues. Many have attempted to live off the land, as their ancestors. Debates have arisen over their right to hunt endangered species or harvest timber, particularly those populations living in protected areas such as nature preserves and the Everglades National Park (Derr, 1998). Additionally, because of contamination upstream, water quality and quantity are at risk as well as the traditional means of survival such as hunting and fishing. It is no longer safe for natives to eat many of the fish species they once relied on due to Mercury poisoning from industry. Habitat loss due to pollution from industry, agricultural runoff and development has impacted important food sources such as deer (Klinkenberg, 2002). In short, as rapidly as the Everglades environment is changing due to external forces, so, too, is the lifestyle of the natives who rely upon it.

**Drainage and agriculture.** Historically, the Everglades consisted of an area of about 4,000 square miles, most of it wetland. In 1850, the U.S. government passed the Swamp Lands Act so that states could reclaim wetland acreage within their borders. With the Act's passage, Florida was given 22 million acres by the federal government for the purposes of reclaiming these wetlands to make them habitable (McCally, 1999). What followed was a series of progressively more complex and expensive attempts to control the flow of water in the Everglades. Subsequent pieces of legislation and numerous state-appointed agencies and commissions succeeded at little more than

mismanagement of the land, while the cost and ecological repercussions of such an endeavor were consistently underestimated (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

Initially, hopes were set on draining the land. Funding such a project proved difficult at best and the state tried several schemes to get the job done. The Internal Improvement Fund (IIF), the state agency tasked with administering Florida's newly acquired wetlands, made deals with railroad and canal companies promising to provide much needed transportation infrastructure in exchange for land grants. Civil war strife left many of these companies with debts unpaid, bankrupting the IIF and drainage efforts. In an attempt to dig the state out of this financial catastrophe, the IIF sold Hamilton Disston, a developer already contracted by the state to drain part of the northern Everglades, 4 million acres to tune of \$1 million; it was the largest land purchase by an individual in the world at that time, (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

Drainage was driven by a desire to open the land for settlement by small-scale truck farmers. McCally (1999) argues that big agriculture taking hold in the Great Plains revolutionized agriculture all over the U.S. Traditional grain crops were no longer profitable for small farmers, spawning the transition of many northeastern farms to truck farms, small fruit and vegetable farms that sold to big cities. The advent of refrigerated railcars made possible what McCally (1999) calls a "new American dream", that is the dream to have a "prosperous truck farm on the reclaimed muck soils of the Everglades" where the climate and rich soils would allow for winter production and tropical produce (p. 86). This dream led many northern farmers to invest in Everglades farm plots, sold sight unseen by land speculators who had purchased the properties from the state at

basement prices. The cheap sales were meant to fund drainage efforts quickly but all of this hinged on the payments made to the speculators, who failed to inform the new property owners of their acquisition's submerged state. Upon realizing they had purchased-- to borrow an oft-cited phrase, "land by the gallon" -- outraged farmers defaulted on payments, halting funding and, effectively, Everglades' drainage efforts (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999, p. 105; Nijman, 2010, p. 21).

Slowly but surely, drainage was eventually realized through the implementation of drainage taxes, land sales to developers, and other efforts by the state to garner income from the landholdings. With the increased agriculture and food production needs associated with World War I, the population of the Everglades boomed. But once the issue of inundation had, for the moment, been overcome, farmers faced a new host of problems. The most basic issue faced by farmers new to the bioregion was that they lacked the traditional local knowledge of how and what to grow in the unique Everglades environment. The 'rich muck soils' of the drained lands lacked trace minerals such as copper and iron and did not retain nutrients well, requiring heavy nutrient inputs that, as noted previously, impact ecosystems downstream. The muck was also susceptible to moisture loss during droughts and, subsequently, loss from fire and dust storms. An even bigger threat was soil subsidence from decomposition; the organic matter of the soils began breaking down once the bacteria were exposed to air. Additionally, south Florida weather proved to be far more precarious than anticipated and periods of drought and severe weather occurrences jeopardized the success of the new settlements (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

**From drainage to flood control.** When the state began altering the traditional sheet flow system and Everglades drainage patterns, not much thought was given to how the new system would handle the large quantities of water brought by extreme weather occurrences. The hurricanes of 1926 and 1928 were the first to hit in decades. They were the first storms of their kind for many new Floridians. Miami was ravaged by the first of the two with the 1928 storm bringing the wrath of Lake Okeechobee down on Belle Glade and neighboring farming communities. More than 2,000 people perished in the floodwaters, making it the most deadly storm to hit the region (Derr, 1998).

Drainage advocates realized that removing water from the Everglades was only half the picture. Once-flooded land would again flood in the presence of storms. Additionally, in the absence of water during times of drought, the region's freshwater resources were threatened by saltwater intrusion from the Atlantic. As early as 1919, a well field in Miami needed to be relocated inland due to saline contamination (McCally, 1999). Not only were the drained lands susceptible to uncontrolled flooding and saltwater intrusion but also the rapid and incontrovertible loss of soils prompted some to argue that fallow land would be best conserved if it were returned to its natural flooded state until needed for production. The hurricanes of the 1920's brought assistance to help the region resolve its water issues in the form of federal funding and the Army Corps of Engineers. Instead of focusing on drainage, a new approach was implemented with an emphasis on flood control. The first project undertaken by the new regime was the Hoover Dike, an earthen mound built up around the shore of Lake Okeechobee. Other measures towards flood control were taken including the dredging and deepening of canals and the installation of pumps and levees (Derr, 1998; McCally, 1999).

The success of these improvements was short-lived and two more hurricanes in 1947 once again inundated farms and homes. In response, Congress authorized the Central and South Florida Project for Flood Control in 1948, and the Florida legislature established the Central and South Florida Water Management District in 1949 to operate the project (McCally, 1999; Purdum, 2002). The Central and South Florida Project proved to be the most comprehensive plan for water management yet seen by the state. For the first time, urban flood control was incorporated into what had historically been an effort centered on serving the purposes of rural agriculture (McCally, 1999).

Four elements constituted the bulk of the Central and South Florida Project. A levee was to be erected around the southeastern edge of the Everglades, protecting anything east of the levee from Everglades flooding and also serving as an artificial boundary for westward development. The second element was the establishment of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) a region situated just south of Lake Okeechobee in the northern part of the Everglades. This region constituted about 27% of the original Everglades land area and was reserved specifically for agricultural use (Lodge, 2004). The third aspect was to build a more comprehensive canal system with pumping stations and control gates so that the whole system could be controlled. Lastly, three reservoirs, or water conservation areas, were to be established and connected with a levee system so that the level of Lake Okeechobee could be maintained and to mitigate the effects of drought on the EAA (Lodge, 2004).

**Watershed management.** Florida has taken an innovative approach to managing its water resources. Five water management districts were established for the state with the passage of the 1972 Water Resources Act (Purdum, 2002). The districts correspond to natural watershed boundaries with the Central and South Florida Water Management District of 1949 becoming the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and managing the area covered by the GEB. The SFWMD encompasses an area that covers parts of 16 counties in south Florida and is home to a population of 7.7 million people (SFWMD, n.d.). Water management districts are responsible not only for maintaining flood control and for managing the water systems within their bounds but also for maintaining water supply (allocation and conservation will be discussed below) and water quality (Purdum, 2002).

Water is unique in Florida insofar as it is considered, for legal purposes, as a resource of the state rather than individuals or corporations. This differs dramatically from how water is managed in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, which follows the prior appropriation doctrine, or “first in time, first in right” (Purdum, 2002, p. 11). Florida’s laws dictate that the water management districts are responsible for administering the permit system through which water is allocated. A water user’s permit can have a lifespan of up to 50 years and the district reserves the right to reduce allocated quantities on existing permits during times of drought. Those wishing to obtain a permit must ensure that their use will not encroach on other users’ rights and that the use is reasonable and beneficial and in the public’s interest. The districting system also serves to encourage the use and maintenance of water resources within natural hydrologic systems,



discouraging the transfer of water from across watershed boundaries unless all local resources have been exhausted (Purdum, 2002).

For conservation and ecosystem management purposes, water management districts must also establish minimum flows and levels for all water resources. This includes both groundwater and surface water sources, manmade and natural (aquifers, lakes, wetlands, rivers, streams and canals). Not only does this measure protect water supplies, but it also serves to protect the ecosystems that have developed around these water resources (Purdum, 2002).

Water is a resource of concern for the region. Approximately 90% of the SFWMD has been designated a Water Resource Caution Area, or an area that has or is projected to have critical water supply problems due to shortages or contamination over the next 20 years (FDEP, 2011; Purdum, 2002). Within these areas, state law mandates the reuse of reclaimed water. According to Marella (2009) in 2005 the SFWMD, with 41% of the population, made up 50% of freshwater withdrawals in the state. Since 1975, groundwater has been the main source of freshwater for the SFWMD and the GEB, coming primarily from the Biscayne Aquifer (FDEP, n.d.a.; Marella, 2009). Although the region relies heavily on groundwater, the SFWMD is the only water management district that has seen an overall increase in surface water withdrawals over the last 30 years. This is partly due to an increase in irrigated acreage. Agriculture is the biggest user of freshwater in the region, with domestic supply coming in second, although it should be noted that power generation, which relies on salt water, is actually the biggest user of water in the region at almost twice that of agricultural draws. Freshwater withdrawals

peaked in 2000 and declined from 2000-2005 due to a decrease in the number of irrigated acreage (Marella, 2009).

***Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.*** The network of over 200 water control structures on 1,700 hundred miles of canals and levees, completed as part of the Central and South Florida Project, succeeded in average daily loss of 1.7 billion gallons of water to the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Oceans (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). Diverting all of this water out of the Everglades has meant the natural hydrologic system was no longer receiving the necessary supplies of water needed to maintain ecosystem functions. These unanticipated effects of drainage and flood control, in conjunction with urbanization, agricultural and industrial activities, brought on the rapid deterioration of water quality and ecosystem health. A lawsuit brought against the SFWMD in 1988 for negligence and mismanagement of the region's fragile ecosystems and water resources, made it apparent that something needed to be done to prevent Everglades ecosystems from further deteriorating (Nijman, 2010).

To grapple with these issues, the federal government established a task force, made up of representatives from federal, state, local and tribal interests, responsible for coordinating and facilitating ecosystem restoration in the Everglades. The Water Resources Development Act formalized the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force in 1996. The Task Force established three goals for restoring the Everglades ecosystem. These include: restoring water flow to a more natural state while still accommodating the region's human and industrial inhabitants by maintaining supplies and preventing flooding, restoring and preserving impacted habitats, ecosystems and

species, finding an equilibrium between the natural and built environment such that human and industry activities are not impacted but also do not impact natural systems (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007).

In order to reach these goals, the Central and South Florida Project was reinvented as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). This plan, approved by the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, was to be executed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in conjunction with SFWMD (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). The four primary goals of CERP were to prevent flooding, improve storage capacity, prevent saltwater intrusion and the over-salinization of freshwater and brackish areas, and restore the natural ecology of the historic Everglades system (Nijman, 2010). CERP comprises the core of Everglades restoration with 60 projects, but this is just one piece of a larger restoration effort that includes 222 projects. The full restoration effort was expected to take 40 years and \$15.4 billion to implement, the cost being equally shared between state and federal governments (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007).

According to a study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2007) core CERP projects were already behind schedule and projected costs had already increased by 28% to \$19.7 billion. The 2008-2010 Biennial Report of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (n.d.) notes that CERP progress had been inhibited by policies in place and, as of 2009, progress has been made towards changing these policies. In addition, funding for restoration efforts has dramatically increased and several projects have broken ground. Examples of these projects include

the restoration of sheet flow by raising and bridging large segments of the Tamiami Trail and restoration of the Kissimmee River to historic flow patterns. Kissimmee restoration efforts have already seen improvements to local flora and fauna such as an increase in wading bird populations in the impacted area (South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, n.d.).

**Urbanization and the city of Miami.** Established in 1896, the city of Miami got its name from the Calusa word for Lake Okeechobee, “Mayaimi” or “big water” (Derr, 1998). Originally called Fort Dallas, promoters felt the new city needed a catchier name if it were to become the vacation destination they dreamed. Henry Flagler, the railroad mogul and former partner to John D. Rockefeller, is known as the “father of Miami” (Nijman, 2010, p. 11). Flagler brought railroad transportation to south Florida, effectively opening up the previously isolated region to development. After completing the east coast rail line to Miami in 1896, the city’s population tripled to almost 5,000 by the turn of the century (Nijman, 2010). To accommodate the growing population, Flagler built the waterworks and electric company as well as a school and church. He is also credited with building up the cities of West Palm, Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale with his elaborate resorts as well as numerous agricultural towns in the interior of the state.

From the start, Miami was developed around the leisure industry, envisioned as a theme park where pleasure seekers could see their dreams come true and carrying with it an air of sinfulness (Nijman, 2010; Portes & Stepick, 1993). The resort life was successful here, even during the early Depression years. Wealthy vacationers and prospective residents were drawn to Florida by “paradise peddlers” who touted the

region's beauty and purported health benefits (Derr, 1998, p. 174). South Florida gained a reputation for one's ability to make fast money in smuggling, construction, gambling and land and in the 1920's, Miami's crime and murder rate skyrocketed. The state legislature's abolition of inheritance and income tax in 1925 was also a factor drawing the wealthy and elderly to Florida's shores. Throughout this time, growth was rapid and Florida experienced a land boom that drove up land values and property taxes, causing many longtime Miami residents to lose their homes. Before the bubble burst and the land industry crashed in Florida in 1925-26, 56 hotels had been built on Miami Beach, a city that had only incorporated 10 years earlier in 1915 (Derr, 1998).

White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) dominated Miami's early development, and their racist and anti-Semitic sentiments were codified in places such as Miami Beach (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010). It wasn't until hard economic times hit, that Jewish tourists, previously barred by Miami Beach developers Carl Fisher and John Collins, were allowed on the scene. This set the tone for Miami's highly segregated settlement patterns; a conglomeration of mini-communities of ethnic concentrations that leave the city fragmented. According to Nijman (2010) even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Miami lacked community cohesiveness.

Further contributing to this fragmentation was a pre-1949 law dictating that 25 people could incorporate as a municipality. Under the auspices of this legislation, 26 'cities', some equating to no more than a small neighborhood by other city's definitions, formed in Dade County. According to Portes and Stepick (1993) this patchwork of mini governments meant a "proliferation of local authorities, petty rivalries, and overlapping

jurisdictions [resulting] in inefficient provision of basic services to the true ‘city’ that encompassed almost the entire county” (p. 81). Complicating matters more, people began moving to unincorporated parts of the county after 1949, creating disparities between city and county residents both in the costs and actual services received for those fees. Localized loyalties prevented the establishment of a unified metropolitan government for many years, but the battle was finally won with the passage of the Metro Charter in 1957 (Portes & Stepick, 1993).

Populations in the GEB are concentrated along the Atlantic Coast. Since the 1930’s Florida has been a predominantly urban state (Derr, 1998). Because the coastal areas along the Atlantic ridge naturally existed as well-drained land, and were also reasonably accessible by boat and later train, these areas were the first to be developed and have remained the most densely populated areas in the region (Derr, 1998; FDEP, 2013b). This area has also maintained a long history of seasonal residency, with winter bringing dramatic increases in population. During WWII, sailors and airmen used Florida as a training ground; many of the hotels on Miami Beach were converted to barracks. Post WWII times saw a rapid development and population growth, much of which was made up of military families, seniors and entrepreneurs. Growth in Florida took a ‘bottom up’ approach, concentrating in the southern portion of the state (cities of the GEB) and moving north in later years (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010).

In and around Miami, growth moved westward until hitting the Urban Development Boundary (UDB), a zoning tool established in 1983 that separates urban development from rural and natural areas, after which infill began to occur in the

urbanized areas giving way to high-rises. In recent years, there has been a push by farmers on the rural side of southern boundary, with the support of developers, to move the UDB. Since land that has urban development potential is worth a great deal more than agricultural land, moving the UDB south would allow the farmers to cash in at a higher rate (Nijman, 2010). The plight of these farmers is reminiscent of what is concurrently taking place in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion insofar as farmland is worth more when sold for development than are the crops one can grow on the parcel.

Derr (1998) outlines several factors that contributed to growth in the region. In the early part of the century, mosquitoes became less of a nuisance with the use of window screens and as progress was made towards Everglades drainage. Into the 1950's, the practice of spraying DDT and the widespread commercial availability of the yellow fever vaccine also contributed to making mosquitoes less of a deterrent. Additionally, as was the case in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion, the availability of air-conditioning in homes and public buildings made the hot tropical climate far more tolerable, although, at the expense of traditional forms of architectural climate control such as large shaded porches, structural orientation for shade, and large windows for breezes and ventilation (Derr, 1998; Haase, 1992). Nijman (2010) contends that encouraging indoor recreation through design that separates people from nature due to summer temperatures and humidity puts more value on the private rather than public spheres and inhibits the creation of public spaces. Further, a life centered on air-conditioning negates his belief that "urban public space serves as the city's living room where different people come together and enjoy each other in an inviting environment" (Nijman, 2010, p. 190).

**Political and economic climate.** Miami was, and continues to be, built on the leisure industry, catering to the wealthy. With a focus on tourism dollars, the city lacks industry that draws skilled middleclass immigrants. The town is rife with social inequality and extreme financial disparities (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010). During the 1970's and 80's the influx of international money and people brought on explosive growth in Miami's banking industry, aided also by the increase in drug trafficking. Drug trafficking was Florida's biggest industry in the early 80's and 80% of drug business was funneled through Miami (Nijman, 2010).

Although Miami's Cuban population has kept a Republican lead in the region, the Democratic Party is increasingly more well represented, particularly among non-Cuban Hispanic voters (Bustos, 2012). Still, Nijman (2010) maintains that the city is politically "apathetic" unless it pertains to foreign political activism and affairs (p. 128). To support this claim, Nijman (2010) cites a 1997 referendum to disincorporate the city of Miami due to the "culture of corruption" and mismanagement that has enveloped in the city's public sector, a referendum that would have passed were it not for the lack of political interest and poor turnout on the part of the citizenry (p. 130).

**Transportation.** As railroads, and later automobiles, spread through the GEB, they triggered growth never before seen in the region. The completion of the Tamiami Trail, an east-west thoroughfare, in 1928 revolutionized life for those living in the GEB. A trip from coast to coast that had previously taken days to complete could be done in less than day on the Trail. Unfortunately, Trail construction also wreaked havoc on the natural environment, blocking the natural sheet flow of the Everglades preventing



ecosystems south of the Trail from receiving adequate supplies of water. The ill effects of this mistake are still being corrected some 80 years later (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010).

A common practice amongst simplifiers is to reduce time spent driving (Johns, 2009; Leonard-Barton, 1981). This is often accomplished through use of public transit, bicycling and walking. Nijman (2010) argues that while public transportation in Miami is actually quite good, a better mass transit system and a regional approach to transportation infrastructure would improve the area's congestion issues. Despite this, upper and middle class individuals often claim that transit services are inadequate. Used almost exclusively by the poor and immigrant populations, public transportation in Miami is clearly associated with class whereas in other metropolitan areas (Nijman uses the examples of New York city and Washington, D.C.) this is not the case (Nijman, 2010). Similarly, walking and riding bicycles for everyday transportation is common in poorer areas of the city but rarely used by the middle and upper class unless done for fitness or recreation. Nijman (2010) attributes this to the climate noting that the high temperatures and humidity prevent more people from riding or walking unless it is out of necessity.

**Ethnic diversity.** Although Miami was originally designed as a leisure destination for wealthy whites, the city and larger metropolitan area boast a widely diverse ethnic and racial landscape. The port of Miami's strategic position on the Atlantic coast has allowed the city to develop as the gateway to South America (Nijman, 2010). This is not to say that it has been easy or that all ethnic groups have been welcomed or treated equally, as I will illustrate below. Voluntary simplicity has

predominantly been a movement of the white middle-class (Elgin, 1993; Grigsby 2004; Johns 2009). Yet, these individuals understand that their consumptive choices carry broader implications and therefore are often motivated to simplify by a sense of social responsibility and equality (Elgin & Michtell, 1977; Etzioni, 1998; Leonard-Barton, 1981; Sandlin & Walther, 2009; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). The question then follows, where simplifiers living in the GEB place themselves within the larger social struggles that have occurred along racial and ethnic lines in Miami.

***Immigration.*** Many of Miami's postwar arrivals were exiles from abroad and those planning the Cuban resistance. So many, in fact, that Time Magazine dubbed Miami "revolutionary headquarters of the Americas" in 1958 (Nijman, 2010). Between 1959-61, 50,000 Cuban exiles had fled to Miami. Miami had historically been a playground for the wealthy middle and upper class and the case was no different when it came to these early refugees. The early Cuban exile population was made up of wealthy business owners who opposed the revolution. By 1973 the number of Cuban refugees had hit somewhere between 340,000-400,000 (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010). Cuban immigrants, anticipating that they would one day return home, did little to assimilate with American culture, and since they arrived in such great numbers, they didn't have to. Little Havana developed as an enclave of the Cuban Diaspora in Miami. Everything changed in Miami in 1980. Not only was this the year of the race riots but it was also the year that Castro opened Cuba's port of Mariel. Over 120,000 refugees fled to Miami during the Mariel exodus, although this wave of immigrants did not receive the warm welcome their compatriots did. Castro went to great lengths, and to some degree

succeeded in, tarnishing the reputation of the Mariel Freedom Flotilla by claiming its passengers were criminals and crazies (Stepick & Portes, 1993).

