

More Than Artifacts: The Surprising Importance of Census Designated Places

Dawn Dhavale

Major Paper submitted to the faculty of the  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban and Regional Planning  
In  
Urban Affairs and Planning

Dr. Robert E. Lang  
Dr. Arthur C. Nelson

August 6, 2004  
Alexandria, Virginia

Keywords: (census designated places, unincorporated places, master planned  
communities, strong county government)

# More Than Artifacts: The Surprising Importance of Census Designated Places

Dawn Dhavale

## Abstract

CDPs are an overlooked component of the metropolitan region, and add to the understanding of the region as a whole. Large CDPs that remain unincorporated have other forms of governance, either public or private. CDPs are equivalent to incorporated places in many ways, but have distinctive differences based on state and region. Large CDPs have reasons for not incorporating. A subset of these CDPs that are similar to Boomburbs are examined. Implications for planners regarding CDP existence are discussed.

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables .....	iv
Why study CDPs?.....	1
Introduction.....	1
What is a CDP?.....	2
<i>The history of CDPs</i> .....	2
<i>CDP Quirks</i> .....	4
<i>CDP Trends</i> .....	5
The Role of Annexation and Incorporation .....	13
<i>Annexation</i> .....	13
<i>Incorporation</i> .....	14
<i>State laws</i> .....	16
<i>Incorporation and Fragmentation</i> .....	16
<i>Benefits of Incorporation</i> .....	17
<i>Costs of incorporation</i> .....	18
Methods.....	20
Demographics .....	20
CDPs and Governance .....	23
<i>So why don't CDPs incorporate?</i> .....	23
<i>Private governance</i> .....	24
<i>Strong County Governance</i> .....	25
The Boomburb CDPs.....	26
<i>Looking at the Boomburb CDPs</i> .....	26
<i>Where are the Boomburb CDPs?</i> .....	29
<i>Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova</i> .....	29
<i>Governance in the Boomburb CDPs</i> .....	30
Implications for Planners .....	33
Research Implications .....	34
Conclusions.....	35
References.....	36
Vita.....	40

## List of Tables

Table 1: Historic Population Distributions .....	5
Table 2: Number of CDPs and Incorporated Places .....	5
Table 3: Historic Population Percentages .....	6
Table 4: Historic Population Percent Changes by Geography.....	6
Table 5: Population by Geography and State, 2000 .....	8
Table 6: Percentage of Population by Geography and State, 2000.....	10
Table 7: Regional CDP Patterns .....	12
Table 8: CDP Outcome Between Decades .....	16
Table 9: CDP Composition in Each Year .....	16
Table 10: Household Demographics for Large CDPs (over 50,000 residents) .....	22
Table 11: Boomburb and Baby Boomburb CDPs.....	27
Table 12: Eligibility for Boomburb/Baby Boomburb Status.....	29

## Why study CDPs?

- More people live in CDPs than central cities, yet CDPs are not well known or understood.
- More than a third of the United States population lives on unincorporated land. Of those people, the percentage living in a CDP is rising.
- One-fifth of all places are CDPs.
- Arbitrary distinctions between incorporated and unincorporated land distort the true picture of metropolitan development.
- CDPs have varied historical origins and serve different purposes within a metropolitan region.

## Introduction

Many people, particularly urban dwellers, would be surprised to learn that it is possible to not live in a “place.” Rural residents have long identified with a county, or sub-county division, but most suburban and urban inhabitants associate their location with a named city or town. These people would then be even more shocked to find that many “places” they thought existed, in fact, do not exist in a legal or governmental sense. This is the world of the census designated place (CDP) – an unincorporated statistical entity equivalent in every way to the incorporated city or town, except for the fact that it is simply a collection of lines on a map without legal and governmental privileges or protections.

A CDP is an unincorporated dense concentration of population that is locally identifiable by name. Residents of a CDP see themselves as belonging to a specific place, and may even be unaware their “city” is not incorporated. From the outside, a CDP appears to be hanging in limbo, neither city nor rural land, similar to both in some ways and wholly different from either in others. But being a CDP is not necessarily a transitional state. Rather than being on its way to a city, a CDP may make the conscious choice to remain perpetually unincorporated, to not be on a path to incorporation.

It is little wonder that the public does not understand CDPs – or even know that they exist – and urban researchers often overlook them because they are seen as statistical artifacts as opposed to “real” places. But it is important to study them: without CDPs, there would be no way to track population and demographic changes in much of the country<sup>1</sup>. As this paper shows, although CDPs are often ignored, many people live and work in these places. Incorporation is an arbitrary division. CDPs function like cities, and to study a

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, all land in Fairfax County, Virginia, is unincorporated, including the CDP the author lives in. There are 33 CDPs, without which there would be no way to divide the county other than through the nine magisterial districts. Even with these CDPs, roughly 20% of the nearly one million residents do not fall into a CDP and are untrackable except at the county level.

region without including CDPs is to understand only part of the equation; examining CDPs allows for the comprehension of the region as a whole. Additionally, there are forces at work in the creation and existence of CDPs that have been understudied, particularly the reasons why large CDPs remain unincorporated. This paper explores CDPs, examines reasons why CDPs exist and choose not to incorporate, as well as looking at a subset of these places that are similar to another studied group of cities, the Boomburbs.

## What is a CDP?

In choosing a place to live, there are three main possibilities – an incorporated place with a local government, unincorporated land outside of any recognizable settlement, or in a combination of both called a census designated place. A CDP, as defined by the census, is a population center without legally defined corporate limits or corporate powers (Census Bureau 2000a), or “communities that lack separate governments but otherwise resemble incorporated places (Census Bureau 1994).” Save being legally incorporated and having a local government, CDPs are almost identical to incorporated places – they are densely settled with a definite core, they have legally defined boundaries, and are known to the residents as a discrete and identifiable place<sup>2</sup>. It is this density and semblance of place that distinguishes CDPs from unincorporated land.

It is the lack of local government and elected officials that truly defines a CDP. As will be discussed later, governance, and the lack of local government, plays a huge role in the continued existence of CDPs. Residents of CDPs are governed by county or sub-county governments.

The Census Bureau demarcates CDPs with assistance from local and state organizations and officials. They are statistically equivalent to incorporated places, and do not include any incorporated land. Subdivisions and building complexes are not considered to be CDPs unless they have been planned to resemble a community, providing facilities and services (Census Bureau 1994, 9-25). Most places in the United States are incorporated; CDPs comprise just over one-fifth of all places. CDPs are defined for each Census before the Census is taken, and must meet the criteria at each Census to be considered; there is no grandfathering.

## *The history of CDPs*

CDPs, along with UAs, were invented as a solution to shifting settlement patterns – as the country moved from a distinct agrarian/urban division to a geographically distributed population. The creation of CDPs represents a shift in definition, but not necessarily a shift in population location. People had already begun to drift out of incorporated places,

---

<sup>2</sup> According to the Census Bureau, CDPs have “a degree of local identity,” and local officials are involved in drawing the boundaries. However, residents of smaller CDPs, or of a place with many abutting CDPs are often unaware of the particular CDP they live in.

and the Census realized the mismatch between its geography and the actual settlement patterns of the United States. Previously, there were few identifiable population concentrations outside of major cities; unincorporated areas simply did not have enough population to warrant concern. CDPs are the institutionalization of the blurring of the line between urban and rural areas.

CDPs are integrally tied to the Census Bureau's definition of urban and rural land. Until 1950, population and incorporation status were the sole determinant of urban and rural classifications. Any incorporated place with greater than 2,500 residents was urban, and smaller incorporated places together with unincorporated places (or non-place land) were rural. Minor Civil Divisions (MCDs), or sub-county divisions in some states, that were densely populated were also considered urban. Unincorporated places were not carefully defined and used, or even tabulated, by the Census Bureau until 1950<sup>3</sup>. From 1950 to 1970, CDPs were referred to as unincorporated places. The name CDP was introduced in 1980 and continues through today.

The definitions of CDPs have not been constant, and the Census Bureau often attempted to tailor the definition for specific areas with atypical settlement patterns<sup>4</sup>. The definition of CDPs varies depending on whether or not they lie in an urban area. Urbanized areas (UAs) consist of all the land in an area that is uniformly and contiguously developed, and has a population of over 50,000 between one or more central places and the neighboring densely occupied land. Everything else is considered rural, although a place – both CDPs and incorporated places – can be urban in the midst of a rural sea provided the population is over 2,500. In 2000, 64.6 percent of CDPs were in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), and 35.9 percent were in Urbanized Areas (UAs). In 1990, 72.7 percent of CDPs were in MSAs, and 45.7 percent were in UAs. The Census considers anything not classified urban (in a UA) to be rural. Clearly today CDPs are not exclusively a creature of beyond the exurbs; unincorporated is not synonymous with rural.

After 1950, UAs determined the urban/rural division. Unincorporated places were separately classified from rural land. These unincorporated places were the beginnings of CDPs, and the first time that unincorporated land was recognized as a place, and CDP residents were given a location to be identified. The introduction of UAs and CDPs assisted in making urbanization patterns more clear; land that was densely settled could be recognized as such even if it was not located in an incorporated place.

To be an unincorporated place in 1950, an area had to have more than 1,000 residents, and be densely settled enough to be recognized as a place outside of a UA. Inside of UAs, only incorporation counted. In the 60s and 70s the requirements to be a CDP outside of UAs stayed the same, and slowly became more accommodating within UAs. In 1980, the term “unincorporated place” was formally switched to CDP. By 1990, CDPs were

---

<sup>3</sup> The 1880 census listed some places as unincorporated, and the 1940 census had a small attempt at listing unincorporated places, but 1950 was the first comprehensive effort (Census Bureau 1994, 9-22).

<sup>4</sup> Alaska and Hawaii have different criteria (25 people for Alaska, and 300 people for Hawaii), as do Puerto Rico and Native American Reservations (Census Bureau 1994, pg 9-23). Likewise, areas around military bases were recognized as CDPs beginning in 1970.

recognized within UAs if they had 2,500 residents. In 2000, there was no population threshold (Census Bureau 2000b). In 2000, UAs were made a subset of urban areas, and the concept of urban clusters (UCs) was introduced. Urban clusters are smaller than UAs, from 2,500-49,999 residents, with high density. These definitional changes are important, because the CDPs added through definitional changes could mask the effects of locational population change, adding confusion to historical change tabulations.

Like incorporated places, CDPs can serve as the central place that anchors a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or Micropolitan Statistical Area (MISA). Incorporated places will always trump CDPs; although the order of the MSA or MISA name is ordered by size, for example Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area, a CDP that is larger than the largest neighboring incorporated place will be listed second to that place, if at all.