Despite the increasing immigrant population, and the vision of Miami as economic capital of Latin America, wealthy refugees from other countries, namely Haiti, avoided the city throughout the 60's and 70's because of its racist reputation (Derr, 1998; Nijman, 2010). Finally in 1980, poor Haitians fleeing the oppressive regime in their country began looking to Miami's shores for refuge. Termed "boat people" these refugees would arrive by sea vessel, or simply wash ashore, risking everything including their life to make the dangerous and expensive voyage. Because little was known about Haitians or their culture and because they lacked the same social support network in the states that Cuban's had, there was a negative perception of Haitians from the onset. The government differentiated between Haitian and Cuban refugees by deeming the former 'economic' refugee and the latter 'political refugees. Haitians faced a constant battle against deportation, whereas their Cuban counterparts were welcomed with aid, until accusations of racism finally won them equal treatment. Support finally came to Haitian immigrants through community efforts and they were able to build their own community, Little Haiti, adjacent to Liberty City (Nijman, 2010; Stepick & Portes, 1993).

By the late 80's Miami was touting its multicultural nature as a "Latin City" and now offers an example to South Americans of the Latin Dream come true (Nijman, 2010, p. 67). During these waves of immigration, whites began moving out of Miami-Dade County, concentrating instead in Broward County to the north. Nijman (2010) makes a strong argument for how all of this movement of people has created a

population defined by its transient nature. Transience has prevented the development of a strong 'local' population and associated benefits of social capital. One's value and social status is defined by spatial mobility, and locals with strong ties to place and lacking spatial mobility (the African American population or poor immigrants) are at the bottom of the totem pole (Nijman, 2010).

***Miami's Black community.*** Forming the basis of the labor force, Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans played a significant role in Miami's early development. As with most southern cities, this population was subject to discrimination and segregation and African American and Afro-Caribbean communities were continuously relegated to a low place in society, even as other minorities immigrated to the city. Historically, the African American community was segregated to "Colored Town", a small area in the northwestern part of the city later known as Overtown. Appeals by community leaders, after cramped squalid conditions in Overtown led to dire health conditions, resulted in the installation of the south's first housing project in Liberty City, the predominant African American community in Miami today (Stepick & Portes, 1993).

Racial tensions continued to mount in Miami, even after the civil rights movement of the 1960's, particularly as immigrant populations entered the city en masse. The African American community perceived Cuban immigrants as posing direct competition for employment, although Stepick & Portes (1993) argue that Cubans did more to revolutionize Miami's economy through entrepreneurial ventures than displace African American's for low wage jobs. Still, Cubans were able to surpass African Americans in

incomes and business ownership very rapidly because aid in the form of business loans and other supports was disproportionately allocated to these immigrants. Haitians, on the other hand, were in direct competition with African Americans for jobs and, similarly, received disproportionate amounts of government aid compared to native black populations. Tensions eventually erupted in the violent race riots of 1980 and 1989. These outbursts were the physical manifestation of anger after years of subordination by whites and, later, other ethnic groups (Derr, 1998, Nijman, 2010, Stepick & Portes, 1993).

**Demographics.** The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL metropolitan statistical area is one of the 10 most populous metropolitan statistical areas in the country. Between 2000-2010 it grew by more than 11% reaching a population of over 5.5 million in 2010 (compared to four million for the Phoenix metro area) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). About half of the metro area population resides in Miami-Dade County, and Broward and Palm Beach Counties each contain roughly a quarter of the metro area population (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The population of the City of Miami is estimated to have hit 400,000 in 2011, less than one-third the population of the City of Phoenix. The population of Miami and the metro area is extremely diverse, having more foreign immigrants than any other metro area in the U.S. (Nijman, 2010). Hispanics and Latinos make up 41% of the population in the Miami metro area and 70% of the population in the City of Miami, compared to the national average of 16%. Whereas Hispanics in the Metro Phoenix area are predominantly of Mexican descent, in the Miami metro area, Cuba is the most significant single country of origin, accounting for almost 18% of the population. Individuals identifying as Black or

African American make up 22% of the population in the metro area, higher than both the Phoenix metro area (6%) and the national average (13%). The median age in the Miami metro area is 41, somewhat higher than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

**Foodshed.** As previously outlined, the GEB, as it relates to agriculture, has had an interesting history. The indigenous groups that formed the regions earliest inhabitants were unique in that they were able to develop large, complex societies without relying on agriculture for subsistence. Spanish conquerors similarly found the environment unsuitable for growing food or other products. It was not until Americans entered the region in the 1800's that anyone dreamed the inundated soils could be productive. So powerful was the hope that the warm environment and rich muck that lay under the swampy surface would provide the answers to the nation's agricultural dreams, that over a century has been dedicated to transforming the watery landscape to dry land. It was believed that agriculture would prevail in the GEB on the backs and plots of small farmers but as I will illustrate, big agriculture generally, and big sugar specifically, has reigned in the region.

Even after Everglades drainage was somewhat successful, other issues faced the burgeoning farm population. As discussed earlier, the soil was not as rich as anticipated and it was not until the University of Florida established a research station in the region that these issues of nutrient deficiency were resolved. Until the 1930's vegetable production was done on a very small scale. Due to high property costs and taxes, very few farmers owned the property they cultivated and a great deal of

Everglades farmland was delinquent with back taxes owed. Legislation passed in 1937 allowed for the forgiveness of back taxes and as properties were brought into good standing, the number of grower-owned farms increased substantially. During this time, sugar companies also growing in the region began to consolidate their land holdings. By 1940, consolidation on the part of sugar was so successful that United States Sugar, a company located in the GEB, was producing 86% of the sugar coming out of the Everglades (McCally, 1999).

As both sugar and vegetable production grew, seasonal labor was needed to keep up with production. As early as the 1920's, before the establishment of the EAA, migrant labor was on the rise in the region. Everglades vegetable farms were easily able to incorporate into the eastern seasonal migrant work pattern, but agricultural workers were loath to place themselves on a sugar farm. Not only was the sugar harvest a great deal harder and more dangerous than other agricultural work, pay practices kept workers in a perpetual state of indebtedness with fees for room and board, tools and transportation. Derr (1998) notes that although the government run migrant labor camps of the 1940's were "models of oppression," once the growers took over, the camp conditions worsened (p. 172). Word quickly spread; even as the sugar industry was allowed to recruit all over the country through the U.S. employment service, and it became increasingly difficult for sugar growers to find labor. It wasn't until the United States negotiated foreign worker contracts with Jamaica and the Bahamas in 1943, a move that served as the basis for the later H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers program, that the sugar industry had an unlimited supply of labor (McCally, 1999).

Sugar became increasingly important to the economy of the GEB. Wartime sugar shortages during WWII increased prices and brought more companies to Florida. With the U.S. embargo on Cuban sugar in the early 1960's, and subsequent price controls and import quotas that ensure profitability, sugar has dominated the EAA. McCally (1999) argues that the success of big agriculture generally and big sugar specifically has been contingent upon a number of indirect subsidies. These take the form of government funded agricultural research, the government's role in providing a steady labor force, the Cuban embargo and additional price assurances and finally, taxpayer funded flood control, which is the cornerstone of Everglades agricultural productivity (McCally, 1999).

Sugarcane now covers more than half of the EAA, although other crops such as sod and vegetables are also grown (Lodge, 2004). Sugar requires a deeper water table than other crops, and with its success in the 1960's it began expanding into areas that had previously been reserved for cattle or had lain fallow, causing soil subsidence to occur at a greater rate (McCally, 1999). Vegetable fields also allow for less soil subsidence because they can be flooded during the summer offseason, whereas sugar is grown in three-year cycles before the field can lay fallow and flood. Vegetable crops require more fertilizer inputs than sugarcane, which, as previously discussed, have severe impacts on neighboring ecosystems. Rice, another crop grown in the region, has proven beneficial both to hydrologic regime and wildlife. It requires very little nutrient input and is tolerant of flooding most of the year. It has additionally proven useful for providing habitat to migrating and wading birds (Lodge, 2004).



Agriculture is also found in areas outside of the EAA but is losing ground. For example, approximately 14% of the land south of urban Miami-Dade County is for agricultural use, although both in this area and in western Broward it is being lost to urban development (FDEP, n.d.a; FDEP, 2013b).

## **Summary**

The physical geography of the GEB has undergone a long history of environmental and human manipulations. Periods of glaciations and inundation have caused a dynamic mosaic of wetland environments to form on the landmass. Small variations in this landscape have subsequently allowed a diverse array of natural environments and plant communities to form. Many of the plants found in the region are tropical and of West Indies origin.

Early human settlers subsisted on the rich and productive coastal and estuarine environments of the bioregion. Agriculture was not practiced, instead they thrived on what they could gather hunt and fish. Spanish settlers to the region decimated these early populations, and were only interested in the area for how it could be exploited. When it became apparent that there were no precious metals to plunder and that agriculture was an unlikely venture in the watery landscape, hopes were set that an east-west water passage could be found through the state.

The Spanish were never able to find a waterway and the territory eventually ended up an American possession. Little was done to develop the acquisition and the region remained, for the most part, void of American settlement, although native

peoples populated the land, until a rail line was carved down the eastern coast.

American developers saw agricultural promise in the rich soils that lay beneath the Everglades' watery surface and the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw many efforts on the part of the government to drain the landscape and make it hospitable for human habitation.

These efforts continued for more than a century, but it became apparent that the endeavor would be far more complicated, and costly, than first imagined. In places where drainage was in fact successfully achieved, problems arose such as soil loss to subsidence and fire, and saltwater intrusion; drained lands were also susceptible to flooding during severe weather and hurricanes. Additional measures had to be taken to cope with these issues. After two devastating and deadly hurricanes, the focus shifted from drainage to flood control. As wetlands became dry and retention ponds maintained water levels, agriculture spread throughout the interior of the region. U.S. embargoes on Cuba meant that sugarcane became the dominant crop in the bioregion.

Simultaneously, the east coast began rapidly developing into an urban metropolis.

Urbanization and heavy agricultural inputs have compounded environmental degradation occurring in ecosystems already stressed by decades of drainage and interruption of natural flow patterns. Currently, water management efforts are focused on restoring the Everglades region to a natural flow while still accommodating the water and land needs of the region's human inhabitants; only time will tell if these efforts will succeed.

The Miami metropolitan region is the largest human settlement in the bioregion and one of the fastest growing in the country. The city of Miami, as with much of the coast, was built around the tourism industry, drawing wealthy vacationers and seasonal residents. This area was developed on the Atlantic coastal ridge; an area that was naturally better drained than other parts of the bioregion and was historically covered by rocky pineland.

The metropolitan region experienced rapid, unchecked growth throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result was numerous incorporated places of varying size that not only cause the city that seem more a large suburb than a thriving urban center, but also prevented a strong centralized government from taking hold. Despite a long history of racism and discrimination, the region has also become an international city renowned for its diversity, with strong representation from Latin and Hispanic cultures. Although immigration has turned the city into a gateway to South and Central America as well as an economic hub, it has also increased racial tensions in the city. Additionally, new immigrants have settled into ethnic enclaves, which have discouraged community cohesiveness and assimilation. Forms of transportation as well as spatial mobility, or one's ability to relocate within or to another place, are both highly associated with social class. In the forthcoming chapters, I will present data collected in this region on voluntary simplifiers. Many of the region's physical and cultural qualities have shaped the way simplifiers think about consumption and practice simplicity. I will explore how simplifiers living communally and non-communally think about resource consumption and conservation. How do these decisions relate to the region's unique environmental history? Does the area's cultural diversity, and associated tensions, color the way

simplifiers view their own consumptive traditions? Have patterns of growth and development impacted how simplifiers are able to reduce their consumption? By examining consumption through the lens of place, I will illustrate how these and other factors have impacted voluntary simplicity practices and to what extent consumption occurs at the scale of bioregion.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Results: The Greater Everglades Bioregion**

This research is comprised of two case studies examining how characteristics of place, at the scale of bioregion, impact the way simplicity practitioners think about and reduce their consumption. In the preceding chapter, I presented a profile of the cultural and physical evolution of the Greater Everglades Bioregion (GEB), which provides a geographical context to this data on alternative consumptive practices. Data was collected from urban center and intentional community residents from October 23, 2011 thru October 30, 2011. During this time I lived at the intentional community, Earth-N-U's, while also conducting research with urban center residents. One additional phone interview was conducted on November 18, 2011.

#### **Urban Center Residents**

I will begin the discussion of data collected with urban center residents in the GEB. In-person interviews were conducted in participants' homes, with the exception of an interview that was conducted at a coffee house per the participants' request. The focus group was conducted in a conference room at the Unitarian Universalist Church Congregation of Miami, chosen based on location in relation to participants' homes. I also conducted participant observation and supplemental data interviews at a local

farmer's market frequented by several of the participants. Participants have been given fictitious names to maintain their anonymity.

Interview and focus group responses were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Trochim, 2005). I identified themes and subthemes in participant responses to interview and focus group questions. Data was organized and will be presented based on these coded themes. I specifically asked participants to define simplicity, as they understood it, and have included these definitions in my analysis. I also asked participants a series of questions about how they began practicing simplicity and their motivation for doing so. An overview of these responses is also included. Otherwise, the remaining themes presented here were parsed out of participant responses. The analysis begins with an introduction to each of the participants to establish a context and background for their individual simplicity practices. I then discuss themes and subthemes that underlie simplifiers' consumptive choices and examine these themes against the background of the profile of the GEB.

Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants, three of whom were also present at the focus group. The focus group included two additional respondents who did not participate in in-depth interviews. Participants were recruited from several municipalities within the Miami metropolitan area, living in urban or suburban communities. The majority of participants were female with only two males out of the nine. Participants were distributed across four age groupings. Three of the participants were between the ages of 18-32, two participants were between 33-46,

another three between the ages of 47-65 and one participant over the age of 65. One participant was Hispanic of Cuban descent and the rest of the sample were Caucasian.

**Participant introductions.** Stella is a Miami native. Of Cuban descent, Stella has spent most of her life living in Miami although she left for two years during which time she lived in Washington, D.C. and Cuba. Stella reflected often on this time abroad during our interview as she attributes much of what she has learned about living simply and in an environmentally conscious way to these experiences. Stella's education and employment centers on the arts; her master's degree is in arts management and she currently works as a producer and curator. Although Stella enjoys the warmth and the ocean and being close to her family, who also live in the metro area, there are many things she does not like about Miami, as will be discussed later. Stella lives in Miami Beach, an incorporated area on a barrier island that runs along the east coast of Miami, with her partner Lavina, who also participated in the study.

Lavina has lived in Miami for a little more than four years, moving to the city from the Northeast. Lavina's education and employment background is in the food service industry. She moved to the region for work, employed at the time by a popular organic and health food chain. Her bachelor's degree is in hotel and restaurant management and she works at a cafe. She also has a certification in pastry arts, which she puts to use as a vegan dessert chef, selling her goods at a local farmer's market, and offering gluten free and vegan cooking lessons. Both Lavina and Stella are very passionate about recycling and reducing waste. Part of the reason they chose to live in the city of Miami Beach is because they perceive the recycling program to be better than other municipalities. I interviewed the two of them together in their home.

David is also a Miami native, leaving only for college where he completed a bachelor's degree in art and agricultural studies. David has worked in art and graphic design, but currently owns his own business installing edible gardens. In addition, David teaches gardening workshops in partnership with a local farmer's market (Figure 30) and is a columnist for a local food publication. He is passionate about local, healthy, organic food and sharing his knowledge on the subject with others.



*Figure 30.* Participant teaching a gardening workshop at a local farmer's market. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

Originally from Queens, NY, Jen has lived in Miami most of her life. She enjoys the climate and has fond memories of connecting with the marine wilderness; her father was a boat builder when she was a child and they spent a great deal of time on the water. Jen has a master's degree in adult education as well as a certificate in environmental studies and public health. She works part-time, by choice, in a division at



a local college that focuses on teaching faculty and student's earth awareness and sustainable life practices. Jen lives in South Miami, a city southwest of downtown Miami. An avid gardener and proud Italian, she finds the two to be unequivocally related. Jen knows a great deal about regionally appropriate plants and was eager to share the fruits of her labor with me during our interview.

Sophie has lived in Miami for over 40 years, having moved to the area with her family from Chicago as a teenager. She has lived in other cities since then, including 15 years in Key West and some time out in Colorado, but she views Miami as 'home'. Sophie has completed a bachelor's degree in English and creative writing as well as a master's degree in transpersonal psychology, studying non-ordinary reality and accessing the spirit. She is currently employed as a fundraiser for a science department at a local university. Sophie is passionate about food and water quality issues.

A native to Brussels, Belgium, Ava immigrated to the U.S. in 1975, living in southern California for 10 years before moving to Miami. She currently lives in South Miami with her husband who teaches science at a local college. Ava completed a bachelor's degree in speech therapy while in Brussels and another in psychology and French while living in Miami. She worked as a speech therapist for a few years as part of her degree fulfillment but left the workforce to be a full-time mother. Ava is very active with environmental issues in her local community ; she volunteers at the local farmer's market and is a member of a citizen's group charged with making sustainability recommendations to the City Commission.

Aaron moved to Miami three years ago from the Northeast. He has also spent time in the Midwest where he went to college and helped his family on their farm. He currently lives in South Miami in a home with five roommates. Aaron has a bachelor's degree in sociology and German. Aaron works in sustainable food systems, specifically on food accessibility in underserved neighborhoods in Miami. He is the cofounder of a nonprofit that installs edible gardens in addition to the work he does managing two local farmer's markets.

Having only lived in Miami for a year and half, Leala came to the states with her husband to be close to his family. Leala grew up in rural Wales, but had been living and working in London for several years prior to moving to the U.S. Having completed a bachelor's degree in social and political sciences, Leala's employment background is in corporate responsibility, helping companies to incorporate sustainability and social responsibility into their business. As I will discuss, this experience as well her international perspective have deeply influenced the way that Leala practices simplicity, particularly in her experience transitioning to life in Miami. Leala lives with her husband and his parents in Kendall, an unincorporated area southwest of downtown Miami.

Jackie currently resides in Kendall and has lived in Miami for over two decades. Jackie is a university professor, teaching primarily religious studies. She has completed a doctor of ministry degree as well as a master's certificate in catechism with a specialization in grief and bereavement. In addition to her passion for ecological conservation, Jackie is concerned about social justice issues and this carries over into her work.

Employment and education trends amongst Miami urban resident participants are consistent with the literature on simplifiers (Johns, 2009). Participants were educated, all have a bachelor's degree and four of the nine also completed an advanced college degree. Additionally, participants worked as career professionals, did not work or worked part-time, in order to spend time with family or have more free time.

Simplifiers worked in either the non-profit or education sectors or they owned their own business. Several participants' jobs were directly related to their beliefs about simple living and environmental sustainability, for example installing gardens or teaching sustainability. Others tried to incorporate simplicity beliefs at work. Stella and Lavina, for example, both discussed trying to teach coworkers about reuse and recycling. Lavina explained during our interview that she was able to work with her supervisor to begin implementing recycling and composting at the café where she works. Stella and Sophie each independently (Stella during the focus group and Sophie in an interview) noted that they struggled to find sustainable catering options when they were charged with hosting a work function. Although Ava does not work, she spends a great deal of time volunteering both at her local farmer's market and with a group that deals with sustainability in Miami. For participants, simplicity is not just something that is practiced in their personal lives; it carries over into their professional careers as well.

**Defining simplicity.** Participants were asked to define simplicity at the beginning of their interviews and focus group. Overall, participants were in agreement that simplicity meant reducing consumption and waste. Simplifiers consider the outcomes and repercussions of their consumptive choices, illustrating once again that simplifiers

are aware that they are merely one of many actors in the global system of production and consumption. Rather than identifying their choices as a harsh asceticism, they view simplifying as “practical life changes individuals can do” (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011). Simplicity was not deprivation, but instead “living within your means” and “using the resources you have” (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011; Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Ava explained that to her, simplicity was at the crossroads of “sanity, comfort and time management” (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011). She must constantly assess her actions in trying to balance what she believes to be right with what she has the time to do while still maintaining the comfort of her family. Similarly, Sophie commented that sustainable choices “must be convenient to be accessible,” further illustrating that although simplifiers make choices with the goal of reducing consumption and waste, these decisions require them to consider other aspects of their lives and the practicality of the choice given their circumstances (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

Participants believe human consumptive habits dramatically impact the environment. Aaron articulated this most poignantly when he defined simplicity during our phone interview. He explained that nature is able to sustain itself on its own; when the environment starts to decline it is because of human intervention (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011). By practicing simplicity, participants believe they are making consumptive choices that promote earth stewardship. For example, one interviewee said that simplicity was “about consumption and waste and doing it in a way that the environment can handle“ that is to say “taking no more from the environment

than can renew itself... and generating no more waste than can be absorbed by the environment” (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Similarly, Leala felt that practicing simplicity meant, “enabling the earth to continue” because she felt that “consumption is a major cause of earth’s destruction” (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

**Origins and motivation.** Participants demonstrated a strong physical and emotional connection with the earth and with nature. That is to say they have developed strong ecological identities, which drive their desire to simplify (Thomashow, 1995). Environmental documentaries helped to motivate Lavina and Stella to practice simplicity. During our interview, Lavina said that when she sees the environmental destruction they depict “it’s like an assault to my body, I feel it” (Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011). In describing the culture, or lack there of, around sustainability in Miami, Lavina went on to say that she felt like there was a “disconnect between us and the dirt” (Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Stella elaborated on this by explaining that walking on ‘dirt’, as opposed to the ubiquitous concrete of Miami, connects one to the earth. The car culture of Miami, she feels, disconnects its residents from nature (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Jen attributed her interest in simplicity to early childhood experiences in the wilderness of Biscayne Bay “bonding to the earth” (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Other respondents also reflected on early childhood experiences both in nature and with family that taught them the value of simplicity and earth stewardship.