### *CDP Quirks*

Boundary changes occur in incorporated places mostly through annexation, deannexation, merging, consolidation, or incorporation. CDPs, although they have legally defined boundaries, have fewer legal obstacles to boundary change and therefore much more fluid boundaries. This can complicate longitudinal analysis of CDPs more than incorporated places. CDPs also face the challenge of being unincorporated and consequently subject to being annexed in whole or part. Also, the Census Bureau determined the existence of each CDP prior to every census; just because it existed in one Census did not guarantee its existence in the next.

Not all CDPs are created equally. There are exceptions to the definition above. By an agreement with the state of Hawaii, all places are considered CDPs regardless of their incorporation status. In states with very strong MCDs – the six New England states, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Michigan and Wisconsin – all MCDs have functional governments providing the same services as cities, towns, and counties. As such, even though these places are considered incorporated by their respective states, the Census Bureau considers them to be “whole-town” CDPs<sup>5</sup>.

The reason for whole-town CDPs lies in the origin of the place, and the structure of its government. If the place was delineated as an administrative district, such as a MCD, without regard for population clustering and does not have an organic origin, then the place is considered a CDP. Likewise a CDP in these states will still have a town council, rather than a mayor and council, reflecting the administrative roots. Even if the CDP has changed since its inception and now has a defined core and is densely settled it remains a CDP; there are no plans to update the CDPs in these strong MCD states to incorporated places. Given their unusual place in the unincorporation spectrum, these CDPs are not readily comparable to other CDPs.

---

<sup>5</sup> A whole-town CDP is defined as being in a strong MCD state (listed above) and having 95% or greater of the population and 85% or greater of the land eligible for UA inclusion.

The largest CDPs are technically Honolulu, HI followed by Arlington, VA, but they are left out of this analysis. Honolulu CDP is coextensive with Honolulu Judicial District within the City and County of Honolulu. Arlington CDP is coextensive with Arlington County. Because they are nonrepresentative, all CDPs in Hawaii, Arlington County, and CDPs in strong MCD states are excluded from analysis in this paper<sup>6</sup>.

### *CDP Trends*

Since 1950, the number of US residents living in a CDP has been rising (see Table 1); the percent change is currently keeping pace with United States population growth, while the total number of CDPs is continuing to rise (see Table 2). As the CDP population has been rising, the unincorporated “no place”<sup>7</sup> population has been dropping. It appears that the proportion of the population living in incorporated and unincorporated places has remained roughly the same (see Table 3); it is only the split between unincorporated-CDP and unincorporated-no place that has shifted. As of 2000, more people were living on unincorporated land (38.1%) than in a central city (29.8%) (Census Bureau 2000c).

Table 1: Historic Population Distributions

Year	Places			Unincorporated Population	Population not in a place	Total US Population
	CDPs	Incorporated	Total All Places			
1950	3,565,496	96,062,627	99,628,123	55,263,171	51,697,675	151,325,798
1960	6,583,649	115,910,865	122,494,514	63,412,310	56,828,661	179,323,175
1970	12,816,101	131,931,660	144,747,761	71,370,371	58,554,270	203,302,031
1980	24,176,786	140,273,938	164,450,724	86,271,867	62,095,081	226,545,805
1990	29,595,737	152,942,266	182,538,003	95,767,607	66,171,870	248,709,873
2000	32,950,387	173,512,180	206,462,567	107,909,726	74,959,339	281,421,906

Table 2: Number of CDPs and Incorporated Places

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
CDPs	1,430	1,576	2,102	3,432	4,146	5,698
Incorporated Places	17,118	18,088	18,666	19,097	19,289	19,452
All Places	18,548	19,664	20,768	22,529	23,435	25,150
% CDP	7.7	8.0	10.1	15.2	17.7	22.7

<sup>6</sup> Strong MCD CDPs will be included in the general discussion of CDPs in the next section, but will be excluded during the final analysis.

<sup>7</sup> “No place” is defined as unincorporated land that is not a CDP.

Table 3: Historic Population Percentages

Year	Places			Unincorporated Population	Population not in a place
	% in CDPs	% in Incorporated	% in All Places		
1950	2.4	63.5	65.8	36.5	34.2
1960	3.7	64.6	68.3	35.4	31.7
1970	6.3	64.9	71.2	35.1	28.8
1980	10.7	61.9	72.6	38.1	27.4
1990	11.9	61.5	73.4	38.5	26.6
2000	11.7	61.7	73.4	38.3	26.6

All this must be tempered with the fact that definitions have changed since 1950 – the 2000 redefinition may account for the huge jump in the number of CDPs. However, the population living on unincorporated land appears to be forming, or being recognized as living in CDPs, especially as the requirements to be recognized as a CDP are loosening. The percent change in population (see Table 4) tells the story of an explosive growth in CDPs in the 1950s through 1980s that has slowed in recent years even as the number of CDPs continues to rise.

Table 4: Historic Population Percent Changes by Geography

Year	Places			% Change Unincorporated Population	% Change No Place	% Change US Total
	% Change CDP	% Change Incorporated Place	% Change Place			
1950-1960	84.6	20.7	23	14.7	9.9	18.5
1960-1970	94.7	13.8	18.2	12.5	3	13.4
1970-1980	88.6	6.3	13.6	20.9	6	11.4
1980-1990	22.4	9	11	11	6.6	9.8
1990-2000	11.3	13.4	13.1	12.7	13.3	13.2

This is somewhat counterintuitive, and suggests that CDPs have a different development timeline than cities or suburbs. Looking back on the history of metropolitan development, although cities began to both fragment and consolidate throughout the metropolitan area in the mid to late 1800s, the complex subtleties of the annexation and incorporation process accelerated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in suburbanization (Teaford 1979). CDPs gained most of their population during the beginning of the move toward suburbanization, well before suburbanization became the norm, and when cities began bleeding population, after 1970. Contrary to the pattern of suburbanization, by 1980, CDP growth slowed to the national average. This growth in CDP population appears to reflect a move to unincorporated places rather than incorporated ones. Incorporated places tell the predicted story of population decline and rebound from 1950-2000 (Simmons and Lang 2003). Percent change in unincorporated land mirrors this pattern. By 2000, all three locations are growing at the national average.

States also vary in the number of CDPs they have, and their proportions of population in incorporated places, CDPs and unincorporated non-place land (see Tables 5 and 6). This

is explained by some of the quirks of CDP definitions<sup>8</sup>, and also the laws governing incorporation and annexation that will be discussed in the next section. Some states have a high proportion of CDPs, and others have very few.

---

<sup>8</sup> State differences mostly result from strong MCDs and definitional differences.

Table 5: Population by Geography and State, 2000

State	Places			Unincorporated Population	No Place Population
	CDP Population	Incorporated Place Population	Total Population		
Alabama	199,542	2,595,824	2,795,366	1,851,276	1,651,734
Alaska	122,186	457,157	579,343	169,775	47,589
Arizona	605,608	4,045,436	4,651,044	1,085,196	479,588
Arkansas	64,962	1,644,185	1,709,147	1,029,215	964,253
California	3,668,763	27,502,319	31,171,082	6,369,329	2,700,566
Colorado	531,118	3,025,069	3,556,187	1,276,192	745,074
Connecticut	704,533	1,324,639	2,029,172	2,080,926	1,376,393
Delaware	129,831	214,718	344,549	568,882	439,051
Florida	4,099,578	7,906,708	12,006,286	8,075,670	3,976,092
Georgia	625,407	3,184,435	3,809,842	5,002,018	4,376,611
Hawaii	1,100,844	0	1,100,844	1,211,537	110,693
Idaho	12,714	848,818	861,532	445,135	432,421
Illinois	102,639	10,646,597	10,749,236	1,772,696	1,670,057
Indiana	114,344	3,884,619	3,998,963	2,195,866	2,081,522
Iowa	6,298	2,265,364	2,271,662	660,960	654,662
Kansas	11,352	2,167,483	2,178,835	520,935	509,583
Kentucky	235,526	1,888,809	2,124,335	2,152,960	1,917,434
Louisiana	764,675	2,234,167	2,998,842	2,234,809	1,470,134
Maine	253,199	344,414	597,613	930,509	677,310
Maryland	2,819,976	1,425,641	4,245,617	3,870,845	1,050,869
Massachusetts	1,452,860	3,059,563	4,512,423	3,289,534	1,836,674
Michigan	947,472	5,436,801	6,384,273	4,501,643	3,554,171
Minnesota	11,812	3,927,340	3,939,152	992,139	980,327
Mississippi	84,393	1,439,019	1,523,412	1,405,639	1,321,246
Missouri	207,441	3,654,118	3,861,559	1,941,093	1,733,652
Montana	110,769	484,384	595,153	417,811	307,042
Nebraska	20,750	1,323,618	1,344,368	387,645	366,895
Nevada	707,857	1,142,955	1,850,812	855,302	147,445
New Hampshire	181,107	405,333	586,440	830,453	649,346
New Jersey	1,962,311	4,096,522	6,058,833	4,317,828	2,355,517
New Mexico	243,050	1,126,538	1,369,588	692,508	449,458
New York	3,204,762	12,146,122	15,350,884	6,830,335	3,625,573

North Carolina	296,105	4,053,841	4,349,946	3,995,472	3,699,367
North Dakota	18,696	467,815	486,511	174,385	155,689
Ohio	523,377	7,488,864	8,012,241	3,864,276	3,340,899
Oklahoma	48,526	2,613,019	2,661,545	837,635	789,109
Oregon	288,079	2,277,616	2,565,695	1,143,783	855,704
Pennsylvania	1,492,690	5,673,904	7,166,594	6,607,150	5,114,460
Rhode Island	196,566	548,968	745,534	499,351	302,785
South Carolina	426,135	1,410,830	1,836,965	2,601,182	2,175,047
South Dakota	37,371	503,296	540,667	251,548	214,177
Tennessee	139,023	3,310,134	3,449,157	2,379,149	2,240,126
Texas	894,067	15,738,989	16,633,056	5,112,831	4,218,764
Utah	238,301	1,865,680	2,103,981	367,489	129,188
Vermont	57,985	154,831	212,816	453,996	396,011
Virginia	1,573,751	2,793,670	4,367,421	4,284,845	2,711,094
Washington	1,152,125	3,515,109	4,667,234	2,379,012	1,226,887
West Virginia	115,716	644,404	760,120	1,163,940	1,048,224
Wisconsin	94,301	3,695,369	3,789,670	1,668,306	1,574,005
Wyoming	49,894	335,067	384,961	158,715	108,821
Mean	659,008	3,458,802	4,117,810	2,158,195	1,499,187
Median	236,914	2,249,766	2,613,620	1,340,916	1,049,547
Maximum	4,099,578	27,502,319	31,171,082	8,075,670	5,114,460
Minimum	6,298	0	212,816	158,715	47,589
US Total	32,950,387	173,512,180	206,462,567	107,909,726	74,959,339