Participants' consumptive choices carry moral weight. Several respondents told me that because they were "doing the right thing" they found their lifestyle "personally rewarding" and that the satisfaction garnered served as a strong motivating force (Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011; Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011). Others felt simplifying was about values and "common sense" (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Simplifiers adhere to a belief system in which the repercussions of their consumptive choices have moral and ethical implications.

As previously noted, participants identified early childhood experiences or upbringing as laying the groundwork for their decision to choose voluntary simplicity as adults. Both Jen and Ava said during their interviews that they had been introduced to simplicity practices by their parents and/or grandparents. Lavina also recalled visiting her grandmother in Vienna as a child and that seeing the recycling program there was her first exposure to simplicity practices. During the focus group, Jackie explained that making changes towards simplicity had been easy for her because of her generation. When she was growing up they did not have the modern conveniences and devices she is now choosing to eliminate from her life. Also it was commonplace for families, such as hers, to share one vehicle even with several children at home (Jackie, focus group, October 26, 2011). Ava agreed that simplicity practices were generational, noting during our interview that she was raised with sustainable life practices (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

**Simplicity and education.** Interestingly, as with simplifiers living in Phoenix, simplifiers in Miami associated practicing voluntary simplicity with education or being informed. For example, Leala stated during our interview that as she became more informed, simplicity became more important to her. Jackie commented at the focus group, “education is important to fostering sustainability” (Focus group, October 26, 2011). Both Stella and Lavina recounted stories during our interview of family members who did not approve of some of their simplicity-related choices. Stella explained that in her case it was somewhat understandable because the individual lacked formal education, whereas Lavina could not understand the resistance she had received given that her family member was, in fact, educated (Stella and Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011).

Several participants recall first being introduced to simplicity practices or earth stewardship in a formal educational setting such as at their university or high school. Leala, for example, saw protestors chain themselves to trees at her university and Stella recalled that her university composted and recycled (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011; Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Other participants noted that they began implementing simplicity practices personally while in college, despite having been introduced to simplicity at an early age.

Simplifiers also viewed informal educational opportunities as important, such as sharing information at work or in social settings. During our phone interview, Aaron explained “people spend more time in the social realm than the institutional so it’s important to share knowledge in this realm” (Aaron, personal communication, November

18, 2011). As previously discussed, simplifiers see work as an opportunity to engage and educate others about their beliefs and practices. Leala recalled that her former coworkers educated her about environmental issues, an important motivator for her choice to simplify (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

**A culture of simplicity: The missing link.** Interviewees feel that many benefits are garnered from social relationships and networks built around simplicity lifestyles. Not only is it encouraging to see what others are doing but also, as David put it during the focus group, friends can either support or inhibit lifestyle choices (Focus group, October 26, 2011). Jen pointed out the more tangible benefits derived from having social networks, such as barter and trade opportunities, and Aaron noted that such bonds allow simplifiers to share resources and workloads (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011; Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011).

Overall, participants felt that Miami lacks a strong, unified community of simplifiers, people who share their views regarding consumption and environmental preservation. Part of the problem, interviewees believe, is that people aren't willing to make the deep changes necessary to live simply. "It's uncomfortable to change," Sophie explained, "it's hard to change the life we've become accustomed to" (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011). David, who has lived in Miami for most of his life, commented during the focus group that he has seen awareness improve over the last 5-10 years, but other participants felt that actions in Miami towards simplicity or sustainability are superficial or just a fad (Focus group, October 26, 2011). During our



interview, Aaron commented that he felt living simply in Miami was “more challenging than easy because of the lack of motivation and organization around sustainability” (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011).

Participants make efforts to raise awareness and strengthen the local movement. Aaron, for example, started a non-profit to increase access to local food because after arriving in Miami he identified that the area lacked a strong local food movement. Ava volunteers with organizations that center on strengthening local sustainability. Stella and Lavina try to educate coworkers, friends and family members about living simply and environmental issues generally. Stella expressed during our interview that she believes public displays of simplicity actions, for example bringing their own takeout containers or other reusable items, sets a good example for others (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). But in sharing their beliefs with others, participants feel they walk a fine line between educating and preaching. Several participants expressed that they have already felt that their practices have put strain on personal relationships.

Posing another challenge is that simplifiers feel they are judged for their counterculture lifestyles. Using the previous example, Stella and Lavina noted that while they like to bring their own containers, and hope that it sets a good example, they fear others will instead look them at as strange or crazy for doing so (Lavina and Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Sophie said during our interview that she has gained the reputation amongst her family as being a “picky eater” because of her food principles, and that generally she “feels more cutting edge than those around her”

(Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Participants feel like they must fight constantly for what they believe to be common sense choices.

There is a feeling that government support would improve matters but this support is lacking. Jen explained that she felt public policy has the ability to change social ideas about what is right but that in Miami there were “a lot of people in policy making decisions in favor of industry” and that people were not encouraged to behave for the greater good (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Others echoed these sentiments stating that government policies do little to push sustainable initiatives, or help lessen the economic blow of implementing sustainable choices. During the focus group, participants agreed that public policies often prevent people from implementing simplicity, citing restrictions on gardening as just one example. Ava felt that pushing for sustainable policies was “like swimming in syrup” and that “people who might make a change with sustainability don’t want to because the political scene is dismal” (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Interviews I conducted with local organizations focused on sustainable initiatives suggest that the movement is slowly growing in Miami. Max, the head of a non-profit that works on strengthening the local foodshed, feels that his organization, Earth Learning, offers people interested in earth stewardship an opportunity to connect. Max feels that because the city is so spread out, people do not feel connected in community and because of this they are left with a feeling of powerlessness and are less likely to implement changes. Earth Learning provides an online community where members can connect (Max, personal communication, October 29, 2011). The Environmental

Coalition of Miami and the Beaches (ECOMB), another environmental educational non-profit, promotes recycling in Miami. They have several programs that promote collaboration between community stakeholders. One program, for example, facilitates public/private partnerships to implement municipal recycling. Another project, the environmental film festival, also works to build community (Maura, personal communication, November 20, 2011).

**Resource consumption.** Participants were typically focused on their consumption of fuel, energy and water. Some participants stated that they wanted to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, particularly by driving a car less. Therefore, I have chosen to also include fuel in this discussion of resource consumption.

**Fuel.** The general consensus amongst participants was that living in Miami meant owning a car. Leala commented during our interview that she did not own her own car while living in the UK, but felt that she could not get around Miami without one (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Lavina similarly pointed out that “you have to drive here in Miami” (Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Despite this, simplifiers sought out ways to mitigate the problems associated with car travel. For example, both Ava and Aaron shared a single vehicle in a multi-person household to reduce the expenses associated with car ownership. Ava went further to say that her family had moved closer to her husband’s employer to reduce drive time (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Sophie hoped to one day get a more fuel efficient car, but was hesitant to make the change because she did not want car payments. For Sophie, the decision meant weighing out personal and environmental

factors, the cost of the new car vs. the cost of gas vs. the environmental costs (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

Participants discussed other alternatives to car transportation, such as bicycling, walking, and public transportation but none were viable, reliable options. Bicycling was perceived to be dangerous and impractical for certain tasks, such as commuting to work, given the warm, humid climate. Additionally, simplifiers felt that the metro area's sprawl inhibited bicycle travel. Walking was similarly discounted due to heat and also safety; Ava noted that on major thoroughfares such as U.S. Highway 1 the crosswalks were inadequate (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Public transportation was similarly viewed as a poor option. Simplifiers felt that public transportation services were inadequate and expensive. Several explained that they had relied on public transportation in other cities or countries, and that Miami's transportation system was extremely inefficient. Stella discussed during our interview that she perceived there to be a social stigma associated with using public transportation in Miami. She felt that in places such as Havana, Cuba or Washington D.C. residents of all socio-economic classes used transport whereas in Miami it was associated with being poor and lower class (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011).

**Energy.** Energy consumption was a topic of concern for most participants. Several interviewees described methods they employed to reduce their energy consumption such as opening windows instead of using air conditioning or line drying their clothing in lieu of an electric dryer. Solar energy was discussed, although

infrequently, and when participants did discuss solar or alternative energy sources they spoke about them as something the region should be exploring. In other words, it was not discussed as something that they viewed as personally accessible or as something they hoped to implement. Although energy efficient appliances were discussed as one way of reducing consumption, participants felt unable to implement such changes because of their living circumstances e.g. rent rather than own. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated both in interviews and during the focus group that there was only so much they could do to reduce energy consumption since the region's climate necessitated the use of air conditioning during hot summer months.

**Water.** Water, though mentioned, was the least discussed theme in terms of resource consumption. Fewer than half of participants mentioned that they were either watching their water usage or concerned about water consumption and water resources in the region. Jen did discuss during our interview that she viewed water as a limited resource in South Florida. She felt that because the region is surrounded by water, the general perception is that water is "plentiful" and therefore people are not as concerned about conservation (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Those respondents that did discuss water said that they monitored water usage. The only reference to supplemental or alternative consumption patterns was in Ava's passing comment that the city offered rain barrel workshops as a potential resource to people wanting to living more sustainably (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011). In other words, no one made reference to using or wanting to implement alternative water-source measures such as rain catchment or gray water.

**Waste production.** Simplifiers were concerned not only with consumption but also waste production, altering the former so as to reduce the latter. Simplicity was defined as not being wasteful and reducing excess, which could be achieved by consuming less. But, when simplifiers did consume, they attempted to do so in such a way so as to reduce the waste they produced. This was achieved several ways: practicing reuse; recycling; and by purchasing products that required little to no packaging. Reuse could mean repurposing an otherwise disposable item or consuming non-disposable items in lieu of disposable alternatives. For example, participants carried refillable water bottles, brought their own reusable grocery bags, or saved glass jars leftover from sauces or condiments and reused them for storage. During our interview Jen referred to this as “realizing the utility of things” (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Overwhelmingly, curbside recycling was the most common means of waste reduction and mitigation. All simplifiers participated in their local curbside recycling, although their opinions differed as to the relative effectiveness of these programs. As discussed in Chapter 6, the Miami metro area is made up of numerous municipalities and also includes unincorporated areas. Historically public services, recycling and trash for example, have not always been adequate or served all populations equally.

Participants also made efforts to reduce packaging waste in the products they purchased. Several participants consciously avoided plastic, even if this meant paying a higher cost or spending time researching non-plastic alternatives. Ava and Jen stated during their interviews that they purchased items in bulk not only because it was less

expensive overall but also because doing so allowed them to reduce packaging waste (Ava, personal communication, October 27, 2011; Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Sophie explained during our interview that she did not like a particular grocery chain, known for selling sustainable products and food, because they used too much packaging (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Lavina and Stella also made a practice of bringing their own food containers for leftovers when dining out to avoid having to use Styrofoam (Lavina and Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011).

Although some participants composted, this was either not as common or was not as commonly addressed. For city apartment dwellers, composting was not feasible due to limited space or apartment complex rules regarding such efforts. Those that did compost at home used both traditional methods and vermicomposting, composting with worms. During the focus group, participants discussed the potential usefulness of a city or metro-wide composting program.

**Food production and procurement.** Food was the most unified focus of simplifiers' efforts meaning all participants discussed food production and procurement, despite the fact that no question specifically dealt with this subject. For some, food was central to their personal manifestation of simplicity, for example to Sophie, "food is a large part of sustainability" (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Participants viewed attention to the quality and source of food as not only contributing to the health of the environment but to their own health as well. When asked during our interview what has been the easiest change for her to make in trying to live more

simply, Leala commented, “food because I like food and I also see the health benefits of that, it’s not just about the environment it’s also about me so it’s partly selfish and obviously always an easier thing to change when there’s a benefit to you” (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Discussions of food revolved around production and procurement, although a few participants also noted that they practiced vegetarianism. All but one participant were either currently gardening or in the process of establishing a garden; Stella and Lavina had plans to collaborate with a neighbor on a garden plot in their apartment complex. For many, gardening had been a normal part of life when they were growing up, recalling the gardens of their parents or grandparents. Participants were sensitive to the fact that the region’s climate was tropical meaning that, to grow successfully, one must be open to planting alternatives to, as Aaron put it, “traditional grocery store vegetables” (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011). Additionally, several participants perceived topsoil to be a threatened resource and expressed concern over how this might impact regional food production.

Food was associated with community building. For example, gardeners could barter, trade and share their produce, allowing them to network with other gardeners and neighbors. Sophie explained during our interview “my dream for my yard is that my whole front yard is a garden where people could just walk by and pick stuff...it would create community and people could come by and there would be more than enough for everybody” (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011).



**Supporting the foodshed.** Simplifiers emphasized the importance of eating locally. Most participants patronized the South Miami Farmer's Market (Figure 31), one of the only markets in the southern part of the metro area. Lavina and Stella frequented a different market located in Hollywood, a city north of Miami, because it was closer to their home. Simplifiers felt that the farmer's market gave them access to local food and other products as well as provided information and resources that supported their simplicity lifestyles. For example, the South Miami farmer's market offered an information booth where patrons could also swap seeds and books (Figure 32).



*Figure 31.* South Miami farmer's market. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos



Figure 32. Information booth at South Miami farmer's market. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

According to Aaron, farmer's markets have been slow to establish in the Miami area. As a farmer's market organizer, Aaron pointed out some of the challenges to building a thriving local food movement in Miami. He noted that, unlike the Midwest, it was more challenging to get produce to market from rural areas given Miami's traffic and freeway systems. He felt there were not enough local farms willing to provide produce to the markets, resulting in many markets selling imported products. He felt that this had and would continue to improve as demand for local products increased, but still he did not perceive there to be a strong movement in Miami supporting local food. He also explained that recent efforts have been focused in some of the city's poorer areas. (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011).

**Time and money.** Most participants were in agreement that living simply was time consuming. Activities such as gardening or bicycling and walking for transportation

take longer to perform than energy and resource-intensive alternatives. David explained during the focus group that he disliked that he burned large quantities of fossil fuels for his business, but that he felt pressure to complete his job quickly, thereby eliminating the option of using alternative forms of transportation. Stella went on to say that slowing down and practicing simplicity was difficult because “we live in a fast paced world, time is money” (Focus group, October 26, 2011). While Jen and Aaron did not argue otherwise, they did feel that because they worked less and, in Aaron’s case, shared resources and labor with household members, they actually had more time free to complete other tasks.

Many participants felt that environmentally conscious alternatives were cost prohibitive or unavailable to them. For example Stella noted during our interview that sustainable or plastic-free products were more expensive (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Sophie hoped one day to purchase a more fuel-efficient car and convert her lawn to an edible landscape, but both had substantial costs (Sophie, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Stella and Lavina felt limited by the energy savings they could do at home since their condo was not LEED certified. Lavina commented during our interview that in some ways it was more economically responsible to live simply, but not when you consider time (Lavina, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Once again, Jen’s experience countered this argument; because she worked less, she was actually able to save money by reducing commute costs and the need for professional clothing. Although Aaron was able to successfully “live on less” he did note that it was “hard to live cheaply in Miami” (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011).

**Simplicity, ethnicity, and white ethnic cultures.** Participants often discussed cultural traditions and diversity as they related to simplicity practices and consumption. As discussed in Chapter 6, Miami's population has a much larger percentage of ethnic minorities than the rest of the country. Despite this, all simplifiers interviewed in the region were Caucasian with one Cuban (white-Hispanic). Although not representative of Miami's larger ethnic makeup, this sample is consistent with other research that characterizes simplifiers as predominantly white (Elgin1993, Grigsby 2004).

Simplifiers self-identified as what Grigsby (2004) terms "white ethnics" and often discussed their cultural heritage and experiences in relation to voluntary simplicity. For example, both Ava and Leala were from Europe, the former from Belgium and the latter from the United Kingdom, and they often reflected on how their experiences practicing simplicity were more challenging in the U.S than in their countries of origin. Leala, for example, found that many simplicity practices such as recycling, using public transportation, and accessing sustainable products were much easier in the UK and general awareness about environmental issues was more prevalent (Leala, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Other comments indicate not only that simplifiers self-identify as white ethnics but also that these cultural traditions have shaped the way they think about consumption and simplicity. Stella reflected on her Cuban heritage and upbringing as deeply influencing her simplicity practice. She felt that because resources are limited in Cuba they don't throw anything away, creating a "culture of reuse" (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Jen commented during our interview that some of her practices were a "cultural thing" and that "it's Italian to have a garden" (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Although participants were not specifically questioned about race and ethnicity, I did ask if they perceived the culture of Miami to embrace simplicity or sustainable practices. Some participants understood this to mean or imply the ethnic culture in Miami. Jen felt that Miami's large immigrant population has brought with it a desire for the "American dream", or as Nijman (2010) termed it the "Latin Dream"; that is the desire to be affluent consumers (Jen, personal communication, October 27, 2012; Nijman, 2010, p. 67). Aaron also expressed concern that pressure to assimilate turns sustainably minded immigrants into super consumers with increasing household sizes and declining health. He felt that Miami's ethnic population had a lot to teach people interested in simplicity, asserting, "a lot of sustainability is just traditional knowledge," knowledge that he feels is often lost to assimilation (Aaron, personal communication, November 18, 2011). Although Stella felt that her mother's Cuban cultural traditions embodied simplicity, she saw differences between her and her mother's practices. Stella maintains that Cuban culture is conscious, but out of necessity illustrated by her mother's lack of environmental awareness and failing to see the "big picture" (Stella, personal communication, October 28, 2011).

**Summary.** Participants viewed practicing simplicity as an alternative to unsustainable human patterns of consumption and waste, patterns that have ultimately led to global ecological decline. Participants felt morally obligated to make conscious consumptive choices and consider the larger repercussions of their purchases. Simplifiers were motivated by a strong ecological identity, which often developed out of early childhood experiences with nature. Additionally, many gained their first exposure to simplicity practices and values in their youth, most often through family.

Participants living in the GEB match some of the demographic patterns outlined by previous literature on voluntary simplicity. That is to say, they are well-educated professionals. Some work part-time or have been able to leave the workforce altogether. Simplifiers' voluntary simplicity beliefs pervade their personal and professional lives. They tend to either work/volunteer in a field related to their voluntary simplicity or environmental beliefs or they find ways to implement their simplicity practices at their job. Similarly, simplifiers share their beliefs with friends and family. Participants are motivated by a strong ecological identity and values system. This identity stems from early childhood experiences in nature and their choice to simplify often coincides with a time when they received formal schooling. Participant's perceived environmental awareness to be derived from education, but this education could be obtained through informal or formal settings. Participants viewed simplicity practices as directly correlated to environmental awareness.

Unanimously, participants manifested simplicity in the ways that they sourced and thought about food. Simplifiers were focused on eating locally and seasonally available foods, and when possible tried to supplement their diet with food they grow at home. The concept of 'foodshed' or a local food system has been adopted as a way of thinking about bioregional boundaries; particularly as many argue that the global food system threatens local food security (Ayres & Bosia, 2011; Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, & Stevenson; 1996). Participants' interest in and concern for locally sourced food illustrates that they are reconsidering scales of consumption. Further, comments, such as references to climate and soil depletion, suggest a growing awareness of the importance of bioregional characteristics on local modes of production.

Reducing resource consumption was discussed, particularly in the area of fuel through car travel, and to a lesser extent home energy use and water consumption. Participants found their options for alternative consumption limited in these areas. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed frustration at the perceived necessity for car travel. Alternatives such as bicycling, walking, or using public transportation were ruled out due to concerns over safety, cost and efficiency. Additionally, participants were in agreement that the region's climate further inhibited travel by these means. What is interesting is that Nijman (2010) contends that public transportation in Miami is actually quite adequate, despite the general consensus by the middle and upper class that it is not. Nijman (2010) also points out that in Miami, alternative forms of transportation are deeply associated with socio-economic class, a point that was also addressed by at least one of the participants.

Simplifiers were conscious of reducing home energy use. This was primarily achieved through passive means such as limiting the use of appliances and air conditioning. Participants felt that they were limited as to how much they were able to achieve as individuals, given that the region lacked the infrastructure to offer alternatives. Several respondents felt that government should be doing more to offer and implement sustainable energy alternatives such as LEED certification on structures, passive cooling techniques as were popular before the advent of air conditioning, and solar energy, but that overall, the infrastructure was lacking. The climate, participants felt, mandated high home energy use in summer months with air conditioning.

Water was not widely discussed, nor did participants mention supplements to traditional consumption patterns, e.g. rain catchment or gray water. One might attribute this to the fact that the area receives large quantities of yearly rainfall, or to the fact that the metro area is surrounded by wetland. Still, participants seemed unaware that groundwater levels were under pressure from increasing populations and also saltwater intrusion. Environmental concern over water quality was also not widely discussed, interesting given that this is a major issue for the region.