Table 6: Percentage of Population by Geography and State, 2000

State	Places			% Unincorporated	% No Place
	% in CDP	% in Incorporated Places	% in All Places		
Alabama	4.5	58.4	62.9	41.6	37.1
Alaska	19.5	72.9	92.4	27.1	7.6
Arizona	11.8	78.9	90.7	21.2	9.4
Arkansas	2.4	61.5	63.9	38.5	36.1
California	10.8	81.2	92.0	18.8	8.0
Colorado	12.4	70.3	82.7	29.7	17.3
Connecticut	20.7	38.9	59.6	61.1	40.4
Delaware	16.6	27.4	44.0	72.6	56.0
Florida	25.7	49.5	75.1	50.5	24.9
Georgia	7.6	38.9	46.5	61.1	53.5
Hawaii	90.9	0.0	90.9	100.0	9.1
Idaho	1.0	65.6	66.6	34.4	33.4
Illinois	0.8	85.7	86.6	14.3	13.5
Indiana	1.9	63.9	65.8	36.1	34.2
Iowa	0.2	77.4	77.6	22.6	22.4
Kansas	0.4	80.6	81.1	19.4	19.0
Kentucky	5.8	46.7	52.6	53.3	47.4
Louisiana	17.1	50.0	67.1	50.0	32.9
Maine	19.9	27.0	46.9	73.0	53.1
Maryland	53.2	26.9	80.2	73.1	19.8
Massachusetts	22.9	48.2	71.1	51.8	28.9
Michigan	9.5	54.7	64.2	45.3	35.8
Minnesota	0.2	79.8	80.1	20.2	19.9
Mississippi	3.0	50.6	53.6	49.4	46.5
Missouri	3.7	65.3	69.0	34.7	31.0
Montana	12.3	53.7	66.0	46.3	34.0
Nebraska	1.2	77.4	78.6	22.7	21.4
Nevada	35.4	57.2	92.6	42.8	7.4
New Hampshire	14.7	32.8	47.5	67.2	52.6
New Jersey	23.3	48.7	72.0	51.3	28.0
New Mexico	13.4	61.9	75.3	38.1	24.7

New York	16.9	64.0	80.9	36.0	19.1
North Carolina	3.7	50.4	54.0	49.6	46.0
North Dakota	2.9	72.9	75.8	27.2	24.2
Ohio	4.6	66.0	70.6	34.0	29.4
Oklahoma	1.4	75.7	77.1	24.3	22.9
Oregon	8.4	66.6	75.0	33.4	25.0
Pennsylvania	12.2	46.2	58.4	53.8	41.7
Rhode Island	18.8	52.4	71.1	47.6	28.9
South Carolina	10.6	35.2	45.8	64.8	54.2
South Dakota	5.0	66.7	71.6	33.3	28.4
Tennessee	2.4	58.2	60.6	41.8	39.4
Texas	4.3	75.5	79.8	24.5	20.2
Utah	10.7	83.5	94.2	16.5	5.8
Vermont	9.5	25.4	35.0	74.6	65.0
Virginia	22.2	39.5	61.7	60.5	38.3
Washington	19.6	59.6	79.2	40.4	20.8
West Virginia	6.4	35.6	42.0	64.4	58.0
Wisconsin	1.8	68.9	70.7	31.1	29.4
Wyoming	10.1	67.9	78.0	32.1	22.0
Mean	12.7	56.8	69.5	43.2	30.5
Median	9.8	59.0	71.1	41.0	28.9
Maximum	90.9	85.7	94.2	100.0	65.0
Minimum	0.2	0.0	35.0	14.3	5.8
US Total	11.7	61.7	73.4	38.3	26.6

Aside from the states with strong MCDs<sup>9</sup>, CDPs are a relatively rare phenomenon. There are just 17 states with double-digit percentages of the population living in CDPs, and several of these are just over 10 percent. These states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. While some of these states have special reasons for high CDP counts – Hawaii for example – there seems to be a regional pattern (see Table 7).

Other than Michigan, a strong MCD state, the Midwest has very low proportion of population living in a CDP. The Northeast is difficult to assess because all states in that

---

<sup>9</sup> Even in two of the strong MCD states CDPs are rare. Minnesota has just 0.2% of the population living in a CDP, and Wisconsin has 1.8%.

category are strong MCD states. The South is a mixed bag. While some states have below 10 percent of the population living in CDPs (Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Kentucky, West Virginia, Georgia), the other half are all in the double digits, some even as high as 25 and 50 percent. The West is the opposite; only two states are below 10 percent, and the rest range in 10 to 35 percent range<sup>10</sup>. The West has very low levels of population living outside of a place, either incorporated or not. It also has a low percentage of residents living on unincorporated land, but a high amount of those living in a CDP. The South is the exact opposite; over half of the population lives in an unincorporated area, but few of those people live in a CDP. Almost 40 percent of the population does not live in a place. The West has a high percentage of its big metro population located in urbanized areas, and also has a high percent in incorporated areas while the Southeast is low on both measures. Given the development history of the West and Southeast (Lang 2002), it follows that the two halves of the Sunbelt would have such distinctive distributions of CDPs. The sprawling Southeast, with no geographic limits to sprawl, is able to support dispersed population, while the West needs to consolidate its population into relatively dense clusters to provide needed services, and conserve usable land.

Table 7: Regional CDP Patterns

Region	Measure	Places			% Unincorporated	% No Place
		% in CDP	% in Incorporated Places	% in All Places		
Northeast	Mean	17.6	42.6	60.3	57.4	39.7
	Median	18.8	46.2	59.6	53.8	40.4
	Min.	9.5	25.4	35.0	36.0	19.1
	Max.	23.3	64.0	80.9	74.6	65.0
Midwest	Mean	2.7	71.6	74.3	28.4	25.7
	Median	1.8	70.9	73.7	29.1	26.3
	Min.	0.2	54.7	64.2	14.3	13.5
	Max.	9.5	85.7	86.6	45.3	35.8
South	Mean	11.7	48.7	60.4	51.3	39.6
	Median	6.1	49.7	61.2	50.3	38.8
	Min.	1.4	26.9	42.0	24.3	19.8
	Max.	53.2	75.7	80.2	73.1	58.0
West	Mean	19.7	63.0	82.7	37.0	17.3
	Median	12.3	66.6	82.7	33.4	17.3
	Min.	1.0	0.0	66.0	16.5	5.8
	Max.	90.9	83.5	94.2	100.0	34.0

<sup>10</sup> The outlier is Hawaii, at over 90%. Because of the special arrangement where all places are considered CDPs, Hawaii is not comparable to the rest of the western states.

## The Role of Annexation and Incorporation

Often the only difference between a CDP and an incorporated place is the legal status of incorporation. Given this difference, a key component of understanding CDPs is the process of unincorporated land becoming incorporated – either through the process of annexation or incorporation. This discussion will address the concepts of annexation and incorporation, and the implications of remaining unincorporated versus incorporating.

### *Annexation*

Annexation is the act of binding unincorporated land into an existing incorporated place. Of course, annexation is not something that can be done if the locality in question is unincorporated; it is something that is done to that place. CDPs have no legal rights or ability to protect their boundaries. As unincorporated land, CDPs are at the mercy of surrounding jurisdictions' desire for growth through annexation.

Annexation can happen through several mechanisms: legislative, popular, municipal, judicial, or quasilegislative determinism (Sengstock 1960). Legislative determinism, or state law, can set the requirements and processes for annexation. Popular determinism, the popular vote or petition of the residents of the annexing or to-be-annexed area, can also instigate annexation. The annexing city can also make the decision to annex through its council or board in municipal determinism. Judicial determinism occurs when the annexation process is determined in a court. And quasilegislative determinism requires the approval of an administrative board.

State law determines the type of process to be followed; individual states can allow for many types of annexation in their laws. State law also determines the priorities for annexation. In some states, urbanized land or land close to urban areas has a higher priority to be annexed, particularly if it is land inhabited by former city residents<sup>11</sup>. Annexation laws are often artifacts of the early part of last century, and are not commonly updated. The focus of these laws was most often how to best handle the spreading urbanization of a metropolitan area (Mumphey, Wildgen and Williams 1990; Galloway and Landis 1986).

The traditional motivations and justification for annexation are generally associated with improvements in citizen welfare. In some cases, annexation makes sense<sup>12</sup> in financial and quality of life terms, but annexation that wishes to be palatable to the area to be annexed assumes a beneficial motivation to bring citizens into a beneficial arrangement. Skeptics believe that annexation only occurs when an incorporated community needs the resources of the unincorporated land, whether it is population, natural assets, or tax

---

<sup>11</sup> For example, in North Carolina, the state law states, "...the philosophical principle which underlies North Carolina state law is 'to make municipal that which is urban'...(Mumphey, Wildgen and Williams 1990 pg. 4).

<sup>12</sup> Mumphey, Wildgen and Williams (1990) examined a case study of Charlotte and found positive effects on the welfare of citizens in recently annexed territory.

dollars. One explanation for annexation is that it is not motivated by city's desire to capture suburban tax base, but instead by politics. Annexation allows a city to regain voters that have left the city for the suburbs (typically wealthier and whiter) to offset the concentration of poorer minorities entering and living in the central city (Austin 1999).

It is important to note that annexation is not a one-way process. Deannexation, in which a city voluntarily detaches a portion of the city and unincorporates it, can occur. It is a considerably more rare process. Deannexation is done when the city has taken on too much responsibility, for example too much land and not enough resources to develop it, or when it is no longer advantageous to hold the land.

### *Incorporation*

Incorporation is the procedure of seeking to be recognized and protected through state law as a legal entity. Incorporation attempts can be launched by residents, or by commercial interests. Incorporation is a form of "internal exit" – a congregation of like-minded individuals who form a new political entity to replace the old, complete with services and regulation (Buchman and Faith 1987). This differs from "external exit", voting with your feet.

Reasons for incorporation have changed through time. Traditionally, incorporation has been viewed as a way to promote development by massing a group of people together to get services supplied and facilities, after failing to meet criteria for being annexed to a larger entity (Sanger 1990). The logic was that incorporation was a response to density. Stauber (1965) argues the only real reason for incorporation is when required by density. The place should incorporate only once a population center reaches the level of density required to have municipal-style services. This prevents greedy incorporations done only for financial reasons. The welfare of the citizens, and the desire to provide efficient and economical services are the only defensible reasons for incorporation. After the purely practical motivations faded, incorporation gained popularity as a tool of exclusion and NIMBYism. Incorporation also gained acceptance as a popular way to protect assets, and control land use and revenue. Simple geography, such as being located in the path of urbanization, may increase the odds of being incorporated. Unincorporated land near a sprawling metropolis may incorporate defensively, or be required to be annexed by a state law (Stauber 1965).

Incorporation is brought about by residents of an unincorporated area that want to control their local land use, influence their local governance, improve existing municipal services or select new desired services. Motivations for incorporation might include: the current large governing entity/elected officials are nonresponsive to local needs; taxes are too high; tax revenues are not being spent in line with the area residents wishes; neighboring development plans are not palatable; the region feels too large and has competing orientations (e.g. urban/rural concerns<sup>13</sup>); services are not adequate, residents desire the

---

<sup>13</sup>In one study, rural residents expressed a belief that urban residents received most tax revenue in a state, making them sympathetic to the concept of incorporation (Fost 1992).

area to be exclusive/ restrict growth; or want to protect their land in a defensive preemptive way to avoid being subsumed by an annexation-hungry neighbor. Incorporation attempts are not always successful, but because they carry a financial penalty for the remaining unincorporated land, they can be an excellent way to get a large umbrella government to take notice. A small area may threaten to secede for the same reasons as unincorporated places may incorporate (Niendorf 1993; Overby 1992). Counties can follow the same type of incorporation strategy as municipalities; new counties are often formed from existing ones in an effort to protect resources through different levels of taxation and governmental spending on services<sup>14</sup>.

The 70s saw a lot of incorporation activity, and the 80s less so (Abrahamson and Hardt 1990). Annexation was also spreading in use throughout the 70s, and was the way that municipalities grow most often (Galloway and Landis 1986). Also, in the 70s, many small cities and towns grew outside of the recognized metropolitan areas (Galloway and Landis 1986).

Incorporation is the other side of the coin from annexation. Unincorporated land may not wish to be annexed. In this case, defensive incorporation – a pre-emptive attempt to safeguard resources – may occur. This has been most likely to happen near cities, as cities grow. A number of CDPs are near cities, but the incorporation rate is extraordinarily low<sup>15</sup>. A total of 68 (1.98%) CDPs incorporated between 1980 and 1990, and another 68 (1.64%) CDPs incorporated between 1990 and 2000 (see Table 8).

Clearly, CDPs do not incorporate to defend themselves, although they may be annexed. The percentage of CDPs that disappeared between 1980 and 1990 might also be a product of definitional changes, specifically loosening definitions of what constitutes a CDP to capture what is actually occurring in the country. These definitional changes are connected to the proportion carried over; the “carried over” proportion in 1990-2000 seems to have absorbed the “disappeared” number from 1980-1990. However, the constant new CDP creation (shown in Table 9) suggests that CDP existence is very fluid, and may be more a product of population shifts than annexation.

---

<sup>14</sup> Santa Clarita was incorporated as a city in 1987 only after a 20-year attempt to create a new county failed (City of Santa Clarita). The city’s website offers this evidence of economic motivation: “The ability to keep local tax dollars local was a huge reason why the City incorporated and continues to be a big reason for this City’s success,” comments Council member Frank Ferry.

<sup>15</sup> Between 1980 and 1990, 2,660 CDPs remained in common. 772 CDPs that existed in 1980 did not exist in 1990. 1,486 CDPs existed in 1990 that did not exist in 1980. Between 1990 and 2000, 3,775 CDPs remained in common. 1,923 CDPs existed in 2000 that did not exist in 1990. 371 CDPs existed in 1990 that did not exist in 2000.

Table 8: CDP Outcome Between Decades

	1980-1990	1990-2000
% Disappeared (e.g. boundary/name change)	20.51	7.31
% Incorporated	1.98	1.64
% Carried over	77.51	91.05

Table 9: CDP Composition in Each Year

	1990	2000
% Carry over	64.16	66.25
% New CDP creation	35.84	33.75

### *State laws*

Just like annexation, state laws authorize incorporation and can have an effect on the prevalence of CDPs within a state, as shown in Tables 5 and 6. State laws have an effect on the use of local annexation efforts (Galloway and Landis 1986). Incorporation is influenced by annexation activity, so it may be possible that incorporation is not just influenced by activity, but also by state laws regarding annexation. Most states have very defined statutes for incorporating a new city based on characteristics such as population size, land area, densities, tax bases, or distance from existing municipalities. An examination of the impact of state laws on incorporation finds that if annexation requirements as dictated by law are easy to achieve, then incorporation will rise no matter the difficulty of the process, especially if the annexing neighbor is large (Rigos and Spindler 1991). This gives credence to the theory of defensive incorporations. The same study finds that differences between incorporation laws themselves do not necessarily make a difference in the rate of incorporations. Clearly incorporation is a reaction to other land use and governance forces, not to demographic variables. In fact, incorporation is not affected by urban status or population growth, but it is affected by strong county government and an awareness of state authority and intervention on a local level (Rigos and Spindler 1991).

But some CDPs show a different pattern. As discussed above, there are few incorporations, defensive or otherwise. And as will be discussed below, many CDPs do not incorporate because of a strong county government. While state laws do play an important role, the type and role of local government seems to be a much stronger predictor.

### *Incorporation and Fragmentation*

Depending on the perspective, fragmentation is either a good thing, or a bad thing. One way of at looking incorporation and the subsequent fragmentation is as public choice; citizens will move to the location that provides the tradeoff of taxes for services that most

closely fits the beliefs of the individual. Having a fragmented metropolis provides residents with the greatest number of choices.

Miller (1981) argues that incorporation is not a manifestation of public choice and economic efficiency, but rather a means of protecting assets from redistribution out of the community. Incorporation is not necessarily raised as an option to offer greater choice or as a means of creating a solid community, but to gather scarce resources and bind their use to a specific group of individuals. In this flip side of the public choice argument, fragmentation is not caused by a group of citizens joining together to form a community, but rather to keep the taxes and services confined to specific population. Miller believes that public goods need to be tied to all people, and by incorporation they can just walk away without supporting the entire region. Short of enforced consolidation to ensure a fair share of costs being assumed by all members of the metropolitan area (Rusk 2003), it is very difficult to get fragmented areas with limited resources to volunteer to assume the financial burdens of the region. It's not just a matter of choice (fitting the suburb to your style) but about getting away from responsibility to others and keeping your resources safe.

Los Angeles County is an example of this type of fragmentation for asset protection. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the barrier to incorporation of providing services was overcome with the Lakewood<sup>16</sup> plan. Los Angeles County provided all services to unincorporated land. The contract allows the new municipality the power to control zoning and taxes<sup>17</sup>, without the bureaucratic pressure. The areas interested in incorporating were able to contract with the county for it to continue to provide the same level of services. The Lakewood plan provides efficient regional administration across fragmented jurisdictions. This also satisfied the county, which was watching in fear as little chunks of the county removed themselves from under its jurisdiction. However, there were many cases of rich areas walking away from poorer communities, or incorporation to protect commercial and taxable assets. Depending on the viewpoint, Los Angeles is either a huge success or tragedy.

### *Benefits of Incorporation*

Incorporation confers certain powers from the state, which vary according to location. States support new incorporation, and have passed laws to reduce the ability to annex, but increased the incorporation possibilities. Examples of these laws include authorization of special water districts, which lend themselves to incorporated areas very easily.

---

<sup>16</sup> Lakewood, California was the first suburb to develop a contracting agreement with Los Angeles County. Lakewood was facing potential annexation to Long Beach and decided to incorporate as protection. Prior to that contract, incorporation was extremely uncommon; the last incorporation prior to Lakewood's incorporation in 1954 was in 1939. After Lakewood incorporated, dozens of cities followed suit (City of Lakewood).

<sup>17</sup> This is a key point to the argument of incorporation as a means to prevent wealth redistribution. After incorporation, the taxes are redistributed only within the jurisdiction, and spent on the contributing residents.

It is not just the community that benefits. Elected officials, citizens and business interests also receive benefits – taxable property, lower taxes, increased development opportunities or sympathetic governance (Fleischmann 1986). There are political motivations too, as cities compete between each other for scarce resources (Logan and Molotch 1987).

As discussed above, incorporation is a way of providing an exclusive environment – just like a Home Owners Association (HOA), or zoning. For a property owner, protecting assets becomes a very strong motivation. Exclusivity is a means to that goal.

Unincorporated places with those with substantial taxable commercial or industrial properties will often incorporate to avoid being subsumed into a resource poor municipality. Incorporation is protection against unfair resource allocation, and gives legal protections and authorities.

### *Costs of incorporation*

When a large population across a unified area pays for services, with a central government providing these services, the taxes are lower since there are no duplications of effort. When fragmented, smaller populations in distinct areas create multiples of the service structure to serve the previously undivided area, the costs rise. What was once unified under one governmental structure or land division is now split into many smaller units that must provide parallel services to their residents. This has the effect of raising taxes and duplicating efforts. For example, if a county is entirely unincorporated – such as Fairfax, Virginia – it provides all services. When areas of the county incorporate and form a new city unit – such as Falls Church and Fairfax City – those places must create their own police and fire departments, school districts, park and recreation authorities and so on. The county no longer provides services, so they need fewer employees. The residents of the cities must now pay taxes that will pay for the services previously received from the county. This is more costly, but can be negated through a Lakewood Plan-style contract.

The place that is being left behind – the unincorporated land or the county the new city secedes from – has an interest in fighting back and trying to preserve the same level of shared resources. For example, when the Lakewood plan began to reform the incorporation patterns in Los Angeles County, the county fought back by trying to convince residents to stay unincorporated – preserving their political power and tax base – and working with the state to have beneficial statutes passed. If the fight against incorporation goes badly, the county might also attempt to compete with the incorporated cities on their terms by encouraging development. This might have the unintended consequences of encouraging sprawl and urbanization in areas that are not prepared (Sanger 1990).

Another cost of incorporation is greedy attempts to capitalize on a specific resource. Asset grab incorporations are extremely inefficient; protecting only certain resources, or grabbing new ones through incorporation can leave islands of unwanted and unincorporated land cut off from resources or taxable properties. This increases the

burden of the county to care for these citizens, and raises the price of services for all. It is also a wasteful and unenvironmentally sound use of land. Differences in the level of service provided, depending on municipal or county.

One final cost is the issue of free riders – just as counties seek to protect their assets by keeping land unincorporated, cities seek to protect their assets by having incorporated neighbors. A free rider occurs when unincorporated land persists in pockets within incorporated places. Gilbert, Arizona is the country’s fastest growing city above 100,000 since the 2000 census. Gilbert has been aggressive at annexing land as it grows, but in the process, some places have held out. The places that resisted annexation are often small-scale, usually the size of a subdivision. Residents living in the unincorporated land that lies within Gilbert use the city’s parks, libraries, and other local facilities but are not taxed by Gilbert for their use. They have even relied on fire and emergency services provided by the town. A recent change in Arizona state law now ends Gilbert’s responsibility for responding to emergencies in the unincorporated pockets within its borders. This may provide an incentive for such places to finally legally join the town and this end Gilbert’s free rider problem.

An incorporated city has legal status and protections, but with those benefits come the responsibility and obligation to provide municipal services<sup>18</sup> – trash collection and recycling, fire and police protection, public schools<sup>19</sup> – and governance to the residents. CDPs are not obligated to provide any services and in fact have no mechanisms in place to provide municipal services. Instead, they rely on another form of governance, private or public, to supply these services. Alternately, incorporation can be used to protect assets that must be shared with all residents of the unincorporated land.