Simplifiers identified barriers to practicing simplicity. They perceived different aspects of their practices to be both time and cost-intensive and felt that they must constantly try to balance cost in time and in money when making consumptive choices. This was most significant in the area of alternative transportation. More significant was the perceived lack of social support networks. Simplifiers felt that connecting with like-minded individuals provided benefits such as encouragement and power to affect change but that Miami lacked a strong simplicity movement and that people living in the area had no environmental awareness. Government, they felt, did not help this issue because of its support for development and tourism industries, discouraging those that might act. Some organizations have begun around local food in Miami, offering simplifiers opportunities to connect with others at venues such as farmer's markets as well as in online communities. Still, according to local organizers this movement is in its infancy.

One of the more interesting outcomes of this research was the ways in which participants discussed ethnicity. Simplifiers self-identified as white ethnics and closely



associated these cultural experiences with their simplicity practices. Simplifiers' attitudes towards other cultures were more complicated. While some responses suggest that regional simplifiers perceive their cultural knowledge, that is their post-affluence, as superior, others indicated that traditional knowledge and cultural identities could inform the simplicity movement. It is not clear whether this is indicative of a broader shift in thinking within the movement or if it can be attributed to the cultural landscape of the region. Further, discussions of cultural difference were framed in terms of culture rather than race. While this is consistent with Grigsby's (2004) findings, it is also interesting given that the population of blacks living in Miami is larger than the national average, and Miami's historic racial tensions.

In the next section I will present and analyze data collected with the region's second sample, simplifiers living at the Earth-N-U's intentional community in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Miami. Although the intentional community made for a very different residential setting, it was still located in the same metropolitan area and bioregion as discussed in the preceding analysis. The purpose of comparing these groups was to understand the following questions: which scales of place are most significant to how residents think about and alter their consumption; and does living in a community that shares one's beliefs and where these beliefs are institutionalized as practice impact the manifestation of voluntary simplicity?

We must address ourselves seriously, and not a little fearfully, to the problem of human scale. What is it? How do we stay within it? What sort of technology enhances our humanity? What sort reduces it? The reason is simply that we cannot live except within limits, and these limits are of many kinds: spatial, material, moral, spiritual. The world has room enough for many people who are content to live as humans, but only for relative few intent upon living as giants or as gods.

Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*

## **Intentional Community**

I conducted research at Earth-N-U's, an intentional community located in the Greater Everglades Bioregion (GEB), in October of 2011. The purpose of this research was to determine if and how communal-living, with a focus on living simply, impacted the way practitioners defined and manifested voluntary simplicity. More specifically, I wanted to understand if these simplifiers had a different experience of place, on the scale of bioregion, than simplifiers living non-communally. Earth-N-U's is located in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Miami, FL. I spent seven days camping at Earth-N-U's, during which time I conducted structured in-depth interviews, informal interviews, focus group interviews and participant observation including participating in the community's weekly volleyball match and potluck, and joining residents for the monthly Critical Mass Miami ride. What follows is a summary and analysis of the data collected during that stay. Participant names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

**Community history and description.** Earth-N-U's farm is an intentional community located in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Miami, FL. The land the community sits on, now a 2-acre inner-city parcel, was purchased piece by piece by the community founder Randy. Looking for a place that his family could call home that would have room for a garden and a place to play volleyball, Randy bought the first plot

1978. Randy boasts that the property is home to the largest gumbo-limbo trees in Miami, one of the features that initially drew him to the property. A Miami native, Randy had worked in the neighborhood at his father's family business and knew it was not without its problems. Drug dealers and crime pervaded the streets. Once Randy realized local police were impotent in dealing with the criminals, he began buying up other neighborhood properties and evicting the perpetrators, in an effort to make the neighborhood a safer place for his family. The farm currently includes over 54 rental units located in and around the primary parcel or the farm proper. (Randy, personal communication, October 26, 2011).

Before developing into the community that exists there today, the farm was home to Randy and his family. Randy lived at Earth-N-U's for many years with his wife, four children, father and sister, who raised her three children in the tree house built for her on the property by Randy. Randy's son and niece are the only family that remains, each renting a property adjacent to the farm proper. Randy now lives on a sailboat docked at his daughters home a few miles from the community.

Although I initially found the community through their listing on the Intentional Communities Directory, it's not wholly accurate to classify Earth-N-U's as an intentional community in the traditional sense. The community's website explains it as follows:

At the dawn of the 21st century, the Farm blossomed as an urban ecovillage...kind of. There is no official community agreement that residents sign or vow they make before calling the Farm home. However, residents and visitors are highly encouraged to garden, feed the animals, mentor neighborhood kids,

engage in sustainable living projects, keep an eye on the Farm and pay rent.

(<http://earthnufarm.weebly.com/history.html>)

At a very basic level, the community is a business for Randy; generating income through rent revenue with new residents selected based on their qualities as good (i.e. rent paying) tenants rather than on their compatibility or shared vision with the community and other residents. As one resident who had lived in other intentional communities explained to me, “it’s not bad, it’s just one model” (Jacob, personal communication, October 23, 2011). This is not to say that the farm is only a business for Randy, in fact quite the opposite. Randy is deeply passionate about what the community represents as well as its future potential. The farm has been drawing visitors and residents since the mid 1980’s. Through the work of Randy’s sister, the farm began hosting field trips from Miami-Dade public schools on topics such as beekeeping and organic gardening (Earth-N-U, n.d.). Earth-N-U is no longer listed on the Intentional Communities Directory website, but I believe this is due to the fact that the former member responsible for the Directory listing is no longer actively involved with Earth-N-U.

During our interview, Randy discussed some of the ways he’d like to see the Earth-N-U develop as a community. Earth-N-U had recently achieved non-profit status and Randy hoped this would allow them to work on more projects to benefit the local community of Little Haiti. Poverty and crime are rampant in Little Haiti and Randy is particularly interested in working with children from the community. The farm has always served as an oasis to neighborhood children, an opportunity for them to connect with

nature. Randy wants the farm to be a safe place for children that fosters learning, not only about food and farming but also art, music, dance... basically anything that keeps them interested and out of trouble (Randy personal communication, October 26, 2011).

In order to achieve these goals, Randy anticipates the community will need to develop more structure. When he began building the farm, Randy did not envision the intentional community that exists there today but feels that the community has been developing little by little. Randy noted that the current system, or lack thereof, draws individuals who aren't interested in contributing to these larger aspirations. Although the process of developing infrastructure such as a community vision and formal screening process has been slow going, he acknowledges that doing so is important so that community members set a good example for the children they are trying to teach (Randy, personal communication, October 26, 2011).

**Site description: getting the lay of the land.** The unassuming street front view of Earth-N-U's is of a shabby old home, in a row of like kind in the poverty and crime stricken neighborhood of Little Haiti. Prior to the arrival of the neighborhood's namesake immigrants, Little Haiti was known as Little River, for the geographic feature that marks its northern boundary. Randy, a native to the area, still uses the names interchangeably. Upon closer inspection of the farm's main house and entrance, one begins to notice the wooden rowboat propped against the tree in the front lawn with the hand painted sign marked "Earth-N-U's" (Figure 33). If you arrive before 9pm, the iron gate, and the front door it guards, will be open signaling that the farm community is open for visitors. An

additional entrance, used by residents and those familiar with the place, sits to the right of the main house.



*Figure 33.* Rowboat and sign at entrance to Earth-N-Us community. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

Three residents share the main farmhouse, each with their own private room. The communal areas of the house, such as the bathroom living room and kitchen, are also shared with other farm residents. The main entryway hall has several information boards on the wall including a dry erase board for the project and work list as well as a corkboard where residents can share information with other residents and visitors such as events, upcoming workshops or discussion groups they'd like to hold at the farm. There are books available for residents' to borrow in the living room. The farmhouse has an indoor/outdoor kitchen with the actual stove and cooking area outside the back door on a covered deck. A large barbeque grill, often used for potlucks, sits adjacent to the

stove. There is also a variety of seating in this covered area in form of tables and chairs, stools, logs and benches. A few steps away, there is additional uncovered seating with benches built into the decks and a large hammock strung up over the deck. All of these areas are considered public space. Focus group and some interviews were conducted here on this deck seating area. Wooden decks, built by Randy, with the help of a contractor, predominate in this section of the property.

From the rear of the house you can access the rest of the farm. Immediately to the left of the outdoor kitchen (when exiting from the rear of the house) there is a workshop where tools, wood and hardware are kept. To the right is the laundry facility with washer and dryer. This is an outdoor facility but on a covered deck built off from the house. The laundry facility is shared not only by residents living on the farm proper but also by Randy's tenants that live in neighboring properties. This area can be accessed without entering the main farmhouse, through a wooden fence and gat on the side of the house.

In addition to the human inhabitants, the farm is home to livestock and honeybees. Many of the farm's non-human residents are rescues, the emus for example. Chickens and ducks are kept for cruelty-free eggs, originally for Randy's children although now community residents enjoy them. Some of the goats were originally purchased to provide milk but they no longer are raised for this purpose. Although the livestock is not kept for meat (Randy is vegan) a friend of the farm explained to me that he had been permitted to host a turkey and duck-dressing workshop the prior Thanksgiving, at which time he slaughtered some of the fowl. Behind

the house to the right, the deck surrounds a series of livestock pens (Figure 34). The central pen is home to the emus, goats, and fowl (chickens, ducks, turkeys and roosters). The pen extends to the right of the property and has an additional area where the pigs can be kept separate. Ducks and turkeys also roam about the property freely. A hen house for egg layers sits behind the animal pen at the end of the deck. Livestock is fed from the kitchen's compostable food waste as well as from food waste left at the farm by friends, neighbors and even a local restaurateur.



*Figure 34.* Animal enclosures at Earth-N-U's farm. Photo by Lauren Drakopulos.

The honeybees (Figure 35) were Randy's first addition to the farm family after purchasing the property. They were obtained to provide a source of healthy local raw honey for Randy's family. The beehives are kept near the garden on the back half of the property. In recent years Randy has had difficulties with the bees; two colonies have



abandoned the hives. While I was conducting research at the farm, Randy received a new queen and introduced her to the hive in the hopes of correcting the problem.



*Figure 25.* Earth-N-U's founder Randy holding a tray from one of the farm hives. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

While it's not uncommon to hear claims that the farm was 'grandfathered in' and therefore exempt from zoning laws prohibiting livestock within city limits, the truth is that Randy, and his family, have cultivated friendships at City Hall. Within a decade of the farm's inception, Randy's sister hosted City Council members to a vegetarian lunch at the farm to raise awareness about what they were trying to teach and accomplish (Earth-N-U's, n.d.). Certainly, one might assume that Randy's efforts to transform the farm's small corner of Little Haiti into a safe haven for children, free of crime and drugs, has helped matters. While the farm's non-human inhabitants are usually a source of enjoyment and education for neighborhood residents, particularly children, the roosters

do create a fair bit of noise at all hours. Although these disturbances might otherwise be a source of complaints, Marion noted that it probably helps matters that most neighbors within earshot are Randy's tenants (Marion, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

The main farmhouse is one of many housing options on the farm proper. There are additional houses on either side of the main farmhouse. These houses share the property and are within the fence that surrounds most of the 2-acre parcel. The homes are private, meaning the space is not communal, and are occupied by couples, families, or unrelated adults (roommates). There are other residences on the back half of the property, behind the livestock enclosure and at the end of the wooden decking. The first is a two level cottage; the second floor is connected to the first by stairs but does not sit directly over the first story. Beyond this residence there is a three-story tree house (Figure 36). Each level is a separate residence, each no bigger than a small room with a porch large enough to set a chair on. A wooden staircase that encircles the tree connects the levels. This structure was built by Randy for his sister, and is where his she lived with her children until just a few years ago. Beyond the tree house is Historic Volunteer Town (Figure 37). Here pallets are laid out demarking several tent campsites and hammocks are also strung up as sleeping options. There is an additional home, owned by a friend of Randy's, at the rear of the property that is not considered part of the community. Randy would like to eventually acquire this residence and convert it into a central meetinghouse or community center (Randy, personal communication, October 26, 2011).



Figure 36. Tree house apartments at Earth-N-Us farm. Photo by Lauren Drakopulos.



Figure 37. Historic Volunteer Town at Earth-N-Us farm with resident tent in background. Photo by Lauren Drakopulos.

Although residents living on the back half of the property are permitted to use the facilities in the farmhouse, they also have their own communal outdoor kitchen, shower







*Figure 39.* Outdoor communal kitchen by Volunteer Town at Earth-N-Us farm. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

The community grows food on two organic garden plots, one half-acre plot on the rear of the property (Figure 40), and another located across the street. The food grown on these plots is shared as amongst community residents, and serves as a supplement rather than as the primary food source. The garden at the rear of the property is fenced in and is primarily overseen by Randy. The garden sits adjacent to the composting area. There are also several bathtubs throughout the rear of the property that are used as vermiculture, worm composting, bins. Randy maintains that the soil at the farm is very rich and much thicker than other areas of Miami due to the 30 years he's spent composting and amending the soil. Numerous rain barrels are fixed to structures or platforms around the rear of the property and near the garden for irrigation.



*Figure 40.* Main garden at Earth-N-Us farm. Photo by Lauren Drakopoulos.

The second farm garden is on slightly smaller plat located across the street. This garden, named Soley Jardin or ‘Sun Garden’ by neighborhood children, is Marion’s project. He has modeled it as a food forest with permaculture principles incorporating edges and zones rather than traditional rows. The tenant who shares the property had claimed a small corner of the garden that Marion had originally planned as a meditation space. A gate encloses Soley Jardin, but outside of the gate there’s an additional small garden available for use by the Little Haiti community. Additionally, Randy has recently acquired a third property a few blocks down that he hopes to eventually convert into a community garden. In addition to the garden plots, the property is rich with fruit trees and tropical foliage. Table 6 provides a list of the fruit trees, vegetables and livestock found at Earth-N-Us farm. Appearing more jungle than backyard, only the sounds of

passing cars or music remind one of the urban surroundings when under the dense canopy and growth that blankets the property.

There are other miscellaneous structures on the property. Randy's office, the former honey making room, is tucked away in a corner near the back of the property and the beehives. Adjacent to the farm garden sits a building that houses a 'green' preschool/home-school. A volleyball court is situated on the far right-hand side of the land, behind a private home. This area is also home to 'Noah's Ark,' a 38-foot sailboat that has seen better days.



<b>Fruit Trees</b>		
Sapodilla	Coconut	Florida Cherry
Tamarind	Ackee	Pineapple
Starfruit (Carambola)	Mango	Egg fruit
Strawberry Fruit tree	Avocado	Barbados cherry
Sea Grapes	Passion fruit vine	Ginip
Grape vines	Fig	Jabatacaba
Calabash	Mulberry	Jackfruit
Banana	Sour orange	Cacao
Papaya	Monstero Delicioso	Lychee
<b>Vegetables and Other Plants</b>		
Cabbage	Eggplant	Pigeon Pea
Lettuce	Basil	Carrots
Mint	Collard greens	Potatoes
Cilantro	Callaloo	Tomatoes
Onion	Radish	Yucca
Swiss chard	Sweet potato	Malabar spinach
Beets	Hot peppers	Comfrey
Broccoli	Pumpkin	Aloe
Rosemary	Squash	Haitian cotton
Moringa		
<b>Livestock and Other Animals</b>		
Geese	Dogs	Goats
Roosters	Cats	Emus
Ducks	Snake	Pigs
Turkeys	Lizards	Honey bees
Chickens		
<i>Note: Vegetables may vary with season. Data obtained from Earth-N-U</i> s		

To say the urban farm community is one-of-a-kind would be a gross understatement. Throughout the community one finds a bohemian playground expressed through artifacts tucked away in every corner, hung on every wall and even dangling from the ceiling. Whether it's the vintage soda pop machine, the rusted out antique tricycle on the roof, or one of the miscellaneous paintings, signs, or sculptures contributed by artist residents and visitors, the landscape comes alive with items that, despite accumulating with time, seem to fit so well that could have just as easily always been there. Quotes about simplicity and vegetarian ideals litter the walls of the



farmhouse and outdoor kitchens. Other signage posted throughout the property advocates for peace, tolerance, courtesy and respect. Hand carved, painted and plastered art pieces suggest that the community has long been home and haven to those with artistic sensibilities. One also senses that little gets thrown away in this place; if it's not put to use in a functional way then the item may be incorporated into one of the landscape's 'installation art' pieces.

**Membership structure.** There is not a formalized membership structure at Earth-N-U's, that is to say there is no screening process, trial period or buy-in amount. All community members fall into one of two resident categories: renter or work-trade visitor. Renters can live in one of the various structures available on the property or in one of the neighboring rental properties. Renters may also live in tents in an area at the rear of property marked 'Volunteer Town.' Rent is paid in exchange for housing and some utilities and the type of rental property determines the amount. Not all campers pay rent with some opting for work-trade instead (specific work-trade tasks will be discussed in the 'Resident Responsibility' section of this chapter). Wireless Internet is available to all residents for a small fee, paid to one the farmhouse resident that manages this service.

As of 2009, Earth-N-U's became listed on the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) register. As discussed in Chapter 5, the WWOOF network connects individuals interested in organic agriculture (WWOOFers) with farms, gardens and communities implementing organic practices. WWOOFers travel to various international destinations and exchange work for room and board and the opportunity to

learn organic food production techniques (WWOOF, 2012). WWOOFers at Earth-N-U stay with the campers in Volunteer Town, either in a tent or a hammock. According to the Earth-N-U website, WWOOFers are expected to do work-trade of four hours per day for their accommodations. Having said that, it did not appear that this policy was strictly enforced. WWOOFers' stays generally tend to be shorter term than camp residents. I was not clear how many WWOOFers came to the farm on average. Marion did explain to me that, for a period of time, they had a problem with WWOOFers coming that were more interested in Miami's nightlife than what was happening on the farm. He said this was no longer the case, though, with more recent visitors using the opportunity for its intended purpose, to learn about agriculture and horticulture (Marion, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

**Decision-making and bylaws.** Earth-N-U does not currently have an agreed upon decision-making process or community bylaws. As property owner, Randy makes all major decisions. Since Randy no longer lives on the farm, the responsibility of overseeing volunteers has fallen to Marion. Otherwise, residents and visitors come and go as they please and attempt to work out disagreements amongst themselves.

**Community activities.** The community hosts numerous activities and events on-site. The main event, as it were, is the Sunday volleyball match, a tradition almost as old as the farm. Friends, family, neighbors and visitors gather from all over to join in the game, socialize and potluck. Reportedly, one of the stipulations Randy had in mind when he was looking for the farm's would-be site was that there be room for a volleyball court (Yahr, 2009). Drum circles have historically been held in celebration of the full

moon. Residents often organize events such as potlucks, women's circles or a Sacred Economics study group, and classes on topics ranging from healing and yoga to apothecary and kombucha brewing. The community has always been open to visitors, groups and fieldtrips interested in sustainable living practices.

Community meetings are not a regular occurrence but during my stay I located notes from a meeting that had taken place just a few weeks prior to my visit. The meeting was centered on developing a vision for the farm community including how residents relate to each other and how the farm community as a unit interacts with the local community. During this meeting, residents expressed that they would like to see the farm host more events such a monthly fair or bazaar where community art and produce could be sold. During a personal conversation, a farm resident, Loretta, alluded to this meeting and noted that several residents were working towards making the farm more communal (Loretta, personal communication, October 23, 2011).

In addition to events hosted at the farm, residents participate actively in larger community events. For example, my stay happened to fall on the last Friday of the month, the Friday of Miami Critical Mass, an activity that many residents participate in on a regular basis. Miami Critical Mass is an event in which bicyclists gather en masse and ride a pre-determined route, blocking or "corking" traffic as they pass through intersections. The social event is meant to raise bicycle awareness (The Miami Bike Scene, n.d.). Residents were adamant that I ride with them at the event and even went so far as to locate a bicycle for me to use.

**Resident responsibilities.** Although residents and visitors are encouraged to participate in farm activities and projects, participation is not mandatory unless one is under a work-trade arrangement. Residents, therefore, live a fairly autonomous life with little oversight or community responsibility beyond what they themselves choose to take on. Chores are not assigned and while there were many shared spaces such as the kitchen, bathroom and shower, there are not rules dictating how these amenities were to be maintained or by whom. Individuals are expected to pick up after themselves, but this is not enforced.

Randy and Marion coordinated community projects. A work list with projects and tasks was kept on the dry erase board in the main entry to the farmhouse for work-trade volunteers or residents looking to get involved. Volunteers and community members would then coordinate with Marion, and to a lesser extent Randy, on completing these projects. Additionally, Randy or Marion may assign additional projects not listed on the board or solicit help from residents and visitors if they had a time sensitive task, such as planting the garden for the season. More often, uncoordinated projects would spontaneously begin with help from whoever happened to be passing through at the time. Examples of projects or work trade tasks include tending the gardens, turning the compost and cleaning the animal pens.

**Current residents: Participant profiles.** As previously discussed, Earth-N-Us lacks a formal membership system. At the time of research, Marion estimated there to be 12-15 residents on the farm proper. Not all residents chose to participate in this research. I conducted a focus group with three residents primarily, although two

additional residents joined in periodically, not staying for the entire discussion. The focus group took place on October 28, 2011 in the communal deck sitting area at the farm. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with four residents (including one focus group participant) as well as with Randy. Informal interviews were conducted with other residents in addition to participant observation. All interviews were conducted in communal areas of the farm, except for Jacob's interview, which was conducted at his place of employment, a non-profit community center also in Little Haiti.