Incorporation might prove to have costs that are too high to maintain. Places that have incorporated often face high payments to the county they seceded from, or find that the expected benefits of incorporated do not materialize. Metairie, Louisiana, incorporated for 17 years to get gas service, but found that incorporation did not address all of the residents needs and subsequently unincorporated (Metairie Information Website).

Fragmentation is a very real cost. Danielson (1976) argues that urbanization has created a population segregated on social and economic divides, mostly through local governmental fragmentation. Suburbs differ from one another based on their land uses, which are set by the local governments. These local governments can choose who lives where and how their suburb will be realized. Danielson further argues that because suburbs are so new as compared to the city, and because they are more malleable, they have the potential to be much more controlled, or exclusive. In his view, incorporation has really just been about maintaining a political distance and autonomy from the central city. The continued differences between the suburbs – tax rates, service levels – are

---

<sup>18</sup> Counties may also provide these services, depending on the local of the incorporated city.

<sup>19</sup> This is a partial list. Other examples of municipal services are animal control, building and business permitting, libraries, building inspections, street and infrastructure construction and maintenance, utility administration, public cemetery maintenance, sanitation and street sweeping, and landscaping. Services provided vary by municipality.

continually reinforced by the political freedom granted by incorporation. The essence of Danielson's argument is that incorporation is a political process to create and maintain homogenous fragmented entities that keep others out.

## Methods

CDPs are extremely diverse. The 5,698 CDPs in the United States cannot be categorized as a group except on their incorporation status. It is time-consuming and difficult to attempt to analyze this many cases for reasons for unincorporation. Instead of probing each CDP for its individual history of unincorporation, it makes more sense to focus on the CDPs that are easily large enough to be incorporated – the biggest, most city-like, income and race diverse places. These are the CDPs that are representative of the United States as a whole. The Boomburb CDPs are a subset of this group, fast growing places suffering the pressures of growth.

To target the question of why CDPs choose not incorporate, this paper examines CDPs over 50,000 residents – the same size as a mid-sized city like Sarasota, Florida or Carson City, Nevada. Most large population clusters in the US are officially incorporated and defined as cities. The 50,000 mark is also used by the census as the minimum size for a city to serve as the primary central city in a metropolitan area, as well as the population mark to be recognized as a UA – particularly relevant for CDPs. Just over 3% (601 out of 19,452) of all the incorporated places in the United States have a population greater than 50,000. In 2000, CDPs ranged from as few as under 10 inhabitants to almost 200,000. Just over 1% (41 out of 4093<sup>20</sup>) of all CDPs crossed the 50,000 inhabitant ceiling. Approximately 6% (41 out of 642) of all places over 50,000 are CDPs. Despite the relatively small percentage of cities over 50,000 that are unincorporated, it must be acknowledged how remarkable it is that any population concentration could reach the size capable of anchoring a metropolitan area without having any municipal government.

While this paper considers CDPs above 50,000, most CDPs are far smaller. Just like smaller towns and suburbs, smaller CDPs can constitute a large share of metropolitan areas. For example, in the Washington, DC MSA, 51.67% of the population lives in a CDP. But just 10 of the 154 CDPs has a population greater than 50,000 residents, and less than one-third (709,720 of the 2,478,426) of the all Washington, DC MSA CDP residents live in one of those 10 CDPs – and this includes Arlington.

## Demographics

CDPs with more than 50,000 residents<sup>21</sup> are similar to the US as a whole, but are slightly more diverse than the nation (see Table 10). Many of these large CDPs are in diverse large urban states – California and Florida – so this overall diversity is not surprising. The

---

<sup>20</sup> This is the number with the 12 states with strong MCDs removed. Including those states, there are 5,698 total CDPs in 2000, and 61 CDPs above 50,000.

<sup>21</sup> Excluding Honolulu CDP, HI and Arlington CDP, VA.

most racially diverse CDPs are Florence-Graham and East Los Angeles CDPs in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, which are one and two percent non-Hispanic white respectively. Palm Harbor, FL and Levittown, PA are the most homogenous places, with populations that are over 93 percent non-Hispanic white.

Three places exceed 40 percent of households married with children, which greatly surpasses the figure for the US. Two of these places, Highlands Ranch, CO – located in Douglas County, the most affluent in the country as of 2000 – and The Woodlands, TX, are large master planned communities that also have a mostly white population of affluent homeowners. By contrast, Florence-Graham, CA, the other big CDP with 40 plus percent of married households with kids, has an almost entirely minority population, and has a very low percentage of homeowners.

Table 10: Household Demographics for Large CDPs (over 50,000 residents)

Unincorporated CDP	Total Pop.	% Non-Hispanic White	% Married with kids	% Home owner	% SF Detached House
Paradise, Nevada	186,070	59.7%	16.1%	44.9%	35.7%
Sunrise Manor, Nevada	156,120	51.9%	23.9%	61.9%	44.1%
Metairie, Louisiana	146,136	81.8%	18.3%	61.8%	60.1%
East Los Angeles, California	124,283	1.8%	35.8%	36.6%	54.7%
Spring Valley, Nevada	117,390	65.4%	18.9%	57.0%	45.3%
Arden-Arcade, California	96,025	72.5%	14.6%	47.1%	47.4%
Columbia, Maryland	88,254	64.4%	27.1%	66.2%	41.8%
Sandy Springs, Georgia	85,781	73.0%	16.2%	45.7%	33.6%
Brandon, Florida	77,895	73.7%	28.6%	71.6%	71.2%
Silver Spring, Maryland	76,540	38.7%	20.9%	43.7%	40.5%
Kendall, Florida	75,226	41.6%	25.1%	66.9%	42.3%
Town 'n' Country, Florida	72,523	58.5%	21.3%	64.9%	54.4%
Highlands Ranch, Colorado	70,931	87.4%	44.4%	87.6%	84.6%
Spring Hill, Florida	69,078	88.4%	17.5%	86.3%	88.9%
Dundalk, Maryland	62,306	88.8%	18.0%	72.0%	31.3%
Florence-Graham, California	60,197	1.0%	41.1%	37.7%	56.0%
Elk Grove, California	59,984	53.8%	38.1%	82.0%	88.7%
Fountainbleau, Florida	59,549	9.4%	23.6%	51.4%	11.0%
Carol City, Florida	59,443	6.4%	25.4%	82.8%	72.3%
Palm Harbor, Florida	59,248	93.2%	20.5%	78.2%	56.2%
Burke, Virginia	57,737	69.9%	37.8%	83.3%	55.7%
Wheaton-Glenmont, Maryland	57,694	40.0%	25.7%	68.1%	60.5%
Castro Valley, California	57,292	64.6%	24.4%	69.7%	71.2%
Kendale Lakes, Florida	56,901	18.9%	31.6%	78.9%	41.1%
Reston, Virginia	56,407	68.4%	22.9%	66.7%	27.8%
Ellicott City, Maryland	56,397	76.9%	35.3%	74.7%	63.0%
Dale City, Virginia	55,971	52.6%	37.0%	77.8%	67.3%
The Woodlands, Texas	55,649	87.5%	40.8%	78.6%	79.1%
Germantown, Maryland	55,419	57.5%	29.4%	67.6%	17.9%
Bethesda, Maryland	55,277	81.8%	24.3%	69.1%	60.8%
Goleta, California	55,204	67.4%	24.4%	69.4%	60.7%
South Whittier, California	55,193	24.7%	35.9%	64.7%	75.4%
Rancho Cordova, California	55,060	61.4%	20.6%	49.3%	49.7%
Annandale, Virginia	54,994	57.2%	26.5%	67.4%	51.3%
Tamiami, Florida	54,788	11.8%	32.7%	83.9%	57.0%
Casas Adobes, Arizona	54,011	80.5%	22.5%	68.1%	61.2%
Levittown, Pennsylvania	53,966	93.1%	28.2%	85.6%	86.9%
Catalina Foothills, Arizona	53,794	86.2%	19.9%	71.1%	60.4%
Hacienda Heights, California	53,122	22.1%	30.4%	79.5%	79.4%

Towson, Maryland	51,793	85.7%	18.3%	59.7%	37.2%
Aspen Hill, Maryland	50,228	49.2%	24.2%	67.4%	52.1%
<i>Average</i>	72,192	57.8%	26.5%	67.0%	55.5%
<i>Median</i>	57,737	64.4%	24.4%	68.1%	56.0%
<i>Highest</i>	186,070	93.2%	44.4%	87.6%	88.9%
<i>Lowest</i>	50,228	1.0%	14.6%	36.6%	11.0%
United States		69%	24%	66%	60%

A final note on CDPs demographics is the maximum size a CDP seemingly can obtain. Paradise, Nevada is the largest CDP, comparable in size to Orlando, Florida or Durham, North Carolina. But these are moderate sized places; there are no CDP equivalents of large cities, like New York or Chicago. CDPs do not approach major cities in either size or intensity of development. The urban form of a CDP is related to this – CDPs resemble overgrown suburbs, not traditional cities. A CDP does not have a skyline; CDPs are more likely to be composed of sprawl – at best mid to high-density suburbs. CDPs are clusters of population, but there are hardly any intense clusters within the boundaries, such as a downtown. There are replicas of cities, like Reston, Columbia, and other large master planned communities, but there are no organically occurring centers of commerce or governance. At most, there are office parks and strip malls.

## CDPs and Governance

*So why don't CDPs incorporate?*

Even with all the costs of incorporation, there are strong motivations to incorporate. Unincorporated lands are open to consideration from other areas that wish to annex them, and are not able to govern themselves. After considering all the options, why do CDPs remain unincorporated?

The answer to this depends on the location: while there are differences between annexation and incorporation policies in states, but more important factor is the local governance structures that can render incorporation irrelevant. Two main geographic considerations explain the rise of big unincorporated CDPs. There are instances where strong county-level government assumes the role of municipal services and therefore negates the need or incentive to incorporate. There are also places where large private governments emerged in the form of homeowners' associations that provide almost identical services as municipalities. As the homeowners' association cares all of their needs, local government becomes redundant (McKenzie 1994).

Therefore, in these CDPs, governance falls to private organizations or to larger, strong public structures such as the county. Some places show both patterns, such as Miami and Las Vegas. Regardless of which is dominant in the area, the key to remaining and flourishing as an unincorporated place is that some alternate form of government plays the role traditionally held by local government. Municipal government becomes unnecessary.

### *Private governance*

Private governments are on the rise, from one percent of homes in 1970 to 15 percent in 2000. One-third of new homes since 1970 have been built in a common interest development. Community Association Institute (CAI) estimates that 50 percent of new housing across the country has some private government component (Nelson 2003). Private government is increasingly being recognized as authoritative and powerful as established incorporated governments. Master planned communities and HOAs are the most recent development in a long line of restrictive arrangements – ranging from exclusive neighborhoods, covenants, redlining and mortgage tactics, to exclusive zoning.

Traditionally, local governments either on the county or the municipal level have provided services. But a growing number of people are getting their services from private governments – homeowners associations (HOAs) and common interest developments (CIDs). These groups serve their residents in the same way as a traditional government, from enforcing rules to collecting trash, but on a private level. These privileges are paid for with mandatory association fees, similar to real estate taxes. There are some differences: these fees are not tax deductible like real estate taxes<sup>22</sup>, HOA residents must still pay the local taxes, and the privately collected HOA fees are only used for the area owned and maintained by the association. Similar to the concept of incorporation to protect assets from being redistributed into the community at large, homeowners associations are a form of incorporation to protect assets even within incorporated communities.

In many ways, HOAs serve the same function as zoning, only with more teeth. HOAs protect the quality of life, and alleviate nuisances, however they are defined. But the important difference between private governments and public governments is legal power. In reality, HOAs are closer to corporations than municipalities. Public governments must be fair and open to all, with no exclusionary zoning. Private governments can be as arbitrary as they please without being considered discriminatory or exclusive. Because the land is held privately, public laws and considerations do not apply. They have more legal rights, and do not have to consider voting and representation concerns, management, taxing, setting boundaries, and residents are able to have more control over the conduct of their fellow residents.

If a private, localized government can do provide all the needed services, then why incorporate? Private government carries with it many of the advantages of incorporation – protecting resources, setting rules and limits on behavior – without the hassle of incorporation. It is much easier to set up a private government than to incorporate a new municipality: the private government is done before the homes are sold, so there is no need for community mobilization, or fighting against neighbors for the right to incorporate. Private governments are also more defensible.

---

<sup>22</sup> Some associations argue that these association dues should be tax deductible (similar to real estate taxes), and that these private associations benefit the community at large (Stark 1998).

Were it not for the rise in popularity of master planned communities, more CDPs would likely incorporate. For example, Anthem, a brand new master planned community is being built in far northern Maricopa County, just beyond the limits of Phoenix. The government of Phoenix and the developers of Anthem are well aware of the implications of this – Anthem will always be a free rider on the county. They have no intention of incorporating, only of receiving the benefits paid for by the citizens of the rest of Maricopa County.

Private governments have an unsavory reputation for being insular, wealthy enclaves that keep undesirable people away (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Judd 1995; Lang and Danielsen 1997). While it is not true that private governments, specifically gated communities<sup>23</sup>, only cater to the rich (Sanchez, Lang and Dhavale, forthcoming), private governments are speculated to reduce social and civic involvement (Lang and Danielsen 1997). This disengagement has potentially even more serious consequences when the larger picture is considered. Since residents of private governance have no elected officials, this compounds the larger problem of municipal fragmentation and reluctance to shoulder municipal responsibilities. The potential for acting on a regional scale, or efficiently distributing resources and revenue, is even more reduced than with incorporation for asset protection. HOAs make it easier for their residents to retreat from an urban area, to carry less of the burden of a metropolitan area.

Master planned community dominated regions, with strong private governments, exist in Brandon, FL; Casas Adobes, AZ; Castro Valley, CA; Catalina Foothills, AZ; Columbia, MD; Elk Grove, CA; Highlands Ranch, CO; Levittown, PA; Palm Harbor, FL; Paradise, NV; Rancho Cordova, CA; Reston, VA; Spring Hill, FL; Spring Valley, NV; Sunrise Manor, NV; The Woodlands, TX; and Town 'n' Country, FL. Some of the big CDPs are single master-planned communities, such as The Woodlands, TX or the Highlands Ranch, CO. The other big CDPs are in master planned community dominated regions where the entire area is not a single planned unit, but planned communities form the majority of the housing in the area, such as Las Vegas.

### *Strong County Governance*

Some states and metropolitan areas have large urban counties that assume the major share of local services – strong counties. The Census notes “Maryland, Virginia, California, Florida, New York, and Georgia are examples of States in which a number of very large suburban population centers have developed with no legal corporate status. Strong county governments in those States provide the urban-type services that only incorporated place governments provide in many other States (Census Bureau 1994, pg. 9-29).”

---

<sup>23</sup> Gated communities are a subset of HOAs; there are very few gated communities without a HOA. Gated communities are representative of the US and HOA population at large; many gated communities are actually mixed income rental developments (El Nasser 2002).

These places essentially function as local governments, even though their boundaries stretch far beyond the area of the CDP. In many ways, the CDPs in these strong counties have no incentive to incorporate because the county provides all necessary services. In other states, there are strong sub-county special districts that function similarly to strong county governments. These special districts provide a service (e.g. water) and in so doing produce an accidental or defacto governmental structure – district officials or county commissioners in charge of the district begin to act on behalf of the residents of the district. Like the strong county governments, these places provide representation and services, as any local government would do.

But as will be discussed below, not all strong counties are created equally – some characteristics of specific strong counties may actually lend themselves more towards incorporation. Additionally, state laws in specific places may also influence the strong county structure and incorporation patterns.

In the list of large CDPs, there are three metro areas with many big CDPs – Los Angeles (East Los Angeles, Florence-Graham, Hacienda Heights, South Whittier); Miami (Carol City, Fountainbleau, Kendale Lakes, Kendall, Tamiami); and Washington-Baltimore (Annandale, Aspen Hill, Bethesda, Burke, Columbia, Dale City, Dundalk, Ellicott City, Germantown, Reston, Silver Spring, Towson, Wheaton-Glenmont). Miami-Dade County, FL, which is a city/county integrated government, contains several large CDPs – the same is true for Los Angeles County, which is the most populous county in the nation with a correspondingly strong government. Urban counties are especially strong in Maryland and Virginia, which in part explains why 13 big CDPs lie in the Washington-Baltimore region (Lucy and Phillips, 2003). For example, Fairfax County, VA is the most populous county in its state, but has no incorporated city. This leaves places like Burke and Annandale clustered like suburban cities, but belonging to the county.

## The Boomburb CDPs

### *Looking at the Boomburb CDPs*

As a means of examining the CDP phenomenon further, a subset of CDPs that resemble Boomburbs have been selected. All of these Boomburb CDPs are on the CDP list discussed above. Boomburbs and Baby Boomburbs are a collection of suburbs that have experienced rapid growth since the 1970s. To be a Boomburb, the city must be incorporated, have more than 100,000 residents as of April 1, 2000<sup>24</sup>, have experienced double-digit growth between each census since 1970<sup>25</sup>, and not be the central city in a metropolitan area (Lang and Simmons 2001; Lang 2003; Lang and LeFurgy, forthcoming). Baby Boomburbs have identical criteria except for population – Babies

---

<sup>24</sup> This is the official collection date of the 2000 census.

<sup>25</sup> An exception is made for some Boomburbs and Baby Boomburbs that did not exist in 1970 or 1980. As long as the Boomburb or Baby Boomburb has at least one measure of population change (from 1990-2000) that is double-digit, and was incorporated with over 50,000 people, it can be included as a Boomburb or Baby Boomburb. These special cases are noted in the tables as having incomplete data.

must have between 50,000 and 99,999 residents – and a slight tweak on location – Babies must be in a top 50 metropolitan area (Lang and LeFurgy, forthcoming)<sup>26</sup>. Twelve CDPs fit these criteria (see Table 11), save for their incorporation status<sup>27</sup>. There are five Boomburb CDPs in the Washington DC MSA, three in Las Vegas, two in Sacramento, and one each in Tampa and Miami.

Table 11: Boomburb and Baby Boomburb CDPs

Boomburb/Baby CDP	Boom or Baby CDP	MSA	2000 Pop.	1990 Pop.	1980 Pop.	1970 Pop.	% Change 1970-1980	% Change 1980-1990	% Change 1990-2000
Paradise, NV	Boom	Las Vegas	186,070	124,682	84,818	24,477	246.5	47	49.2
Sunrise Manor, NV	Boom	Las Vegas	156,120	95,362	44,155	9,684	356	116	63.7
Spring Valley, NV	Boom	Las Vegas	117,390	51,726	**	**	---	---	127
Columbia, MD	Baby	Wash. D.C.	88,254	75,883	52,518	8,815	495.8	44.5	16.3
Brandon, FL	Baby	Tampa	77,895	57,985	41,826	12,749	228.1	38.6	34.3
Elk Grove, CA	Baby	Sacramento	59,984	17,483	10,959	3,721	194.5	59.5	243.1
Carol City, FL	Baby	Miami	59,443	53,331	47,349	27,361	73.1	12.6	11.5
Reston, VA	Baby	Wash. D.C.	56,407	48,556	36,407	5,723	536.2	33.4	16.2
Ellicott City, MD	Baby	Wash. D.C.	56,397	41,396	21,784	9,435	130.9	90	36.2
Dale City, VA	Baby	Wash. D.C.	55,971	47,170	33,127	13,857	139.1	42.4	18.7
Germantown, MD	Baby	Wash. D.C.	55,419	41,145	9,721	1,000	872.1	323.3	34.7
Rancho Cordova, CA	Baby	Sacramento	55,060	48,731	42,881	30,451	40.8	13.6	13

\*\* Incomplete data.

Incorporation seems to make little difference in whether a place qualifies as a Boomburb (see Table 12); patterns of eligibility are similar among the Boomburbs and CDP Boomburbs<sup>28</sup>. Because there are more Baby/Baby CDPs than Boomburb/Boomburb CDPs, the Baby patterns are more similar. Three of the five, or 60, of the CDPs eligible to be Boomburb CDPs meet all the criteria. Likewise, 54 (or 57) of the 94 possible Boomburbs meet the criteria to be Boomburbs. Babies and Baby CDPs have similar

<sup>26</sup> Top 50 is defined by the population of the metropolitan area. The Richmond, VA metropolitan area is substituted for San Juan, PR, as this analysis is confined to the fifty states in the United States.

<sup>27</sup> Gathering population data on unincorporated places is more difficult than for incorporated places because official records are rarely maintained on unincorporated property except for the decennial census.

<sup>28</sup> All cities and CDPs that could potentially be either Boomburbs or Baby Boomburbs were considered, with the exception of CDPs in strong MCD states. Potential Boomburbs or Baby Boomburbs in these states were left in.

growth patterns as well. Each group had approximately 20 of the places almost qualify<sup>29</sup>, and 34 of potential Baby CDPs, and 38 of potential Baby Boomburbs met all the criteria. This suggests that CDPs and incorporated places actually grow very similarly.

---

<sup>29</sup> An almost Boomburb or Baby Boomburb is defined as having at least two decades of percentage changes of greater than 10 percent, or one of greater than 25 percent.

Table 12: Eligibility for Boomburb/Baby Boomburb Status

	Baby CDPs	Baby Boomburbs	Boomburb CDPs	Boomburbs
Total Potential	29	227	5	94
Boomburb/Baby Boomburb	9 (34)	86 (38)	3 (60)	54 (57)
Almost Boomburb/Baby	7 (24)	51 (22)	0 (0)	17 (18)
Does not meet criteria	13 (45)	90 (40)	2 (40)	23 (24)

April 1, 2000 was used as the official cutoff date to qualify for Boomburb, Baby Boomburb and Boomburb/Baby CDP status. However, the two Sacramento CDPs incorporated after that time: Elk Grove on July 1, 2000 and Rancho Cordova on July 1, 2003, so they will be considered separately.