Resident participants constitute an interesting demographic makeup and the most diverse case study population. Five of the participants were male and two were female. Comments from residents lead me to believe that while on occasion women did stay in Volunteer Town, this was not a common occurrence. Of the community residents who participated in the study, one was over the age of 65, three were between the ages of 35 and 50, and three were under the age of 35. Participant ethnic makeup was as follows: four participants were Caucasian, one was African American, another participant was of French Canadian and Haitian descent, and one participant was of Borikén (Puerto Rico) Taíno and African American descent.

Alicia has lived at Earth-N-U's for three years. Having first heard about the farm from through an online rental add, she eventually moved into one of the tree house apartments. She now lives in one of the other rentals on the property. In hopes of escaping harsh winter weather, Alicia moved to Miami from Anchorage, AK. She said that Miami was different than she had expected and, had she not found the farm, she probably would not have stayed. Alicia finds the farm to be an encouraging environment

because it has residents that share ideas and vision with her. An artist and a student, Alicia has had prior experience living in a communal setting.

Marion moved to the farm from Chicago, IL. He has lived in a tent in Volunteer Town for 17 months. He now oversees the WWOOFers and other visitors, a responsibility that was handed down to him from Martin, the previous community organizer who had established the farm on both the WWOOF and Community Directories website. When in Chicago, Marion worked on community garden projects. Since moving to the farm, Marion has completed a permaculture design course as well as a farm apprenticeship. Marion's long-term goal is to use permaculture to help people in the developing world.

Having spent over 20 years living abroad in Central America, Loretta has now lived in Miami for six years and at Earth-N-U's for just over a year of that time. Before living abroad, Loretta spent time in the Northeastern United States; she now lives in one of the shared rental properties. Employed as a counselor, Loretta has a master's degree in community/health psychology. She has previously worked as an international project manager for both the public and private sector, including such organizations as the Peace Corps. Loretta was, at one time, more involved in the gardening at Earth-N-U's although recently she has not had as much time to do this. Loretta is hopeful for the potential of the community to serve as a healing center and hub for healing and the arts in Miami.

Jacob has lived in Miami for just over a year, six months of which have been spent camping at the farm. Although Jacob is a potter by trade, he has been working on

and off in Haiti for the last few years as a community organizer, particularly on issues surrounding race, justice and sustainable livelihoods. He studied pottery as an apprentice in both the U.S. and in Europe after having first completed some college coursework in philosophy. He moved to Miami because it made travel to Haiti more convenient and had lived in the Little Haiti neighborhood prior to moving to the farm. Jacob is from the Northeast originally and has also lived in an intentional community for a period of time while in Tennessee.

Maurice was one of the tree house apartment residents. He came to Earth-N-U's a month and a half prior to research, living first in a tent in Volunteer Town. Despite only living at the community for a short time, Maurice was very active and interested in the community's development. Maurice is a yoga instructor, poet, native and spiritual healer and massage therapist. He came to Earth-N-U's for the purpose of healing; he felt that he was able to connect to the earth and to nature at the farm and this played a significant role for him in the healing process. Although a native and longtime resident of New York City, Maurice is proud of his ethnic ties to the indigenous peoples of Borikén (Puerto Rico) and has stayed active in the Taíno Diaspora. Maurice has previously lived in an intentional community in Brooklyn.

Adonis was staying at Earth-N-U's for a little over a week as a temporary work-trade visitor. He was en route to Bolivia from his home in British Columbia, Canada. Adonis has a background in media production and had worked as a producer for a prominent radio and television news station in Canada. Of Haitian descent, Adonis met Jacob while traveling in Haiti with his parents. It is through Jacob that Adonis was

introduced to Earth-N-U.s. Adonis was also an avid gardener, having lived in a small cabin on a remote acreage in Canada where he grew food. Earth-N-U.s presented an ideal housing option on his stop through Miami offering both the opportunity to work in a tropical garden in a unique community setting and a chance to connect with friend Jacob.

Like Adonis, Terry was a traveler and temporary visitor to Earth-N-U.s. Terry learned about Earth-N-U.s through their listing in the Fellowship for Intentional Community Directory online. Terry had completed a master's in public health prior to setting out on his journey, a bike tour through the U.S. and Central America. The trip was to be completed on his bicycle, except for an anticipated boat ride from Florida to Mexico, camping or staying at work-trade communities along the way. He had ridden from his home in Massachusetts and was only staying a few days at the community with plans to continue on to Key West. Terry enjoyed the low impact lifestyle that bike touring afforded him.

**Practicing voluntary simplicity.** Residents see voluntary simplicity as disassociating oneself from a consumption driven life, and reducing waste of material goods and natural resources. Loretta defined living simply as being able to meet ones needs without having to focus on earning and money (Loretta, personal communication, October 25, 2011). By not prioritizing waged work, one could then direct their energy to family and personal development. Maurice admitted that it had taken him some time to get to the point where he was able to live on very little, a feat he deemed particularly challenging in his expensive home town of New York. He referred to himself as “an



urban gorilla... hunting and gathering,” that is finding a means of survival by tapping into the waste stream of others (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

Residents led materially simple lives and rejected status consumption. Personal belongings were functional and unostentatious. Participants sought an existence detached from consumer goods. This was clear in participant responses to issues of theft at the farm (this topic will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). Residents expressed more concern over the circumstances (poverty and cultural differences) that brought about these events than over the loss of material goods. While discussing her own loss of property to theft, Alicia commented that other farm residents had taught her a great deal about alternative ways to view private property (Alicia, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

Many participants opted for plant-based diets and vegetarianism and veganism were popular dietary options at the farm. Residents were able to work in and harvest from the gardens, which were completely organically grown. As noted in the introduction, Randy began the farm so that his family would have access to healthy food.

Residents monitored natural resource use in addition to reducing their consumption of goods. Residences were usually single rooms or tents and therefore a low impact lifestyle requiring little energy. Communal living allowed residents to share facilities such as the kitchen, bathroom and laundry, thereby further reducing personal appliances and therefore energy consumption. Facilities, such as the composting toilet and gray water irrigation, provided infrastructure for reducing one's water consumption.

Most participants traveled primarily by bicycle or on foot to reduce car travel. Although participants did choose to avoid car travel, they did not find the city's infrastructure to support these efforts. All agreed that the city needed more bicycle lanes and that public transportation services were inadequate and unreliable. Marion felt that in Miami there was a social stigma associated with alternative forms of transportation. He reasoned that this was part of the reason so few people chose to ride bicycles despite the obvious benefits to their personal health and the health of the environment. Jacob contended that "Miami is a car town" citing the lack of bicycle lanes and an unreliable public transportation system that he did not perceive to serve poor areas of the city adequately (Jacob, personal communication, October 29, 2011). He felt that for most people living regular lives with regular jobs, alternative forms of transportation were not a practical option. Marion also perceived that Miami's culture promoted conspicuous consumption, and that automobiles were one expression of this. During the focus group, he explained why he thought private automobiles were more widespread in Miami than in other cities such as Chicago:

I think with regards to transportation it's good to have a car, it's good to have a nice Corvette; I see lots of those out here... I haven't seen as many luxury cars in any city except for maybe Malibu Beach... I mean it's just about looking good and you're always seen. (Focus group, October 28, 2011)

Waste reduction was an additional focus of community simplification efforts. This was accomplished through participation in a municipal recycling program, composting food waste on site, and through the reuse of items. Marion emphasized reuse saving

everything he could around the farm “right down to nuts and bolts” for reuse in other projects (Focus group, October 28, 2011). For example, he built the “mulch mobile,” a cart for moving mulch between gardens out of scrap parts (I should note that this project was unsuccessful but Marion still uses it as an example of creativity and ingenuity) . A great resource for community children, Marion also does bicycle repair and salvage at the farm. During my stay, he loaned me a rebuilt bike, an example of his reuse handiwork; a broom stick served as the handlebars.

Participants felt that Miami as whole was behind other cities in terms of green initiatives that reduce waste. They felt municipal services should be offering compost pickup and recycling containers in public places. Marion felt government policies inhibited actions individual might take towards these ends. While taking part in a permaculture design course, he and others had attempted to procure food waste for making compost from cafes and restaurants but were unable to because they were not a licensed agriculture business and did not have permits. While some local establishments do give away food waste to those in need, these actions are illegal and must take place “under the table” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Residents identified cultural obstacles to gaining widespread support of such initiatives. Haitian neighbors, not differentiating between ‘trash’ and ‘compost,’ on multiple occasions deposited non-compostable materials such as car batteries and soda cans on farm compost piles. But residents felt these were easily overcome when one took the time to educate people on the matter.

Despite advocating for a simpler lifestyle decoupled from consumption participants still find themselves tethered to the cash economy. Jacob explained that while generally he finds it easy to do without, at times it could be challenging “having to depend on the benevolence of the universe,” rather being able to rely on something you own (Jacob, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Loretta maintained that her ability to embark on new projects, and further her personal development, was limited by financial constraints. According to Maurice, “the biggest challenge right now on a material basis is moving beyond money and economics” (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011). This comment referred to an ongoing issue at the farm between Volunteer Town campers and other farm residents. Campers uphold simplicity beliefs that reject waged work, but their ability to do so is contingent on the waged work of others living and paying rent in the community. I will explore this issue in greater detail later in this chapter.

Residents disagreed as to how poverty impacted one’s ability to practice simplicity. Some community members felt that given the dire economic condition of the immediate neighborhood, voluntary simplicity was “not a choice” and that in Little Haiti “they don’t have enough to waste” (Jacob, personal communication, October 29, 2011; Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Community members felt that the people of Little Haiti came from a cultural history that embodied simple living, but that as they began to assimilate to American culture, these values were lost. Adonis, who was of mixed Haitian descent, commented:

I think a lot of the Haitian immigrants come from peasant roots and they want to get as far away from that as they possibly can, because what they believe is coming to the United States means having this highly materialistic kind of lifestyle, and there's this like reverse education that has to take place because they they're being brainwashed to believe in that. (Focus group, October 28, 2011).

Jacob felt that structure of our economic system was such that people were forced into making unsustainable choices. He used the example of healthy locally grown and /or organic food, noting that in poorer areas, not only was access to such goods limited but they were far more expensive. He felt people did not have the time and resources to dedicate to living simply. Others maintained that the matter was more a social issue than economic issue, and that perception of cost did not consider externalities. Marion argued that if people prioritized living simply and "started using their free time not as consumers but as producers like going in their backyard and growing food," then living sustainably became a much more economically viable option (Focus group, October 28, 2011).

Residents find themselves connected with friends who are aligned with their own beliefs, but for many this support does not carry over into their family life. Loretta acknowledges that her family has not always been supportive of her lifestyle. Because Loretta's professional life has been aligning with and guided by her simplicity beliefs, she attributes her family's concern as deriving from a fear she will be unable to find employment (Loretta, personal communication, October 25, 2011). Terry confessed

that, when back home in Massachusetts, he does not adhere as strictly to a simplicity life. During our interview he commented “I haven’t totally matched up my actions with my convictions” attributing this in part to not wanting to seem too different or counterculture (Terry, personal communication, October 29, 2011). His family and friends do not embrace the same simplicity beliefs and while he hopes they will see the benefits as exhibited through the lifestyle choices he does choose to implement, he still filters his behaviors so as to maintain the cultural norm.

Participants felt that life at the farm facilitated and encouraged their simplicity beliefs on both a social and physical or practical level. Because residents shared beliefs and values regarding living more simply, they were able to nurture and encourage one another. Maurice noted that he had initially come to Earth-N-us for healing but that being around so many people practicing environmentally conscious living raised his awareness and in turn encouraged him to implement even more of these practices in his own life. Additionally, residents felt that the practical application of simplicity in terms of waste reduction and resource conservation was quite easy at the community because the farm supplied the infrastructure necessary for a low impact lifestyle.

**The Occupy Movement.** As discussed in Chapter 5, research was conducted not long after the ‘occupation’ of New York’s financial sector had begun to develop as a nationwide protest movement (Eckholm & Williams, 2011; Skinner, 2011). The events taking place at “Peace City,” the Occupy Miami encampment located in downtown Miami’s Government Center resonated with Earth-N-U’s residents. Several residents

were very active in the protest; at least one farm resident had been living fulltime at the Occupy encampment (I was unable to meet this resident because of this). Marion stayed at the encampment in the evenings, returning to the farm during the day to complete tasks and around the property and the garden. Marion assisted Occupiers in planting a garden at the encampment. He felt the garden was significant because it symbolized self-reliance and sustainability, attributes he associated with the movement. Several other residents made a regular habit of visiting the encampment to show support.

Residents felt that the Occupy movement in many ways shared the beliefs that informed their simplicity lifestyles. Jacob observed, “these are things that people like us have been talking about for a long time but what’s interesting now with the Occupy Movement is the conversation is reaching a broader audience, or a broader conversation, cause people are trying to figure it out and that’s kind of exciting” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). In choosing to live simply, residents were rejecting what they perceived to be an unsustainable cultural system, one that prioritizes consumption and affluence. To them, the Occupy Movement signified the breakdown of this system. Adonis commented “the link there I think goes back to what’s going on with occupy Miami and what’s going on all over the country, that obviously the American set of values is bankrupt in a way” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Additionally, the Occupiers were perceived to be making progress towards a socially just democratic system, a system that was perceived to be lacking in Miami. One in which their were “vehicles for inclusion and participation and ownership of the process, not a ‘sense’ of ownership” (Jacob, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

**An urban nature.** Participants felt that practicing simplicity meant being aware and respectful of the environment and “living in line with the earth” (Terry, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Residents felt a strong connection to nature living at the farm. Maurice felt that living at Earth-N-U's allowed him to become more aligned with” nature and the earth’s natural rhythm” (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Following this logic, simplifiers also felt that mainstream consumerist society took interest in the environment so long as there were resources to exploit but ultimately lacked “respect and reverence for this earth and what she has to offer” (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

Residents felt that the climate and physical geography of the region were ideal for those wishing to practice simplicity. Not only did the warm climate mean home heating was unnecessary, but the lack of extreme winter weather allowed them to walk or ride a bicycle for travel year round. The flat topography also made bicycling easier. The warm climate was also perceived to facilitate food production and composting.

**Living in community.** Although residents and visitors are at the heart of on-the-ground community building efforts, Randy, as landowner, is ultimately responsible for major community decisions, particularly concerning financial matters. Still, Randy’s interactions with residents are more casual and democratic than one might expect in a landlord/tenant relationship, and residents have a great deal of autonomy. Financial arrangements are between Randy and individual residents, therefore the community is not functioning as a single financial unit. Jacob explained that because the community was not pooling resources, residents were “not deciding where to go together, just



finding common ground” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Because there is so little organization, there are limited opportunities to collaborate towards these ends. Marion noted that previous attempts to foster unifying structure, setting up regular community meetings for example, were “like herding cats” because everyone was so fiercely individualistic (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Jacob agreed that residents were highly individualistic but felt that residents “genuinely like being together” and enjoy the opportunity to express themselves when community events are organized (Focus group, October 28, 2011).

Residents agree that despite the lack of formalized membership, living at Earth-N-U's implies a certain level of intentionality. My first evening at the community, Loretta and Jacob explained that many residents are drawn there for a purpose, although this purpose could be different for everyone. For example, they elaborated, while some might come to Earth-N-U's for the sense of community or to be closer to nature, others might simply be drawn by affordable rent. Marion felt that the farm attracted people interested in sustainability, something different than the status quo (Focus group, October 28, 2011).

As I've alluded to, the community lacks cohesiveness. While some residents are directly involved in community activities, others are preoccupied with lives and jobs away from the farm. During the focus group, residents explained the farm was “transitional place” and that there could be more or less unity at times depending on who was living there (Focus group, October 28, 2011). When contributions are not perceived to be equal, tensions arise. It is not always readily apparent what goals the

community is working towards or how residents and visitors can contribute. Marion expressed during the focus group that he felt energy was too often directed to other projects and private lives rather than to making the community a more functional place. Another resident contended that “if it was one big tent city people [could be] living that way... [but we] still have to work and pay rent, nobody here is rich” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). This resident felt that residents had to work at jobs outside the community were not left with much time to contribute to farm projects and community building activities.

This resident’s comment also brings to light an ongoing issue that has burdened farm life. Some community residents harbor resentment towards those camping in volunteer town, because they do not work ‘regular’ jobs and are not required to make tangible financial contributions to the farm. Most campers pay no rent but are still permitted to use the same facilities as other tenants. While many do exchange work for housing, the community is essentially ‘funded’ and able to continue through the rents paid by other tenants. In referring to Historic Volunteer Town, Maurice explained, “you don’t need no money to function there per se but... the reality is we are not self sustaining because it’s being sustained by the people that are working” (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Rent-paying tenants feel indignant towards those who’ve chosen to disengage from waged-work and the cash economy.

Participants are aware that this tension is indicative of the larger social stigmas that voluntary simplicity lifestyles must come up against. During the focus group, Adonis asserted that in “regular society there is this idea that you’re not invested in a place unless you’ve made a financial commitment” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Maurice

further noted that although Volunteer Town residents may not be engaged in traditional waged work they “are also pioneers in the shift that’s taking place right now because somebody has to let go of the system” (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

Community residents are both challenged and supported by living so intimately with other individuals through shared space. Alicia explained that due to close quarters, community members tended to get involved in each others business; that is to say, there was not much privacy in personal affairs. For many residents the “farm drama” became too much and they were not able to live at the farm for extended periods of time. Marion echoed these sentiments noting that this tended to be the biggest issue he and others had with life at the farm. The close contact and communal living was also a draw for residents, and many found the farm environment to be nurturing and supportive of their lifestyle choices. For Marion, facing social tensions offered an opportunity to improve communication skills. He explained it this way:

When I got to this farm it was about ‘being a human 101’, you know, releasing the objective, the agenda, the layers of nonsense that have been imposed upon us in this society [over generations] to the present and getting back to just being a person, a human being. (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011)

**Community-community relations.** Earth-N-U is situated within Little Haiti, a neighborhood that garners its name from the predominantly Haitian population that began settling there during the immigration waves of the 1980’s (Portes & Stepick, 1993). Yet, farm demographics do not represent the neighborhood’s ethnic makeup.

Jacob, who moved to the area to better facilitate his ongoing work in Haiti commented “my Haitian friends are like ‘you moved out of little Haiti when you moved to the farm you know’ you know they were like ‘you use to live in little Haiti you don’t live in little Haiti anymore’ and its true” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Although neighborhood kids have taken an eager interest in community activities, attempts at bridging the cultural gap have seen little success amongst the older population.

Farm residents feel that their alternative lifestyle further challenges their ability to integrate with the neighboring community. Jacob explains it this way, “we're a little odd here... there's this automatic barrier between the immediate neighbors here and us just because we're so weird” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). Adonis felt that neighborhood residents underestimated the work being done at the farm and the values associated with a simplicity lifestyle. He asserted, “they see it as a fantasy land you know where you're not actually doing what it takes to survive, even though that's the opposite... you're trying to create a place where we're creating the tools to actually survive, it's a disconnect” (Focus group, October 28, 2011). He went on to speculate that the neighborhood's immigrant population may, under pressures to assimilate into mainstream American culture, want to disassociate themselves from what they perceive to be a subversive lifestyle.

Due to the relative absence of boundaries demarcating public and private space, farm residents feel themselves vulnerable. As previously noted, the front door to the farm house remains open throughout the day and visitors are free to enter and tour the grounds unattended. Although many areas of the farm are considered shared or

communal space, it isn't clear to visitors, as spoken from personal experience, where these areas end and private residences begin. The community has kept it this way so as to maintain an environment where neighborhood children feel safe and welcome and encouraged to engage with the animals and natural landscape. But lax security has resulted in the farm having an ongoing issue with theft. Randy addressed this during our interview noting that even though the farm is in a rough area, it feels like a safe place and people tend to let their guard down (Randy, personal communication, October 26, 2011). A good example of this occurred during my stay. A young woman, thinking it was safe to leave the keys in the ignition for the short time it took her to pick her child up from the farm's daycare, had her car stolen from the front drive.

Residents partially attribute the theft to the neighborhood's misconceptions about farm life and cultural differences. Residents know the crimes are being perpetrated by neighborhood kids. The community feels it is targeted because, in the poverty stricken ethnic neighborhood of Little Haiti, they are viewed as predominantly affluent and white (Focus group, October 28, 2011; Alicia, personal communication, October 24, 2011). Residents do not perceive themselves to be wealthy, and in fact see themselves as at a similar economic level as the surrounding neighborhood. Marion felt that the community as a whole was insensitive to the economic circumstances faced by most neighborhood children. He contended that more could be done collectively to address these issues of poverty and theft. Still, no one that I spoke with expressed anger or animosity but were, in fact, quite sympathetic. Alicia explained to me that she would rather deal with the inconvenience of theft than create a closed-up, unwelcoming environment. At one point, Randy refused her request to post signage encouraging visitors to respect the property.

She later agreed with his decision as she explained it was a very “white way” to deal with the problem, and would only further perpetuate the idea that within the farm’s confines lay “forbidden fruit” (Alicia, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

**Arts, healing, and spirituality.** Earth-N-Us draws people involved in the creative and healings arts, as well as those pursuing paths driven by spirituality. As previously noted, one gets a sense of these ties just by perusing the property as the landscape is littered with numerous and varied artistic works. Randy boasted during our interview that the community has hosted many artists and felt the place inspired creativity. Participant histories also illustrate this point; for example Alicia was a painter and Jacob a potter. Loretta enjoyed being creative and found creativity to be one of the easiest aspects of her lifestyle. Both she and Randy hoped the community could focus more on art in the future as the non-profit developed.

For some participants, voluntary simplicity was deeply intertwined with their spiritual lives. For Loretta, her church was a significant source of support for her simplicity lifestyle. Maurice explained that his path towards simplicity had primarily been focusing on the spirit, and that only in recent time had he begun delving into the physical and social components. He described the City of Miami as a “spiritual desert,” and felt that this stood in the way of those wishing to practice simplicity (Maurice, personal communication, October 29, 2011). Simplifiers found the community to be a healing place and for some, healing, of both the body and mind, was facilitated by their simplicity practices. Farm residents offered classes on subjects related to health and healing, and they hoped it would develop as a healing center.

**Summary.** Participants believe society's preoccupation with consumption has led to social injustice and ecological decline. They view practicing voluntary simplicity as an opportunity to express reverence for others and for the natural world. Residents tried to foster respect for individuality and culture both in their interactions with one another and with the neighboring community of Little Haiti. Cultural differences created tensions with the neighboring community, and this posed an ongoing issue for farm residents wanting to bridge this divide. Because simplifiers strove to promote social justice through their simplicity practices, they were sympathetic to the circumstances of their neighbors and sought a deeper understanding of their actions and cultural underpinnings.

The culture that has evolved at Earth-N-U's in the absence of formalized structure embodies aspects of social anarchism (Bookchin, 1995). Community members see "individual freedom as conceptually connected with social equality and emphasize community and mutual aid" (Suissa, 2001, p. 629). For those residents who adhere to and manifest this culture, they live and work together for the betterment of the community. The community only exists insofar as its members work towards that goal, that is to say, it is not a community on paper and not everyone is involved in these efforts.

Living at the farm allowed residents to manifest a key component of voluntary simplicity, closeness with nature, while still being connected to the resources of the urban environment. Residents were able to supplement their existence by tapping into the urban waste stream, for example through the procurement of food by 'dumpster

diving'. But because residents were not tied down to the farm via a remote locality, they had to make greater efforts to connect with one another in a meaningful and intentional way. Communal living afforded residents the opportunity to lead low-impact lives. The community provided a supportive environment as well as the infrastructure necessary to live more simply. They were able to navigate their own feelings on issues of object attachment and personal property through this experience.

Despite removing themselves from the cycle of work-consume-work, residents still found themselves tied to the cash economy, and the economic system they so vehemently protest. Questions arose as to what constituted a contribution, and how non-monetary contributions should be measured and valued in a monetary system. Simplifiers saw themselves as fighting this system and working towards a world where value was placed on individual and interaction rather than on objects and what they symbolize.



## **Chapter Seven:**

### **Conclusions**

In the preceding chapters, I used four case studies to illustrate the relationship between voluntary simplicity lifestyles and place. Applying qualitative research methods, I have explored how simplicity lifestyles have been adapted to the bioregional geography in which they are manifested. Additionally, voluntary simplifiers living in an intentional community setting were compared to those living outside of an intentional community, in an urban environment. In recent decades, the body of literature on voluntary simplicity lifestyles has grown, particularly in the fields of marketing, psychology and sociology. Yet, prior research has done little to explore the role of geography in shaping voluntary simplicity lifestyles. My research has attempted to fill this gap by comparing simplifiers living in the Greater Everglades Bioregion (GEB) to those living in the Sonoran Desert Bioregion (SDB).

### **Discussion**

Simplifiers shared some commonalities in their practices and motivations, regardless of bioregion or community setting. Overwhelmingly, participants had adopted their voluntary simplicity practices out of a sense of moral obligation to improving social and environmental conditions and simplifying allowed them to make ethical consumptive

or anti-consumptive choices. This coincides with Sandlin and Walther's (2009) findings that simplicity allows for moral and ethical identity creation. The degree to which social or environmental concerns took precedence varied according to communal or non-communal living arrangements. Simplifiers living non-communally tended to prioritize the environmental impacts of their lifestyle and evaluated consumptive choices primarily on their ecological consequences. Communal simplifiers foregrounded societal issues when discussing their lifestyles, such as social justice, communication, and learning to live and work cooperatively. This finding reaffirms previous research (Mulder, Costanza & Erickson, 2006) comparing communal residents to non-communal residents which found that the former make a stronger association between social capital and quality of life than does the latter.

Simplifiers in each sample endeavored to achieve simplicity goals by monitoring their consumption of goods and resources. Not only did this mean consuming less, but being more thoughtful in one's purchases. Participants considered the full lifecycle of an object or resources when gauging the impact their consumption of that good would have; costs and benefits were weighed at multiple scales. Waste reduction was also an important goal and recycling, reuse and composting were common practices. As anticipated, local adaptations were dependent on several factors: the geography of the region, infrastructure, and available technologies. In a broader sense, how simplifiers related to these features was a function of the social and political cultures of the regions.

Simplifiers living in the SDB identified water as a regional challenge and finding ways to conserve and supplement water at home was an important component of their simplicity practices. Responses in the GEB dealt far less with water, suggesting that water conservation is not a universal simplicity practice and that SDB simplifiers are sensitive to the environmental limitations of their bioregion. Yet, given the precarious state of water resources in the SDB, it is surprising participants did not express more concern for water than other resources mentioned, such as energy or fuel. This could be due to several factors. The threats of peak oil and anthropogenic climate change are widely discussed and have many concerned that current levels of oil dependency and use are unsustainable (Hopkins, 2008). These threats carry with them significant environmental and financial costs. The feedback loop is so sensitive that when oil supplies are called into question, individuals feel it in their wallet and at the pump. Water is a different story. As illustrated in the bioregional profile in Chapter 3, water management in Phoenix is highly complex and intentionally kept out of public discussion. Prices are kept low and many residents are unaware of the true state of water in the region. The resource is not managed bioregionally, meaning there are inputs from beyond the bioregion, and the true state of water resources, both locally and those that are outsourced, is unknown to simplicity practitioners. Intuitively, residents may perceive that living in a desert environment implies water scarcity and greater need conservation. Despite this, lacking adequate information and environmental and cultural feedback indicators (e.g. a rise in cost, a public conservation campaign, water shortages when drought occurs) their efforts are focused on what they perceive to be more pressing matters such as fuel and energy.

Although simplifiers in both regions endeavored to maintain what they saw as more sustainable and healthier food practices, this was more pronounced with simplifiers in the GEB. Most achieved this goal by either growing in a home or community garden or purchasing organic and locally grown produce at their farmer's market. In the GEB, many simplifiers living both communally and non-communally manifested their desire to eat more sustainably by adopting vegetarianism and/or veganism.

Both the GEB and SDB face their own unique challenges when it comes to agriculture. Agriculture has played a significant role in each region's development. Yet, rapidly increasing populations have meant loss of farmland to urban and suburban sprawl. In the GEB, crops such as sugar cane, cotton and grain for livestock feed dominate production, with far less of the remaining land going to fresh produce. Although no data is available on how much local produce is retained for local consumption, regional informants employed in the industry asserted there was a shortage of local farmers willing to sell at local farmer's markets.

Environmental conditions present additional obstacles. In both regions, simplifiers attempting to supplement their diet with homegrown food felt one must possess specialty knowledge of the crops and techniques that are best suited for the climate, and relied on local nonprofit organizations and peers for this information. Although the area around Phoenix has been an epicenter for agriculture for thousands of years, this has only been possible so long as the region's rivers keep flowing at normal levels. As discussed in Chapter 3, should there be a water shortage --a likely

occurrence if consumption and population levels continue to increase --agriculture will be the first allocation to get cut.

The GEB has seen quite the opposite scenario, although it faces similar outcomes. Despite more than 10,000 years of human habitation, agriculture has only become the primary source of subsistence over the last century or so. Previous cultures thrived on the abundance provided by the unique marine and estuarine environments found in the region. Small-scale horticulture and food gardens were mainstays of some later Native American peoples, but overall, the region's predominantly wetland habitat did not lend itself well to agriculture. With the implementation of drainage and flood control, the region has seen the spread of agriculture in the form of large corporations with sugarcane being the staple crop. But the cost of drainage has been substantial soil loss due to subsidence, fire, and decomposition. Although agriculture is one of the most economically significant industries in the region, some question the viability of continued large-scale agricultural production given more recent efforts to restore the natural Everglades ecosystem.

As noted in Chapter 1, one conceptual manifestation of bioregion has been the 'foodshed' or regional food supply. Simplifiers' focus on locally grown foods as more healthful and sustainable alternatives to conventional grocery store produce indicates an ideological shift towards bioregional consumption. Further, attempts at home provisioning illustrate a desire for self-reliance in an effort to disengage from larger, less sustainable, systems of production and consumption. It is unclear if simplifier concerns are indicative of a growing awareness to local realities of food security, given that each

region faces challenges to building a healthy foodshed, or if their interest comes out of a national shift towards decentralizing food systems (Ayers & Bosia, 2011). This point also calls into question the widespread adaptation of vegetarianism amongst simplifiers in the GEB region. Agriculture is a fairly new venture, with the region's previous inhabitants relying heavily on the area's abundant sources of seafood. Agriculture, and its requisite drainage, has caused widespread ecological destruction. Given this point, it seems illogical to think that an exclusively plant-based diet could be sourced locally. Instead, one might assume that a sustainable local food system, and local diet, must rely heavily on seafood as did the region's early inhabitants. Further, has the ecosystem decline, resulting from agricultural runoff and mercury poisoning from development, precluded this from ever becoming a reality?

Participants in all locations found simplicity practices to be more costly, particularly those living in urban, non-communal environments. Although it seems somewhat counter-intuitive to think a person must spend more to consume less, this is highly dependent on what the person is consuming and how. In attempting to choose more socially and environmentally responsible products, simplifiers are no longer externalizing the costs of consumption. As Eglin and Mitchell (1977) point out, "Living simply need not be equated with living cheaply" (p.5). Eglin and Mitchell (1977) go on to explain that even though one might be consuming less, because the economy within which this consumption is embedded is not geared towards these kinds of products (environmentally benign, justly made, higher quality, longer-lasting) they are obtained at a higher cost.

Additionally, because it is often the case that consumption is viewed strictly in terms of conscious consumptive choices, such as commodity purchases, “less individualistic kinds of consumption such as houses, transportation, water, sewage, energy” are ignored (Heyman, 2005, 113). Although simplifiers were in fact reconsidering their relationship to material goods, on a broader scale they were exploring ways to reduce or alter their consumption (and waste) of natural resources. Simplifiers challenge cultural ideologies regarding resource consumption and waste, but in a material sense must also find alternatives given that the distribution of these resources is embedded in the built environment and maintained by political and economic institutions.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study, is how participants grappled with this duality. Simplifiers have traditionally been thought to embrace what Maniates (2002, p. 45) terms the “individualization of responsibility,” that is to say they take personal responsibility for global scale environmental ills and feel remediation can be realized through educated consumptive choices and individual action. One need only look to Grigsby’s (2004) work to see evidence of this; “those in voluntary simplicity... [focused] on the individual as the primary mechanism for change” (Grigsby, p. 12). Yet, my research indicates that “individualization” is highly dependent on locale. In the SDB, participants saw, to borrow from Maniates (2002, p. 45), “environmental degradation as the product of individual shortcomings.” Participants aspired to alter how they consumed resources such as water, fuel and to a lesser extent energy, but doing so required home infrastructure improvements such rain barrels or retrofitting, perhaps even the oversight of certified professionals, efforts that are costly and time consuming. Ironically,

simplifiers felt if they had more resources, e.g. time and money, at their disposal, they would be able to implement such changes. Individualization of responsibility has therefore trapped simplifiers in a peculiar cycle. In response to social and environmental ills, which they feel are a result of individual consumptive behaviors, simplifiers seek to consume less and spend less while simultaneously freeing up time from a work centered life, but because they've individualized responsibility they feel they are unable to manifest the necessary changes because of shortages of time and money.

Voluntary simplifiers living in the GEB broke from this tradition. Responses indicated that simplifiers understood they were limited to the choices available locally, and that larger social, economic and political institutions determined these options. They felt efforts towards reducing or altering resource use were stymied by policies favoring growth and development, and that government made little effort towards implementing sustainable initiatives such as recycling and energy efficiency. Although simplifiers took responsibility to conserve through individual consumptive and anti-consumptive behaviors, they recognized there was only so much they could accomplish as individuals without widespread social and political change.

The broader implications of these differing worldviews are profound. Maniates (2002, p. 46) contends "individualization of responsibility in the United States is... undermining our ability to react effectively to environmental threats." Further, in order to effectively transform the social and political institutions that lie at the root of the problem, individuals must prioritize their role as citizen over that of consumer or, I would argue, anti-consumer (Maniates, 2002). This shift has already begun taking place in the GEB,



but the question is why? To answer this, I look to Elazar's (1994) theory of political cultures. Elazar postulates that political cultures influence the political system at multiple scales by shaping not only how the polity understands and interacts with the political process but also the expectations for government function as well as who is drawn to, and ultimately responsible for, performing public service and initiating social change (Elazar, 1994, p. 219). He identifies three political subcultures in the United States, individualistic, moralistic, and traditionalistic. Here I have outlined the key differences as they pertain to this research, but for a more thorough discussion of these cultures and their distribution see Elazar (1994, pp. 229-257).

The moralistic culture "emphasizes the commonwealth conception as the basis for democratic government" and therefore politics is viewed as "public activity... devoted to the advancement of the public interest" (Elazar, 1994, p. 232). Further, when necessary, government not only can but is expected to interfere in what is otherwise considered the private sphere if it benefits the public (Elazar, 1994). Citizens are expected to be active participants in the political process.

By contrast, the individualistic culture sees government as responsible for maintaining the marketplace; "politics is a business"(Elazar, 1994, p. 230). It serves only the "functions demanded by the people it serves" and interference into the private realm is limited (Elazar, 1994, p. 230). New programs only come about if the public demands them, but politics is generally viewed as an activity best left for the 'professionals' and outside the realm of the public (Elazar, 1994).

Born out of hierarchical traditions of the Deep South, the traditionalistic culture is “rooted in an ambivalent attitude toward the marketplace coupled with a paternalistic and elitist conception of the commonwealth” (Elazar, 1994, p. 235). The purpose of government is to maintain the existing social and economic order, systems established by society’s elite, and this political culture tends to be “anti-bureaucratic” (Elazar, 1994, p. 236). Political power is inherited; social position and family ties determine who is suited for governance. Those outside of the hierarchy are excluded from the political process and are “not expected to be even minimally active as citizens” (Elazar, 1994, p. 235).

Examining ‘individualization of responsibility’ through the lens of Elazar’s theory of political subcultures provides insight into bioregional differences. These subcultures were dispersed throughout the country with waves of immigration during westward expansion. They are found side by side and in some places overlap with one taking a dominant role. According to Elazar (1994) the GEB is characterized by a traditionalistic (dominant)/individualistic(secondary) subculture, with a pocket of moralistic/individualistic predominating in Miami. In keeping with the moralistic/individualistic paradigm, Miami simplifiers, both communal and non-communal, hold the political system accountable for implementing changes. They recognize the need for a top down approach to altering patterns of consumption, and some, though not all, are politically active citizens.

Moralistic/traditionalistic typifies the vast majority of the SDB, although this is reversed in Southern parts of Arizona. At first glance, one might question the validity of

this line of reasoning, given that simplifiers of this region have adopted 'individualization' as their approach to environmental change. 'Individualization,' and a comparative disengagement from the political process, would suggest the predominance of a traditionalistic perspective. But, the population has changed since Elazar's writing in 1994, and the region has undergone dramatic waves of immigration from the south. Elazar (1994) notes that Hispanic influence reinforces the traditionalistic culture, hence the reversal in the south where Hispanic influence is the strongest along the border. Therefore, because the Hispanic population of Phoenix specifically and Arizona generally has more than doubled since 1990 as a percentage of total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990), I contend that the dominant-subordinate organization of moralistic/traditionalistic cultures in the metro area, should be revisited and does in fact support my hypothesis. One might contend Miami has also seen an increase in Hispanic populations, but as a percentage of total population, the increase has been far less pronounced.

The findings of a concurrent study conducted by Alexander and Ussher (2012) similarly contradict the conventional view that simplifiers are disengaged politically having fully adopted 'individualization' as the solution to environmental concerns. In their survey of voluntary simplifiers, Alexander and Ussher (2012) found a growing "political sensibility," which they suggest is indicative of a broader shift in the simplicity movement (p. 81). Applying social movement theory, Alexander and Ussher (2012) hypothesize that individualization was a phenomena of the simplicity movement's gestation phase, and that transformation to "group consciousness" is part of the social movement's natural evolution and progression. I would contend that while this is

certainly an intriguing theory, my data supports a place-based understanding of the shift towards group consciousness (rejection of individualization) present within the voluntary simplicity movement.

**Intentional communities.** Intentional communities are unique in that interactions can occur between the environment and individuals living within the community or between the environment and the community as a collective. But the community can also take on the role of place. For simplifier's living in an intentional community, food production, waste disposal and water and energy conservation, are often prescribed by the community and facilitated by community infrastructure; they are part of the community as place. These systems have evolved over time and are the product of years of collaboration and contributions from past and present residents. To say the bioregion has shaped the collective community's simplicity practices implies that it has also impacted simplification for community residents. But, this impact on residents is indirect. In other words, residents may engage in a practice at the behest of the community without being cognizant of the practice's origin. This is especially true given that many residents' stays are short-lived. For these residents, the scale of impact is much more localized, meaning the community as place is what is most significant in shaping the way they think about and practice simplicity. Perennial residents, on the other hand, have been able to watch the systems evolve and are sensitive to the external as well as internal factors that have shaped the community's simplicity practices and consequently their own.

In both communities, emphasis was placed on improving social interactions and authentic connections to each other and the natural world. By living communally simplifiers had access to infrastructure that allowed them to live low impact lifestyles, allowing them to concentrate on other aspects of living simply. That is to say, where non-communal simplifiers were preoccupied with trying to navigate day to day existence altering consumption in a world geared towards high-consumption lifestyles and technologies, community residents were able to focus on the other piece of the simplicity pie; garnering satisfaction from relationships to people and the natural world. Participants were challenging the paradigm that promoted consumption as a means for communicating personal worth and achieving social position.

In an intentional community, individuals are valued based on contributions to the community and their effort to become contributing and functional community members. When members have differing ideas about what constitutes a “contribution,” relationships may become strained. Often financial burdens are shared and in these instances financial contributions are equal and one’s income is unimportant. Income and employment are even more inconsequential when the community rejects material consumption and accumulation. At Earth-N-U’s, the community followed a different model in which community residents made individual arrangements with the community’s manager and contributions could take the form of money or unpaid work. Because the community lacked a shared idea of what constituted “contribution,” tensions arose amongst residents.

There was a universal desire amongst simplifiers living communally to connect or reconnect with nature and they felt this constituted an important part of practicing simplicity. Additionally, participants found making a connection to the natural environment both spiritual and therapeutic. In each case study of communal simplifiers, the community environment allowed simplifiers to meet these needs. Based on their research with rural simplifiers, Shaw and Moraes (2009) found that simplifiers sought out rural environments because they were better able to connect with nature, with this connection sometimes carrying spiritual significance. My research is significant in that it illustrates that communing with nature can occur in both urban and rural environments.

Communal simplifiers faced ongoing challenges as they attempted to reconcile their beliefs regarding waged work with ongoing engagement in the cash economy. By allowing residents to lead comparatively low impact lifestyles through infrastructure and pooling of non-monetary resources, the communities provided some buffer between simplifiers and the dominant economic paradigm they were attempting to resist. Further, residents in both communities were able to provision for needs by tapping into local waste streams such as dumpster diving in Miami or obtaining pre-dumpster waste food from Trader Joes in Arizona. Despite this, the communities required some financial inputs in order to maintain and improve residents' quality of life, for example installing solar panels or repairing structures, and each faced a unique set of challenges in trying to maintain financial viability.

At Wind Spirit, all residents were expected to make financial contributions, yet due to their remote location, income-generating opportunities were limited. Herein lies

the conundrum, although residents clearly disavowed the waged work system, the community still functions within the cash economy. How then can the community ask or motivate residents to participate in an onsite business when they have come to the community out of a desire to leave their work-driven lives behind?

Earth-N-U's allowed residents to contribute in non-financial ways, but this was contingent on their being at least some residents who were able to make monetary contributions. This duality caused internal strife between paying and non-paying residents. Paying, and therefore working, residents felt frustration at being unable to contribute more to onsite activities due to employment obligations, a phenomena documented in other ecovillage case studies (Ergas, 2010; Kirby, 2003), and were in turn seen as less invested in the community on a social level. Non-paying residents were resented because they were able to disengage from the waged work system, yet they were recognized for their contribution to broader social change through consumptive resistance.

**Ethnicity.** While both regions boast large numbers of international immigrants, simplifiers varied immensely in their treatment of this topic. Most simplifiers living in Phoenix were cautious to avoid commentary on the subject of ethnic diversity. I attribute this in part to the fact that legislation passed in 2011 (SB 1070) has made ethnicity a highly contentious and politicized subject. Historically, Phoenix has touted itself as a white, American town. Clearly, as illustrated by SB 1070, the city has little interest in embracing its rapidly changing ethnic demographic. Conversely, Miami celebrates its rich ethnic heritage and the city is employing this diversity to carve out a place for itself

as an economic hub between the Americas. Participants from this region showed no hesitation in discussing ethnic difference.