### *Where are the Boomburb CDPs?*

The twelve Boomburb CDPs are located in five metropolitan areas – Sacramento, Washington DC, Miami, Tampa, and Las Vegas. All of these metropolitan areas have either other Boomburbs or Baby Boomburbs as well; the CDP Boomburbs complement the understanding of the growth of these regions.

In fact, Las Vegas is a perfect example of the way in which ignoring CDPs presents an incomplete picture of the metropolitan area, and also evolving trends in metropolitan development. For example, Las Vegas – one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States – has only two official Boomburbs. But when CDPs are considered, Las Vegas has three more Boomburbs, for a total of five. This is a more accurate representation of the explosive growth Las Vegas is experiencing. In fact, the only CDP “Boomburbs” are the three in Las Vegas, a testament to the rapid growth of the region. When all five Boomburbs are considered, the population encompassed rises to 750,449 (or almost 50 of the MSA population), instead of 290,869 (approximately 20) with only the 2 incorporated Boomburbs.

The five Washington DC Boomburb CDPs round out the two Baby Boomburbs Frederick and Gaithersburg, Maryland. These CDPs are another example of the true growth situation in a metro area being revealed through CDPs. The two (now incorporated) CDPs in Sacramento complement the three existing babies, Davis, Folsom and Roseville<sup>30</sup>. In the Tampa area, Brandon CDP joins with the sole Boomburb, Clearwater. And in Miami, there are three Boomburbs, nine Babies, and one CDP.

### *Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova*

Given that the two Sacramento County CDPs have since become incorporated cities, Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova merit special attention. Their incorporation is actually part of

---

<sup>30</sup> Elk Grove incorporated in part to create a wealthy enclave modeled on Folsom and Roseville (Sacramento News & Review).

a larger pattern; Sacramento County only has 7 cities<sup>31</sup>, three of which have incorporated since 1997 - Citrus Heights became a city in 1997, Elk Grove in 2000, and finally Rancho Cordova in 2003. Sacramento County fought the incorporation of Citrus Heights by refusing to schedule an election, and then fighting the constitutionality of the state incorporation law. Sacramento is somewhat of an anomaly in California. Most residents live in cities, and the city and county split service provision. In Sacramento County, most development occurred in unincorporated places, and several special districts provide services – over 100 in Sacramento County (California Center for Regional Leadership). This state of affairs lead to incorporation drives by many of the CDPs.

In Rancho Cordova, the incorporation vote passed with 77 percent approval from residents (League of Women Voters California). The reason cited for the incorporation was low response from the larger county, and dispersal of tax revenue collected from Rancho Cordova residents to greater Sacramento County. The new city of Rancho Cordova has to pay \$6.3 million dollars each year until 2034 as part of a revenue neutrality agreement; the city must reimburse the county for the revenues lost because of incorporation (Sacramento Bee).

Elk Grove incorporated to regain land control and institute a local growth management policy (City of Elk Grove), as well as to protect a wealthy tax base (Sacramento News & Review). Although Elk Grove has had more difficulty in the transition from CDP to incorporated place, both cities are benefiting financially and politically from secession from Sacramento County.

Although there are many master planned communities in both Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova with many more planned, incorporation was important to both cities because of the unique history of Sacramento County, and the current situation. Many more CDPs in Sacramento County are considering making the leap to incorporation to avoid being the last tax base left in Sacramento County, the Unicity (Sacramento Transportation and Air Quality Collaborative). This is similar to the sentiments expressed in Miami-Dade County, as discussed below.

#### *Governance in the Boomburb CDPs*

Like the other large CDPs, Boomburb CDPs appear to remain unincorporated because of a governmental structure, either public or private, that takes over the administration of the local government and its services. There are also combinations of these two causes - the Washington DC area strong county governments also have a strong master planned community presence – Columbia, MD is one of the original planned towns, as is Reston, VA.

Four of the Metro areas that Boomburb CDPs are located in have strong county government – Miami (Miami-Dade); Washington, DC (Howard, MD; Prince William, VA; Montgomery, MD; and Fairfax, VA); and Las Vegas (Clark County), Tampa

---

<sup>31</sup> Sacramento, Citrus Heights, Folsom, Isleton, Galt, Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova.

(Hillsborough County) – and the other one (Sacramento) has an unusual history. However, this is not to say that all unincorporated places in strong county governments will forever remain unincorporated, or that strong counties always do a good job of redistributing the taxes to the satisfaction of all. In fact, both the literature and real-life examples point to difficulties with the theory of strong counties entirely replacing the functions of local government.

There are more potential problems with a strong county government replacing local government than with master planned community governance. Brandon is substantially composed of Master Planned communities (although it is an extremely large area, and incorporation is often bandied about to protect its assets (St. Petersburg Times). Strong counties, while still an impetus for remaining unincorporated, are a less stable arrangements than a master planned community. Strong counties must be well balanced, not too geographically dispersed, and homogenous enough to even out disparities without alienating voters/tax payers. Also, state laws play a part. The new California state law requires that newly incorporated cities pay an annual severance fee if the cost of the incorporation damages the remaining unincorporated county. Although this is a serious burden, it only slows the incorporations in Sacramento County; it does not stop them. Depending on how onerous the process is, and the provisions and procedures for incorporation, the laws can influence how and if CDPs remain unincorporated. Strong county governments may be adequate to replace local governments under certain circumstances. The major complaints of unincorporated residents under a county government are that the government is too large, or that the area under the united governance is too large and has competing demands from different area residents, and that the tax dollars are not equitably distributed.

In some strong county governments, notably in the Washington, DC area, there are no such complaints. The Washington DC CDP Boomburbs exist because of the strong county structure in Maryland and Virginia. The counties, while relatively large for the East Coast, are nowhere near as large as the counties in the western United States. The population in these counties is also relatively homogenous in terms of income. By contrast, in both Sacramento and Miami-Dade counties – strong counties that provide services to unincorporated places – have great income and geographic disparities. These counties also have huge proportions of their land and population unincorporated, and no provisions in place to deal with their large and rapidly growing populations. Together these conditions create the ideal atmosphere for taxpayer dissent, dissatisfaction with services, and strained county governance. When counties get too large and cannot adequately address the needs of all their citizens, the incentives to secede become greater than the inertia or desire to be or benefits of staying part of the larger whole.

Miami-Dade is a notoriously corrupt and problem-ridden county. It is also spans an impressive area – larger than the state of Delaware. The population in the 31 incorporated areas is just over one million, and only slightly larger than the population living in the unincorporated areas of Miami-Dade County. Miami Gardens incorporated May 13,

2003<sup>32</sup>, and as of July 2004 there are 10 more incorporations pending in the county (Miami-Dade County). Looking at the number of Boomburbs and Baby Boomburbs in the county, and the single Boomburb CDP, it is clear that there is a preference for incorporation in Miami-Dade, not unincorporation. Even though there are laws favoring the county – for example, when new cities in Miami-Dade incorporate they are required to continue using Miami-Dade fire, library and solid waste services, and must contract with the police for three years – these requirements do not slow the progress of incorporation. The costs of remaining as part of the county are too high.

But how does Clark County, an incredibly large county, avoid this same fate? The three largest CDPs are in Clark County, which suggests that there is a structure supporting CDPs here. One of the distinguishing factors of Clark County is how heavily master planned it is. The entire Las Vegas area is almost entirely master planned because of water rights and restricted land availability much more so than either Sacramento or Miami-Dade. It comes as no surprise that the three CDPs in Las Vegas are almost entirely Master Planned Communities – add in what the Clark County people say. The high presence of master planned communities stabilizes the potentially unstable widespread government of Clark County, giving a local feel to an otherwise unwieldy government.

But the main reason that Clark County is so successful at retaining CDPs is that the county itself chose to protect unincorporated land from municipal incorporation. The famous Las Vegas “Strip” is actually unincorporated, and not part of the city of Las Vegas. In the early 1980s, Las Vegas attempted to annex this area to gain control of the tax revenue. Clark County did not want to lose this resource that funded county services and public schools, so it approached the state to create an unincorporated town system that received governance and services from the county. A township in Clark County is unincorporated, but protected from annexation by an existing city. Today the Strip is actually located in Paradise, NV. Many of the tourists who visit each year never actually enter the city of Las Vegas, and the money they spend in the unincorporated land stays in Clark County. Clark County is an example of a strong county structure that is overlaid on top of an existing county authority, with powers that are protected by an agreement with the state.

It appears that when a strong county government is large and heterogeneous, it is not capable of stopping the redistribution of resources – in fact that is one of its strengths – that alienates the wealthy and more likely to incorporate. On the other hand, master planned communities are very strong at keeping resources within a prescribed limited community. In a master planned community, it is impossible to leave. The existence of the community and the contribution of all the homeowners and renters is written into a contract. That contract, as it is part of a private legal entity, does not have to abide by rules that the incorporating city does, and therefore cannot be forced into changing.

---

<sup>32</sup> In order to incorporate, a new city is required to continue receiving fire, municipal waste and library services from the county. The police service is required for the first three years and then can be replaced.

## **Implications for Planners**

The major implication that CDPs pose for planners is a challenge to traditional methods of directing growth. The directive of planners is to orchestrate the growth and evolution of cities and regions. Development should occur in a planned and advantageous way, according to widely understood and tested principles. Just like sprawl, haphazard and unpredictable incorporations and annexations are a difficult problem that threaten organized planning. Unincorporated land that is settled to a dense concentration – a CDP – is not specifically the problem. City growth and regional development through incorporation and annexation has one set of implications for planners, just as the creation and continued existence of CDPs has another. Depending on the scope of the planner – either local/municipal or county/regional – the creation and continued existence of CDPs is either good news or bad news, sometimes both.

From the perspective of a county or regional planner, unincorporated land, CDP or not, is under their purview. Services and government are distributed through a central system, and as long as there is an adequate tax base to support all unincorporated land, CDPs do not pose any specific problem. In fact, master planned communities that also perform municipal type services are a boon to a county system of governance. But there are strains. With non master planned CDPs, it is not possible to plan the CDP like a city. And as CDPs get to moderate sized places, they collect all the problems that normal suburbs do. A CDP does not receive the same kind of attention a city does from a planner, so it seems likely that potential problems would not be noticed or planned for until they are full-fledged problems.