When the subject of ethnicity did come up, it was in the context of discussing participation in the movement by different ethnic groups. Ethnic and minority populations were perceived to care little for voluntary simplicity. Some, it was argued, are stuck in a web of 'involuntary' simplicity and unable to meet even basic needs. Simplifiers asserted that often these ethnic populations boast traditions that embody simplicity lifestyles, but exposure to American consumption culture and goods corrupts them causing them to abandon these traditional practices. Ethnic groups are perceived indifferent to the environmental repercussions of their consumptive choices; once reaching American shores, immigrants forego their materially simple earth-centered traditions in favor of high consumption lifestyles. Time and again in these discussions, participants portrayed regional ethnic populations as "poor" and "immigrant." That is to say, participants failed to recognize that a growing number of the ethnic population are second and third generation Americans or that they are increasingly achieving middle class incomes. Although it is a very real fact that this demographic is often plagued by poverty, particularly in the instance of Earth-N-Us' neighbors in Little Haiti, and that many have indeed recently immigrated to the U.S., it's still noteworthy that these qualities were extrapolated to the larger population.

To understand these responses, I turn to Grigsby's (2004) research on simplifiers in the Pacific Northwest. Grigsby (2004) posits that simplifiers see themselves as socially conscious and unprejudiced individuals. Nevertheless, she has found that the



discourse of the movement positions simplifiers, and their consumptive choices, in a dominant role over other cultures and individuals who are striving to attain levels of consumption comparable to that of the dominant class. Yet, because simplifiers have rejected the traditional systems of consumption and production that legitimize oppression they absolve themselves from their own feelings of superiority where dominance and superiority are derived not from one's racial or ethnic makeup, but from one's 'knowing best'. Simplifier's felt their lifestyles could inform the consumptive choices of other cultures by illustrating there was a better way (Grigsby, 2004). Further, Grigsby (2004) maintains that:

simple livers choose to reduce the level of their privileged position relative to being able to consume an unfair proportion of the earth's resources without giving up their position of unequal access to these resources and right to a higher level of control over the use of resources. (p. 157)

While I do believe Grigsby's analysis holds some validity, my research also challenges her findings. Many respondents rationalized changes in traditional ethnic lifestyles and consumption patterns by contending that Western systems of oppression and intolerance devalue indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity. Seeking social and political acceptance, ethnic groups were assumed to feel pressure to assimilate to American lifestyles and values. Whether or not these assumptions are accurate, it speaks volumes that simplifiers are looking beyond commonly held beliefs and stereotypes, and suggests an outlook of equality rather than superiority. More significant is that some even bemoaned the *absence* of indigenous and ethnic voices

from the broader simplicity discussion. With assimilation, they argued, comes the loss of knowledge and culture that could deeply inform simplicity lifestyles. These responses suggest that living in an ethnically diverse landscape may serve to stimulate simplifier's sensitivity to the ethnic experience. Or these responses could be indicative of a larger sea change in the simplicity movement's discourse on ethnicity.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to the study that should be addressed. Although overall sample size was appropriate for research methods, and commensurate with prior qualitative studies (e.g. Grigsby, 2004; Sandlin & Walther, 2009), I would have preferred a larger sample size for the individual case studies and greater focus group participation. Further, due to time constraints, I was only able to spend a short period of time in each intentional community and was unable to conduct follow-up interviews with participants. While the data collected certainly offered a comprehensive look at interviewees' and community practices, it would have been beneficial to have clarified or delved deeper into certain responses or motivations. I should also address that although the sample had little racial, ethnic and gender diversity, it was, in fact, a good representation of the study population. As noted in the introduction chapter, simplifiers are predominantly white, middle-class and female (Elgin, 1993; Grigsby 2004; Johns 2009).

### **Implications**

By framing consumptive choices as ecologically and socially motivated, participants have politicized an otherwise apolitical act. In a mundane way, simplifiers

were reconsidering their relationship to material goods, but on a broader scale they were exploring ways to reduce or alter their consumption (and waste) of natural resources. Simplifiers challenge cultural ideologies regarding consumption and waste, but in a material sense must also find alternative ways to provision for themselves given that the distribution of these resources is embedded in the built environment and maintained by political and economic institutions. As anticipated, local material adaptations were dependent on several factors: the geography of the region, infrastructure, and available technologies. While biophysical conditions present in the bioregion influenced the individual concerns and practices of simplifiers, unfavorable conditions were often mitigated by external inputs. In other words, simplifiers intuitively understood the limitations of their natural environment. But, because resources were supplemented or managed from outside of the bioregion, simplifiers did not fully comprehend their environmental reality. Lacking the social and physical feedback to inform their consumptive choices, simplifiers' efforts were often directed towards environmental concerns of lesser consequence.

Many simplifiers turn to self-sufficiency as a means of provisioning resources. Most simplifier admits that simplifying and self-sufficiency are both time and labor intensive. Yet, simplicity is often driven by a desire to work less and free up time for leisure. This raises several questions. Are simplifiers aware of this glaring inconsistency before embarking on this lifestyle? Do simplifiers differentiate between work for wage and work for survival? Is emancipation from the cash economy empowering enough to warrant a life with even less free time or is the work of self-sufficiency conflated with leisure?

Further complicating matters is that the idea of simplifying to save money and free up time competes with the reality that simplifying requires time and money. Given this ironic relationship, is simplicity a practical option for everyone? As previously noted, simplifiers tend to be middle-upper class, well-educated white-collar professionals. Yet, even these folks struggle with finding the resources necessary (e.g. time and money) to achieve their simplicity goals. Is it realistic or even possible for those in poverty living involuntarily simple lives (not meeting basic needs) to circumvent the cycle and transition into voluntary simplicity lifestyles? Are the rich the only ones in a position to simplify? This point gets to the root of the biggest criticism of the simplicity movement; namely, can simplicity affect meaningful environmental change if it can only be practiced by an elite few? I believe that voluntary simplicity lifestyles can be more widespread, but in order for this to happen, changes must take place at both the individual and institutional level. Although individuals are responsible for their personal consumption choices, the choices they have are limited to the options available, which in turn, are determined by larger systems of production and distribution. Therefore, obstacles such as time and money can be overcome if institutional policies favor simplicity lifestyles, as exhibited through increased access and implementation as well as defraying the cost of these lifestyle choices. This brings me to the next point, locus of responsibility.

My findings challenge the traditionally held view that the simplicity movement individualizes responsibility. Responses indicate that simplifiers' approaches to affecting change were highly dependent on place. In Miami, where the dominant political culture advocates for an empowered citizenry and a government responsible to the

commonwealth, simplifiers sought out changes in systems of power and the social and economic forces that control modes of consumption. In and around Phoenix, finding a means to simplify was the responsibility of the simplifier and failing to do so was seen as a personal failure rather than a failure of the system. Although this difference can, to a certain extent, be explained by differing regional political cultures, political systems are multi-scalar and extend beyond the regional or local sphere. We live in an era in which neo-liberal conservatism reigns; big government is under attack at the national level and the political climate favors the expansion of private sector enterprise. Given that place exist as a temporal landscape as well as physical one, how much influence can be attributed to the current political climate? Would one expect to find the same results in a different time?

In returning to the my original research question, “How do bioregional characteristics impact the way in which simplifiers think about and practice simplicity?” the answer is that bioregion is at once both significant and insignificant. Clearly, simplicity lifestyles are place-based but “place” is engaged at various scales and in a multitude of social, political and economic spaces. It is impossible to truly practice bioregional consumption when current systems of resource management and distribution extend beyond the boundaries of the bioregion. To “re-localize” resource consumption would, in many instances, require a radical redistribution of populations and reassessment of consumption practices and products if it is to be done in an environmentally sustainable way. While it might be empowering for individuals to create off-grid homesteads, complete with solar panels, well water and a home garden, this is not a realistic option for all. Further, even understanding “place” can be difficult as

environments and ecosystems are transformed with rapid urbanization and resulting environmental degradation. Therefore, as the environmental movement continues to advocate for re-localization or living in place, careful thought must be given the following points: how “place” is defined and bounded; consumption patterns and goals of “going local” given the physical limitations of one’s place; and reorienting systems of power and distribution so as to better facilitate this movement at a larger scale.

To build on these findings, I recommend future research continue to explore the relationship between place and anti-consumptive behaviors, specifically at multiple scales and spheres. Although the home lives of simplifiers have been well documented, little is known about how these simplicity practices are acted out in other “spaces” or spheres of their lives such as at work or on the Internet. Further, consumption research should continue to examine how simplifiers understand and define “local”. Are their ideas about place contingent on the resource in question or influenced by limitations of their locale? Finally, future work should explore inconsistencies between practicing simplicity and self-sufficiency and how these practices are rooted in notions of empowerment.

## Literature Cited

- Aberley, D. (1999). Interpreting bioregionalism: A story from many voices. In M. V. McGinnis (Ed.), *Bioregionalism* (pp. 13-42). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Agriculture in the Classroom (National Organization). (2010). *A look at Arizona agriculture*. [Fact sheet]. Retrieved on June 17, 2012 from <http://www.agclassroom.org/kids/stats/arizona.pdf>
- Alexander, S., & Ussher, S. (2012). The voluntary simplicity movement: A multi-national survey analysis in theoretical context. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12 (1), 66-86. doi: 10.1177/1469540512444019
- Andrews, C. (1997). *Circle of simplicity: Return to the good life*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. (2012). *2010 Status of Water Quality Arizona's Integrated 305(b) Assessment and 303(d) Listing Report: Little Colorado water quality assessment* (EQR-12-01). Retrieved from <http://www.azdeq.gov/envIRON/water/assessment/download/lg.pdf>
- Arizona Department of Water Resources. (2010). *Arizona water atlas: Central highlands planning area* (Vol. 5). Retrieved from [http://www.azwater.gov/AzDWR/StatewidePlanning/WaterAtlas/CentralHighlands/documents/Volume\\_5\\_Final.pdf](http://www.azwater.gov/AzDWR/StatewidePlanning/WaterAtlas/CentralHighlands/documents/Volume_5_Final.pdf)
- Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. (2006). The Sonoran Desert region and its subregions [Map]. Retrieved July 15, 2012 from <http://www.desertmuseum.org/desert/sonora.php#map>
- Arnold, J. S. & Fernandez-Gimenez, M. (2007). Building social capital through participatory research: An analysis of collaboration on Tohono O'odham tribal rangelands in Arizona. *Society and Natural Resources: An International Journal*, 20, 481-495. doi:10.1080/08941920701337887
- Arrow, K., Dasgupta, P., Goulder, L., Daily, G., Ehrlich, P., Heal, G., Levin, S.,... Walker, B. (2004, Summer). Are We Consuming Too Much? *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18 (3), 147-172. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3216811>

- Ayres, J., & Bosia, M. J. (2011). Beyond global summitry: Food sovereignty as localized resistance to globalization. *Globalizations*, 8 (1), 47-63. doi:10.1080/14747731.2011.544203
- Bennett, C. (1997). *Exploring the foodshed concept with organic growers in Ontario* (Master's Thesis). Retrieved from <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp04/mq24442.pdf>
- Berg, P., & Dasmann R. (1977). Reinhabiting California. *The Ecologist*, 7.
- Bernard, R. H. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Blaikie, P. M. & Brookfield H. C. (1987). *Land degradation and society*. New York: Methuen.
- Bookchin, M. (1995). *Social anarchism or lifestyle anarchism: An unbridgeable chasm*. San Francisco, CA: AK Press.
- Booth, D. E. (2004). *Hooked on growth*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Brown, S. L. (2002). *Intentional community: An anthropological perspective*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Bryant, R. L., & Goodman, M. K. (2004). Consuming narratives: The political ecology of 'alternative' consumption. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29 (3), 344-366. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3804496>
- Buell, L. (2005) Downwardly mobile for conscience's sake: Voluntary simplicity from Thoreau to Lily Bart. *American Literary History*, 17 (4), 653-665. doi: 10.1093/alh/ajj040
- Bustos, S. (2012, February 11). Voting shifts weaken Republican strength of Miami Dade's congressional seats. *Miami Herald*. Retrieved from <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2012/02/voting-shifts-weaken-republican-strength-of-miami-dades-congressional-seats-.html>
- Chen, E., & Gerber J. F. (1990) Climate. In R. L. Myers & J. J. Ewel (Eds.), *Ecosystems of Florida* (pp.11-34). Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida Press.
- Chow, W. T. L., Chuang, W., & Gober, P. (2012). Vulnerability to extreme heat in metropolitan Phoenix: Spatial, temporal, and demographic dimensions. *The Professional Geographer*, 64 (2), 286-302.
- Christian, D. L. (2003). *Creating a life together: Practical tools to grow ecovillages and intentional communities*. Canada: New Society Publishers.



- Claxton, G. (1994). Involuntary simplicity - changing dysfunctional habits of consumption. *Environmental Values*, 3 (1), 71-78. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30301376>
- Craig-Lees, M. & Hill, C. (2002). Understanding voluntary simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19 (2), 187-210. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/docview/227691044?accountid=14745>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cronon, W. (1993). The uses of environmental history. *Environmental History Review*, 17 (3), 1-22. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3984602>
- Daly, H. (1996). *Beyond growth: Economics of sustainable development*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Davis, J. H. (1943). *Natural features of southern Florida, especially the vegetation, and the Everglades* (FGS: Bulletin 25). Retrieved from <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00000488/00001>
- de Graaf, J. & Boe, V. (Producers). (1997). *Affluenza* [VHS]. Oley, PA: Bullfrog Films.
- de Graaf, J. & Boe, V. (Producers). (2005). *Escape from affluenza* [DVD]. Oley, PA: Bullfrog Films.
- Derr, M. (1998). *Some kind of paradise: A chronicle of man and the land in Florida*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Dewalt, K.M. & Dewalt, B.R. (2002). *Participant observation: A Guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Dimmitt, M. A. (Photographer). (1989). Sonoran desertscrub – Lower Colorado River Valley. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Sonoran Desert Digital Library website: <http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM09810&sp=Sonoran%20Desertscrub%20-%20Lower%20Colorado%20River%20Valley>
- Dimmitt, M. A. (2000a). Biomes and communities of the Sonoran Desert region. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 3-18). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Dimmitt, M. A. (2000b). Plant ecology of the Sonoran Desert. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 3-18). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Dimmitt, M. A. (Photographer). (2008). *Encelia farinosa*. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Sonoran Desert Digital Library website:

<http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM21714&sp=Encelia%20farinosa>

Dorschied, T. (Cartographer). (n.d.). Arizona's watersheds [Map]. Retrieved February 26, 2013 from the Arizona Geographic Alliance, Arizona State University School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning: [http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/AZ\\_Watersheds.pdf](http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/AZ_Watersheds.pdf)

Dorschied, T. (Cartographer). (n.d.b). Central Arizona Project: The canal and the area it serves [Map]. Retrieved February 26, 2013 from the Arizona Geographic Alliance, Arizona State University School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning: <http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/CAP.pdf>

Douglas, M. S. (1988). *The Everglades: River of grass* (Rev. ed.). Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press.

Duever, M. J., Meeder, J. F., Meeder, L. C., & McCollom, J. M. (1994). The climate of South Florida and its role in shaping the Everglades ecosystem. In S. M. Davis & J. C. Ogden (Eds.) *Everglades: The ecosystem and its restoration* (pp. 225-248). Delray Beach, FL: St. Lucie Press.

Earth-N-Us Farm. (n.d.) History. Retrieved on March 5, 2013 from <http://earthnusfarm.weebly.com/history.html>

Earth-N-Us Farm. (2011, October 3). *Vision of the farm*. [Meeting notes].

Eckholm, E. & Williams, T. (2011, October 3). Anti-Wall Street protests spreading to cities large and small. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/04/us/anti-wall-street-protests-spread-to-other-cities.html>

Elazar, D. J. (1994). *The American mosaic: The impact of space, time, and culture on American politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc.

Elgin, D. (1993) *Voluntary simplicity: Toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich* (Rev. ed.). New York: Quill.

Elgin, D. (1996 Spring/Summer). Upshifters: Pioneers of an awakening culture [Interviewed by Sarah van Geder]. *Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures*. Retrieved from <http://duaneelgin.com/upshifters/>

Elgin, D. (2010) *Voluntary simplicity: Toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich* (2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. ed.). New York: Harpercollins.

Elgin, D., & Mitchell, A. (1977). Voluntary simplicity. *Co-Evolution Quarterly*, (Summer). Retrieved from [http://duaneelgin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/voluntary\\_simplicity.pdf](http://duaneelgin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/voluntary_simplicity.pdf)

- Emerson, R., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ergas, C. (2010). A model of sustainable living: Collective identity in an urban ecovillage. *Organization and Environment*, 23(1), 32-54. doi: 10.1177/1086026609360324
- Etzioni, A. (1998). Voluntary simplicity: Characterization, select psychological implications, and societal consequences. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 19 (6), 619-643. doi:10.1016/s0167-4870(98)00021-x
- Etzioni, A. (2004). The post affluent society. *Review of Social Economy*, 62 (3), 407-420. doi:10.1080/0034676042000253990
- Fellowship for Intentional Community. (2010). *Communities directory*. Retrieved from <http://directory.ic.org/>
- Flores, D. (1999). Place: Thinking about bioregional history. In M. V. McGinnis (Ed.), *Bioregionalism* (pp. 43-58). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (n.d.a). Biscayne Bay-Southeast Coast basin: Lakes, rivers, streams, and aquifers. Retrieved January 13, 2013 from [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/monitoring/docs/bmr/southeast\\_coast.pdf](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/monitoring/docs/bmr/southeast_coast.pdf)
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (n.d.b). Everglades basin: Lakes, rivers, streams, and aquifers. Retrieved January 13, 2013 from <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/monitoring/docs/bmr/everglades.pdf>
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (2011). Water reuse program. Retrieved February 23, 2013 from <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/reuse/wrca.htm>
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (July, 2012). Watershed management. Retrieved from <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/watersheds/index.htm>
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (2013a). Learn about your watershed: Everglades watershed. Retrieved from <http://www.protectingourwater.org/watersheds/map/everglades>
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (2013b). Learn about your watershed: Southeast Coast-Biscayne Bay watershed. Retrieved from [http://www.protectingourwater.org/watersheds/map/southeast\\_coast\\_biscayne\\_bay/](http://www.protectingourwater.org/watersheds/map/southeast_coast_biscayne_bay/)
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). (2010). Guide to the natural communities of Florida: 2010 edition. Retrieved from [http://www.fnai.org/pdf/nc/FNAI\\_NatComGuide\\_2010.pdf](http://www.fnai.org/pdf/nc/FNAI_NatComGuide_2010.pdf)

- Gober, P. (2006). *Metropolitan Phoenix: Place making and community building in the desert*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gregg, R. B. (1936). *The value of voluntary simplicity*. Retrieved from <http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0304spiritpsych/030409simplicity/SimplicityFrame.html>
- Grigsby, M. (2004). *Buying time and getting by: The voluntary simplicity movement*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Haase, R. W. (1992). *Classic cracker: Florida's wood-frame vernacular architecture*. Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press
- Halweil, B. (2002). *Home grown: The case for local food in a global market*. World Watch Paper 163. Washington, D.C.: World Watch Institute.
- Heyman, J. M. (2005). The political ecology of consumption: Beyond greed and guilt. In S. Paulson & L. L. Gezon (Eds.), *Political ecology across spaces, scales and social groups*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Highwater-Langston, D. (2003). *The Native American world*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Hirschman, R. (Photographer). (n.d.). Aloe ferox. Retrieved on February 28, 2013 from Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Sonoran Desert Digital Library website: <http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/detail.php?id=ASDM23273&sp=Aloe%20ferox>
- Holmgren, D., & Holmgren Design Services (2002). *Permaculture: Principles and pathways beyond sustainability*. Hepburn, Australia: Holmgren Design Services.
- Hopkins, R. (2008). *The Transition handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Huneke, M. E. (2005). The face of the un-consumer: An empirical examination of the practice of voluntary simplicity in the United States. *Psychology & Marketing*, 22(7), 527-550. doi: 10.1002/mar.20072
- Ivanyi, C. (2000). Fishes of the desert. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 3-18). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Iyer, R., & Muncy, J. A. (2009). The purpose and object of anti-consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 62, 160-168. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.023
- Jackson, R. (2004, Summer). The ecovillage movement. *Permaculture Magazine*, 40. Retrieved from [http://www.gaia.org/mediafiles/gaia/resources/JTRJ\\_EV-Movement2004.pdf](http://www.gaia.org/mediafiles/gaia/resources/JTRJ_EV-Movement2004.pdf)

- Johns, R. A. (2009). Assessing the social and ecological impact of voluntary simplicity. *Papers of the Applied Geography Conferences*, 32.
- Johnston, T. C., & Burton, J. B. (2003). Voluntary simplicity: Definitions and dimensions. *Academy of Marketing Studies*, 7 (1). Retrieved from <http://bi.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/essentials/article/GALE%7CA166751753/8974ae120e7fcac5c25534dd7e11d340?u=tamp44898>
- Kirby, A. (2003). Redefining social and environmental relations at the ecovillage at Ithaca: A case study. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23, 323-332.
- Klinkenberg, J. (2002). A culture endangered. In S. Cerulean (Ed.), *The book of the Everglades*, (pp. 97-106). Canada: Milkweed Editions.
- Kloppenburg, J., Hendrickson, J., & Stevenson, G. W. (1996). Coming in to the foodshed. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 13 (3), 33-42.  
doi:10.1007/BF01538225
- Kozeny, G. (1996). *Intentional communities: Lifestyles based on ideals*. Retrieved from <http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/01kozeny.php>
- Kozeny, G. (2000). In community, intentionally. In *Communities Directory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Routledge, MO: Fellowship for Intentional Community.
- Leonard-Barton, D. (1981). Voluntary simplicity lifestyles and energy conservation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 8 (3), 243-252. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2488881>
- Librova, H. (1999). The disparate roots of voluntary modesty. *Environmental Values*, 8 (3). 369-380. Retrieved from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/content/whp/ev>
- Lipschutz, R. D. (1999). Bioregionalism, civil society and global environmental governance. In M. V. McGinnis (Ed.), *Bioregionalism* (pp. 101-120). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lodge, T. E. (2004). *The Everglades handbook: Understanding the ecosystem* (2nd ed.). London: CRC Press.
- Logan, M.F. (2006). *Desert cities: The environmental history of Phoenix and Tucson*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Maniates, M. (2002). Individualization: Plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world? In T. Princen, M. Maniates, & K. Conca (Eds.), *Confronting consumption* pp.43-66). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

- Marella, R. L. (2009). *Water withdrawals, use, and trends in Florida, 2005*. (U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2009-5125). Retrieved from <http://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2009/5125/pdf/sir2009-5125.pdf>
- Massey, D. B. (1984). *Spatial divisions of labor: Social structures and the geography of production*. New York: Methuen.
- Mather, C. (2010, February/March). Off the grid and thriving. *Mother Earth News*, 83-87.
- McCally, D. (1999). *The Everglades: An environmental history*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- McCarthy, J. (2005). First world political ecology: Directions and challenges. *Environment and Planning A*, 37 (6), 953-958. doi:10.1068/a38134
- McGinnis, M. V. (1998). Wastesheds. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 9(1), p. 91-103. doi:10.1080/10455759809358781
- McDonald, S., Oates, C. J., Young, C. W., & Hwang, K. (2006). Toward sustainable consumption: Researching voluntary simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 23 (6), 515-534. doi:10.1002/mar.20132
- Meindl, C. F. (2005). Water, water everywhere. In J. E. Davis & R. Arsenault (Eds.), *Paradise lost?: The environmental history of Florida*, (pp. 113-131). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Merkel, J. (2003) *Radical simplicity: Small footprints on a finite earth*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.
- The Miami Bike Scene. (n.d.) Miami Critical Mass. Retrieved on March 5, 2013 from <http://www.themiamibikescene.com/p/miami-critical-mass-guidelines.html>
- Milbrath, L. W. (1993). Redefining the good life in a sustainable society. *Environmental Values*, 2 (3), 261-269. Retrieved from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/content/whp/ev?>
- Morrison Institute for Public Policy. (2011). *Watering the sun corridor: Managing choices in Arizona's megapolitan area*. Retrieved from <https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/publications-reports/2011-watering-the-sun-corridor-managing-choices-in-arizonas-megapolitan-area>.
- Mulder, K., Costanza, R., & Erickson, J. (2006). The contribution of built, human, social and natural capital to quality of life in intentional and unintentional communities. *Ecological Economics*, 13-23. doi: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.09.021
- Myers, N. (1997). Consumption in relation to population, environment and development. *The Environmentalist*, 17 (1), 33-44. doi:10.1023/A:1018531428876



- Nabhan, G. P. (2000). Native American management and conservation of biodiversity in the Sonoran Desert bioregion. In P. E. Minnin & W. J. Elisens (Eds.), *Biodiversity and Native America* (pp. 29-43). USA: University of Oklahoma Press.
- National Park Service. (n.d.a.) Everglades: Brazilian pepper. Retrieved February 26, 2013 from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=170163>
- National Park Service. (n.d.b.) Everglades: Old world climbing fern. Retrieved February 26, 2013 from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/upload/OldWorldClimbingFern.pdf>
- National Park Service. (2012, November 19). Everglades: Hardwood hammock. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/forkids/hardwood-hammock.htm>
- National Park Service. (2012, November 22). Everglades: Natural features and ecosystems. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/naturalfeaturesandecosystems.htm>
- National Park Service. (2013, February 5). Everglades: Pine rocklands. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/forkids/pine-rocklands.htm>
- National Park Service. (2013, February 26). Everglades: American Alligator, in-depth. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/alligatorindepth.htm>
- National Park Service. (2013, February 26). Everglades: Florida panther, species profile. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/floridapanther.htm>
- National Park Service. (2013, February 26). Everglades: Woodstork, species profile. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/floridapanther.htm>
- Nelson, M. R., Rademacher, M. A., & Paek, H. J. (2007). Downshifting consumer = upshifting citizen? An examination of a local Freecycle community. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611, 141-156. doi:10.1177/0002716206298727
- Neumann, R. P. (2010). Political ecology II: Theorizing region. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34 (3), 368-374. doi:10.1177/0309132509343045
- Nijman, J. (2010). *Miami: Mistress of the Americas*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Nordie, F. G. (1990). Rivers and streams. . In R. L. Myers & J. J. Ewel (Eds.) *Ecosystems of Florida*, (pp. 392-425). Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida Press.
- Oates, C., McDonald, S., Alevizou, P., Hwang, K., Young, W., & McMorland, L.-A. (2008). Marketing sustainability: Use of information sources and degrees of

- voluntary simplicity. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(5), 351-365. doi: 10.1080/13527260701869148
- Occupy Directory. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2013 from <http://directory.occupy.net/>
- Olmsted, I., & Loope, L. L. (1984). Plant communities of the Everglades National Park. In P. J. Gleason (ed.), *Environments of south Florida: Present and past II*. Miami, FL: Miami Geological Society.
- Portes, A. & Stepick, A. (1993). *City on the edge: The transformation of Miami*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Purdum, E. D. (2002). *Florida waters: A water resources manual from Florida's water management districts*. Retrieved from [http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/xrepository/sfwmd\\_repository\\_pdf/florida\\_waters.pdf](http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/xrepository/sfwmd_repository_pdf/florida_waters.pdf)
- Rauch, S. (2002). Putting down roots: Exotics in the Everglades. In S. Cerulean (Ed.) *The book of the Everglades*, (pp. 143-151). Canada: Milkweed Editions.
- Redmond, W. H. (2001). Exploring limits to material desire: The influence of preferences vs. plans on consumption spending. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 35 (3), 575-589. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4227691>
- Rees, R. E. (1992). Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: What urban economics leaves out. *Environment and Urbanization*, 4 (2), 121-130. doi:10.1177/095624789200400212
- Robertson, W. B., Jr., & Kushlan, J. A. (1984). The southern Florida avifauna. In P. J. Gleason (ED.) *Environments of South Florida Present and Past II*, (pp. 219-257).
- Robin, V. (2008). *Your money or your life: 9 steps to transforming your relationship with money and achieving financial independence* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Ross, A. (2011). *Bird on fire: Lessons from the world's least sustainable city*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sale, K. (1991). *Dwellers in the land: The bioregional vision*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Sandlin, J. A., & Walther, C. S. (2009). Complicated simplicity moral identity formation and social movement learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59 (4), 298-317. doi:10.1177/0741713609334137
- Scarborough, R. (2000). Geologic origin of the Sonoran Desert. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 71-85). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.



- Schor, J. B. (1998). *The overspent American: Upscaling, downshifting, and the new consumer*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schor, J. B. (2005). Prices and quantities: Unsustainable consumption and the global economy. *Ecological Economics*, 55 (3), 309-320. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.07.030
- Seyfang, G. (2005, April). Shopping for sustainability: Can sustainable consumption promote ecological citizenship? *Environmental Politics*, 14 (2), 290-306. doi: 10.1080/09644010500055209
- Shama, A. (1988). The voluntary simplicity consumer: A comparative study. *Psychological Reports*, 63, 859-869. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1988.63.3.859
- Shama, A., & Wisenblit, J. (1984). Values of voluntary simplicity: Lifestyle and motivation. *Psychological Reports*, 55, 231-240. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1984.55.1.231
- Shaw, D., & Moraes, C. (2009). Voluntary simplicity: An exploration of market interactions. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 33 (2), 215-223. doi: 10.1111/j.1470-6431.2009.00760.x
- Shaw, D., & Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19 (2), 167-185. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/docview/227756695?accountid=14745>
- Sheridan, T. E. (2000). Human ecology of the Sonoran Desert. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 105-118). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Siminski, P. (2000). The desert adaptations of birds and mammals. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 3-18). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Skinner, J. (2011). Social Media and Revolution: The Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement as Seen through Three Information Studies Paradigms. *Sprouts: Working Papers on Information Systems*, 11 (169). Retrieved from <http://sprouts.aisnet.org/11-169>
- Snyder, G. (1993). Coming in to the watershed: Biological and cultural diversity in the California habitat. *Chicago Review*, 39 (3/4), 75-86. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25305721>
- South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. (n.d.). *Strategy and biennial report: July 2008-June 2010*. Retrieved from [http://www.sfrestore.org/documents/2010\\_sbr.pdf](http://www.sfrestore.org/documents/2010_sbr.pdf)
- South Florida Water Management District. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved January 10, 2013 from

<http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/xweb%20about%20us/sfwmd%20about%20us>

- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice* (vol. 20) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Suissa, J. (2001, November). Anarchism, utopias and philosophy of education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35 (4), 627-646. doi: 10.1111/1467-9752.00249
- Thomashow, M. (1995). *Ecological identity: Becoming a reflective environmentalist*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Trochim, W. (2005). *Research methods: The concise knowledge base*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Atomic Dog.
- Turner, R. M. (1994). Sonoran desert scrub. In D. E. Brown (Ed.), *Biotic communities: Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico* (pp. 181-221). Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press.
- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). (1992). *Agenda 21*. Retrieved from <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *State and county quick facts*. Retrieved on February 1, 2013 from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (1990). *1990 Census of Population General Population Characteristics Arizona (1990-CP-1-4)*. Retrieved from <http://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/fedddocs/id/43/rec/4>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010a). *Profile of general population and housing characteristics: Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL metro area*. Available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010b). *Profile of general population and housing characteristics: Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, AZ metro area*. Available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Population distribution and change: 2000 to 2010*. 2010 Census Briefs. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf> : Mackun, P. & Wilson, S.
- U.S. Geological Survey. (2013a, January 15). Controlling the waters: Water conservation areas (WCAs). Retrieved from South Florida Information Access (SOFIA) [http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual\\_tour/controlling/wca.html](http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual_tour/controlling/wca.html)

- U.S. Geological Survey. (2013b, January 15). Everglades National Park, northern section: Tree islands. Retrieved from South Florida Information Access (SOFIA) [http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual\\_tour/enp/index.html](http://sofia.usgs.gov/virtual_tour/enp/index.html)
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2007, May 31). *South Florida ecosystem: Restoration is moving forward but is facing significant delays, implementation challenges, and rising costs* (GAO publication No. GAO-07-520). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/assets/270/261610.pdf>
- Van Devender, T.R. (2000a). Adaptations of desert amphibians and reptiles. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 61-69). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Van Devender, T.R. (2000b). The deep history of the Sonoran Desert. In S. J. Philips & P. W. Comus (Eds.), *A natural history of the Sonoran Desert* (pp. 61-69). Tucson, AZ: Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Press.
- Velben, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-h/833-h.htm>
- Walker, P. (1998). Politics of nature: An overview of political ecology. *Capitalism, Nature, and Socialism*, 9 (1), 131-144. doi:10.1080/10455759809358786
- Water Education Foundation, University of Arizona's Water Resources Research Center. (2007). *Layperson's guide to Arizona water*. Retrieved from [http://www.azwater.gov/AzDWR/IT/documents/Layperson's Guide to Arizona Water.pdf](http://www.azwater.gov/AzDWR/IT/documents/Layperson's_Guide_to_Arizona_Water.pdf)
- Watershed Monitoring Basins [Map]. (2011, September 21). Retrieved from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection website: <http://www.floridadep.org/water/monitoring/basins.htm>
- Webb, D. S. (1990). Historical biogeography. In R. L. Myers & J. J. Ewel (Eds.) *Ecosystems of Florida*, (pp. 70-100). Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida Press.
- The Wildlands Project. (1999). *State of the desert biome: Uniqueness, biodiversity, threats and adequacy of protection in the Sonoran bioregion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Tucson, AZ: G.P. Nabhan & A.R. Holdsworth.
- Whitehead, M. (2007). *Spaces of Sustainability: Geographic Perspectives on the Sustainable Society*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.
- Williams, J. (2008). Predicting an American future for cohousing. *Futures*, 40, 268-286. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2007.08.022
- Wind Spirit Community. (n.d.a). Wind Spirit Community overview. Retrieved July 21, 2012 from [http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/ws\\_overview.htm](http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/ws_overview.htm)

- Wind Spirit Community. (n.d.b). Gardens and fruit trees. Retrieved July 21, 2012 from <http://www.windspiritcommunity.org/Garden.htm>
- Wind Spirit Community. (n.d.c). The co-creators agreements. Retrieved July 21, 2012 from <http://www.windspiritcommunity.org>
- World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. (2012, August 31). How it works. Retrieved from <http://www.woof.org/index2.asp>
- Yahr, H. (2009, April). Inner-city Shangri-la. *Biscayne Times*, 7(2). Retrieved from [http://www.biscaynetimes.com/images/stories/art\\_0409/BT\\_April09.pdf](http://www.biscaynetimes.com/images/stories/art_0409/BT_April09.pdf)
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zavestoski, S. (2002). The social-psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 149-165. doi: 10.1002/mar.10007

## **Appendix A:**

### **Simplicity Guideline**

(Adopted from Elgin, 1993; Leonard-Barton, 1981; Holmgren, 2002)

1. Recycle/Upcycle/Reuse/Repurpose/Compost
2. Purchase used or secondhand items when available
3. Purchases contribute to local economy when possible
4. Engage in barter of goods and services
5. Make items when possible (non-food)
6. Reskilling/DIY/Off grid living/self reliance training
7. Engage in food production and preservation
8. Eating locally and seasonally
9. Meatless meals/Vegetarian-vegan diet
10. Reduced energy consumption at home: includes solar, CFL's, reduce/eliminate disposable products, energy efficient appliances, mindfulness of power/water usage, grey water/rain barrels, xeriscaping)
11. Reduced energy consumption with transportation: non-motorized transport, public transport/rideshare, moving or altering lifestyle to require less travel
12. Consumption with non-pollution in mind: avoid companies/products which pollute, natural environmentally friendly products

### **Appendix A (continued)**

13. Celebrate and encourage tolerance, diversity, equality (civic engagement)
14. Consider environmental implications for reproductive choices
15. Career choice informed by environmental concern (includes location and carbon footprint from travel)
16. Reduction in number of hours worked as part of simplifying

## **Appendix B:**

### **Study Summary and Invite**

As part of my thesis research into sustainable lifestyle choices being conducted through the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, I'm looking for volunteers willing to discuss their path down the road to sustainability. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the impact of geographic surroundings on sustainable lifestyle choices. Participants should be actively pursuing a lifestyle, which incorporates sustainability, simplicity and reduced consumption. You'll be asked to share your experiences and in doing so will be given a chance to connect with like-minded members of the community. There will be a 1-2 hour focus group with some volunteers selected to take part in a follow-up interview to be conducted on a later date. Refreshments will be provided. If you would like to participate or want more information please contact Lauren Drakopoulos at [941.504.6890](tel:941.504.6890) or [simplicitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:simplicitystudy@gmail.com) (IRB Study # **Pro00005310**)

**Appendix C:**

**Simplicity Study Participant Prescreen**

**Contact Information**

Name:

Contact Number:

Day or evening better to call?

Email:

Zip code:

Availability: Please check all that apply

	<b>AM</b>	<b>PM</b>
<b>Monday</b>		
<b>Tuesday</b>		
<b>Wednesday</b>		
<b>Thursday</b>		
<b>Friday</b>		
<b>Saturday</b>		
<b>Sunday</b>		



## Appendix C (continued)

Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview if you are selected to do so?

Will you need transportation to/from focus group site?

### Demographics

Age: 18-32      33-46      47-65      65<

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Income bracket (in U.S. dollars):

<11,000      11,000-25,000      25,000-40,000      40,000-60,000

60,000-80,000      80,000- 120,000      >120,000

How long have you been actively incorporating sustainable life choices (estimate)?

## **Appendix D:**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

1. Lets start by defining sustainability.
2. What are some of the ways each of you has tried to make your own lives more sustainable?
3. What has been the easiest part of the process?
4. What have you found to be most challenging
  - a. Why are these so challenging?
5. What local resources do you think are most useful for a person trying to live more sustainably?
6. What role do relationships and social networks play in the process?
7. Do you think local cultural norms value sustainability as we've defined it?
  - a. If so in what way?
  - b. If not how do they differ
8. Do you think government policies value sustainability?
  - a. Can you identify differences between the local, statewide, and national levels?
9. What are some basic infrastructure components that are key to sustainability?
  - a. Are these present here? Could they be improved?

### **Appendix D (continued)**

10. Do you think the local economic condition impacts sustainability?
11. What about the physical geography of this region is the most appealing to a sustainable lifestyle?
12. What about the physical geography of this region is the least appealing?
13. What resource should be of highest concern for \_\_\_\_\_ residents?

## **Appendix E:**

### **Interview Protocol**

1. Let's start with you telling me your name (ethnicity and age if no info sheet).
2. How long have you lived in this area? (if not originally from the area go to 2.a.)
  - a. How did you end up here?
  - b. What other places have you lived?
  - c. Where do you consider "home" or "second home" and how is it different from here?
3. What is your educational background?
4. What's your line of work?
5. How do you define simplicity or sustainability?
6. How have you tried to make your own life more simple or sustainable?
7. When do you think the process started for you?
8. How were you first introduced to sustainable practices?
9. What was your motivation?
10. What have you found to be the most challenging part of the process?
11. What have you found to be the easiest part of the process?
12. Do you have any sustainability goals that are currently unattainable?
  - a. What would make it easier for you to make these changes?
13. What if any local resources have you found to be the most helpful for you during this process?
14. What role have your relationships and social networks played in the process?

## Appendix E (continued)

- a. If living in community, do you think this has helped? If so how?
  - b. If living out of community, have you considered living in an intentional community with a focus on sustainability? Do you think it would help?
15. How have your friends and family reacted to your efforts to change your lifestyle?
16. Do you think local cultural norms value sustainability as we've defined it?
- a. If so in what way?
  - b. If not how do they differ
17. Do you think local government policies value and encourage sustainability?
- a. In what way?
18. How does the local economic condition impact sustainability?
19. What are some basic infrastructure components that are key to sustainability?
- a. Are these present here? Could they be improved?
20. What about the physical geography of this region do you find to be the most conducive to your lifestyle?
- a. What part is the least conducive?
21. As a \_\_\_\_\_ resident, what resources are you most concerned with preserving or sustaining?
22. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we've not already discussed?

## **Appendix F:**

### **The Co-Creators Agreements**

#### **Be Mindful**

My intent is to be myself, to be authentic, and to be fully present.

#### **Realize our Potential**

My commitment is to realize my full potential and support others in doing the same

#### **Follow my Guidance**

I agree to attune with spirit and follow the calling of my soul on behalf of the well -being of the whole.

#### **Communicate with Integrity**

I agree to tell my truth with compassion for myself and others.

#### **Act with Integrity**

I agree to keep my agreements and will do my best to follow my heart in making commitments.

#### **Deep Listening**

I agree to listen respectfully to the communication of others and tune in to their deepest meaning.

#### **Honor One Another**

I agree to honor each person's process, acknowledging that everyone, including myself, is making the best possible choice or decision we are capable of in that moment.

#### **Appreciate Our Contributions**

I agree to take responsibility for asking for and receiving acknowledgement and for acknowledging others.

#### **Honor Our Differences**

I agree to come from a sense of cooperation and caring in my interactions with others, and from an understanding that objectives are often the same even though methods for achieving them may differ. I honor the diversity of all life.

## **Appendix F (continued)**

### **Take Responsibility**

I agree to take responsibility for my creations, my reactions, my experience and my relationships.

### **Maintain Resonance**

I agree to take the time to establish rapport and then to re-connect with anyone with whom I feel out of harmony as soon as it may be appropriate.

### **Resolve Problems Constructively**

I agree to offer at least one solution any time I present a problem. I agree to take problems, complaints and upsets to the person(s) with whom I can resolve them, at the earliest opportunity. I agree not to criticize or complain to someone who cannot do something about my complaint, and I will redirect others to do the same.

### **Go for Excellence**

I agree to support others and to be supported in participating at the highest level of excellence.

### **Learn from Experience**

I agree to do my best to learn from my experiences.

### **Accept Imperfections**

I intend to embrace and accept the imperfections of myself and others.

### **Be a Leader**

I agree to foster an environment of genuine collaboration, in which all people, including myself, feel empowered to express our individual and collective potential.

### **Service to Others**

I am willing to open my heart, still my mind and be in compassionate service to all life.

### **Re-evaluate My Commitment**

I agree to choose and re-choose to participate in this community. It is my choice

### **Lighten Up**

While honoring all these agreements and taking them seriously, I aspire to do so with an attitude of light heartedness.

## **Appendix F (continued)**

We recognize that aligning in a shared agreement field is essential in order to cultivate and maintain harmonious relationships and well being. The above agreements were first established by the Geneva Group and have been used by Global Family teams and other groups throughout the world for the past several decades.

Wind Spirit Community. (n.d.b). Retrieved July 21, 2012 from

<http://www.windspiritcommunity.org>