Another potential problem is fragmentation, and how to plan for it. In the words of Rigos and Spindler (1991), “fragmentation begets more fragmentation”; their study examined number of municipalities and incorporation rate. Areas with larger numbers of incorporated places had higher rates of incorporation. It might be similar to a domino effect. When one place incorporates, it gives power and precedent to those who follow – as in the case of the Boomburb CDPs in Sacramento. Soon the planners in Sacramento County may wish they had planned for an inevitable and quickly occurring loss in revenue. The reverse of this is deannexation. A city, such as Buckeye, Arizona, may grab too much land that it cannot manage. When the city realizes this, the land is unceremoniously dumped back to the county, along with the residents and their service needs. A stable tax base can evaporate with either land addition or subtraction. Planning for residents and their needs is very difficult to do under these circumstances.

For the local or municipal planner in a localized government specific to the development or subdivision (i.e. a master planned community), being a CDP is a good news situation – they are able to craft a community from the ground up. Many planning questions such as open space, affordable housing, and funding for infrastructure investments, are written right into the project from the beginning. But a planner in an incorporated place that is surrounded by CDPs may have a problem. Localized wealth concentrations may determine who can – or wants to – incorporate or move into an exclusive community/CDP, further dividing the fragmenting region. The residents of a CDP may

be free riders on the incorporated place, with some incorporated residents moving into the CDP or the unincorporated land beyond to escape the price of city living. And while incorporation allows a locality to address local concerns more directly, it also brings a reduced awareness of and concern for regional planning issues and coordination.

Further questions a local planner might consider are how to consolidate the regions, if some are governed traditionally and others have no obvious center of power or authorities to collaborate with? How will services and infrastructure be extended beyond the lines of incorporation, to CDPs and others on unincorporated land? If financially feasible, should annexation or incorporation be attempted? And is this is done, how should metropolitan expansion be paid for?

Planners must also be cognizant of CDPs for planning purposes. While planners may be using CDPs for data purposes – and may even be working with the Census Bureau to create them – planners may not be thinking of CDPs can be used in the community. CDPs might serve as the basis for neighborhood planning associations, or used by planners as a technique to organize citizens.

Regardless of the particular orientation of a planner, or the current use planners are making of them, CDPs seem to be here to stay. Master planned communities cannot evolve past their covenants. If places are born as unincorporated places, they will remain that way – slowly replacing public government with private. This rise in private government suggests a huge social, governmental and legal change in the United States (McKenzie, 1994; Nelson, 2003). Is this rising trend in private governance reflected in rising CDP rates, or in a reluctance to incorporate? Either way, planners will need to find a strategy to handle CDPs and unincorporated land.

## **Research Implications**

The data and findings presented in this paper are just a beginning. Census designated places have been overlooked for so long, and consequently, there are many questions to be asked. The field of planning would benefit immensely from undertaking a careful consideration of CDPs in practice, how they are used in the field, if there are problems or concerns, and ways to integrate them into planning practice. Likewise, local, regional, and state government officials would benefit from a similar inquiry into the function of CDPs, and their place in the governmental landscape. To get at the differences between and fully understand the phenomenon of CDPs, social and political scientists, urban scholars and geographers will need to create a topology of these places, and use it to identify the patterns and categories beneath the umbrella of CDPs. Finally, the Census Bureau might wish to examine the rising importance of CDPs as they move to a core based definition for metropolitan and micropolitan areas. While CDPs can and do anchor these areas, incorporated places always have preference over CDPs. As development patterns shift away from an assumption of incorporation as the preferred state, this policy may need to be adjusted. CDPs will come to have greater implications for the Census Bureau beyond a catchall category used to count leftovers.

## Conclusions

The importance of CDPs should not be underestimated. As described in an article in USA Today: "It's the first new form of urban space in 10,000 years," says Mark Gottdiener, professor of sociology at the University at Buffalo and author of *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*. "To understand these kinds of places is to do away completely with the concept of cities (El Nasser 2003)." CDPs are as much an attempt to capture and quantify the evolving metropolitan form, as they are a product of governmental and legislative quirks. Some CDPs are undoubtedly leftovers of a rural past or a metropolitan area annexation/incorporation squabble, while others are springing into existence as a result of a development deal today.

Large CDPs add to the understanding of metropolitan form, rounding out the picture, and stretching the horizon beyond the conventional cities or suburbs. These large and Boomburb CDPs are inextricably linked to master planned communities, another often neglected and rising force shaping the metropolis. The trends illustrated by the Boomburb CDPs raise a few questions about the future of metropolitan form:

- Are master planned communities actually more likely to be large and diverse than strong county governments? What will happen then?
- If incorporation is really fueled by asset protection, will a seemingly restrictive covenant actually serve to protect the public good and provide services more than a public governance structure?
- Are master planned communities the answer to cherry picked municipal incorporations that will eventually leave only undesirable neighborhoods behind as unincorporated land?

The answer to these questions will vary both by the region of the country, and the specifics of the location. CDPs continue to grow in number and population. In some places, generally rapidly developing areas, almost all new housing is in the sphere of a HOA (McKenzie, 1994). Counties and cities are facing problems from free riding unincorporated land, annexation and incorporation disputes, and development pressures. These questions will continue to be asked, and the role of CDPs will only become more integral to future metropolitan development.

## References

- Abrahamson, Mark and Mark Hardt. 1990. Municipal Annexations within Major Metropolitan Areas, United States 1980-1986. *Sociology and Social Research*. 76. 49-52.
- Austin, D. Andrew. 1999. Politics vs. Economics: Evidence for Municipal Annexation. *Journal of Urban Economics*. 45:3. 501-532.
- Blakely, Edward J., and Mary Gail Snyder. 1997. *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Buchman, James J. and Roger Faith. 1987. Secession and the Limits of Taxation: Toward A Theory of Internal Exit. *American Economic Review*. 77. 1023-1031.
- California Center for Regional Leadership Website.  
<<http://www.calregions.org/news/item.php?id=184>> (22 March 2004).
- City of Elk Grove <<http://www.elkgrovecity.org/whatsnew/growth-management.htm>>. (22 April 2004).
- City of Lakewood. <<http://www.lakewoodcity.org>> (22 April 2004).
- City of Santa Clarita. <<http://www.santa-clarita.com/cityhall/history.asp>> (23 July 2004).
- Danielson, Michael N. 1976. *The Politics of Exclusion*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- El Nasser, Haya. 2002. Gated Communities are Not Just for the Wealthy. *USA Today* December 16, pp. A1-2.
- El Nasser, Haya. 2003. Some big places find paradise in not being real cities. *USA Today* June 25, p A1.
- Fleischmann, Arnold. 1986. The Goals and Strategies of Local Boundary Changes: Government Organization or Private Gain? *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 8:4. 63-76.
- Fost, Dan. 1992. The New Civil Wars: Secession in the 1990s. *American Demographics*. March. 9-10.
- Galloway, Thomas and John D. Landis. 1986. How Cities Expand: Does State Law Make A Difference? *Growth and Change*. 17. 25-45.
- Lang, Robert E., and Karen A. Danielson. 1997. Gated Communities in America: Walling Out the World? *Housing Policy Debate* 8(4): 867-877.

- Lang, Robert E. and Patrick A. Simmons. 2003. "Boomburbs: The Emergence of Large, Fast-Growing Suburban Cities." in Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang eds. *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000*. Washington, DC Brookings Institution Press, pp. 101-116.
- Lang, Robert E. 2003. Are the Boomburbs Still Booming? Metropolitan Institute Census Note.
- Lang, Robert E. and Jennifer LeFurgy. Forthcoming. *Boomburbs: Inside America's New Super Suburbs*. Brookings Institution Press.
- League of Women Voters California Website.  
<http://smartvoter.org/2002/11/05/ca/sac/meas/W/> (30 April 2004).
- Logan, John R. and Harvey L. Molotch. 1987. The City as a Growth Machine. In *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, pp. 50-98.
- Lucy, William H. and David L. Phillips. 2003. "Suburbs: Patterns of Growth and Decline." In Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang eds. *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000*. Washington, DC Brookings Institution Press, pp. 117-136.
- McKenzie, Evan. 1994. *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Metairie Information Website <http://www.metairie.com/about/aboutmet.htm> (10 February 2004).
- Miami-Dade County Website. <http://www.miamidade.gov/inc/map.asp#>. (03 May 2004).
- Miller, Gary J. 1981. *Cities by Contract: The Politics of Municipal Incorporation*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Mumphey, Jr. Anthony J., John Wildgen and Louise Williams. 1990. Annexation and incorporation: alternative strategies for municipal development. New Orleans: Working paper series, University New Orleans Division of Urban Research and Policy Studies.
- Nelson, Robert H. 2003. The Rise of the Private Neighborhood Association: A Constitutional Revolution in Local Government. Chapter 8 in *The Property Tax, Land Use and Land Use Regulation*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Niendorf, Elizabeth. 1993. Sweet Smell of Succession. *Governing*. October. 22-23.

- Overby, Peter. 1992. We're Outta Here: From the Redwood Forests to Staten Island, America Suffers from Separation Anxiety. *Common Cause*. Winter. 23-26.
- Rigos, Platon N. and Charles J. Spindler. 1991. Municipal Incorporation and State Statutes: A State-Level Analysis. *State and Local Government Review*. 23, 76-81.
- Rusk, David. 2003. *Cities Without Suburbs*. Washington DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Sacramento Bee Website. <[http://www.sacbee.com/content/community\\_news/folsom\\_cordova/story/6960846p-7909947c.html](http://www.sacbee.com/content/community_news/folsom_cordova/story/6960846p-7909947c.html)> (30 April 2004).
- Sacramento News & Review Website <<http://www.newsreview.com/issues/sacto/2001-10-04/cover.asp>> (24 April 2004).
- Sacramento Transportation and Air Quality Collaborative  
 <<http://www.sactaqc.org/Resources/Literature/Governance.htm#Incorporations>>. (28 April 2004).
- St. Petersburg Times Website.  
 <[http://www.sptimes.com/2003/05/22/Columns/Brandon\\_governing\\_its.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2003/05/22/Columns/Brandon_governing_its.shtml)>. (25 April 04).
- Sanchez, Thomas W., Robert E. Lang and Dawn Dhavale. Forthcoming. Security versus Status?: A First Look the Census's Gated Community Data.
- Sanger, John. 1990. The City Incorporation Movement. *Urban Land*. 49:7. 30-31.
- Sengstock, FS. 1960. *Annexation: A Solution to Metropolitan Area Problems?* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Simmons, Patrick A., and Robert E. Lang. 2003. "The Urban Turnaround." In Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang eds. *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000*. Washington, DC Brookings Institution Press, pp. 51-61.
- Stark, Andrew. 1998. America, the Gated? *Wilson Quarterly* 22(1):58-79.
- Stauber, Richard L., 1965. *New cities in America: a census of municipal incorporations in the United States 1950-1960*. Lawrence, KS: Governmental Research Center, University of Kansas.
- Teaford, Jon. 1979. *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America 1850-1970*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration,

Bureau of the Census. 1994. Geographic areas reference manual.  
Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, November.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration,  
Bureau of the Census. 2000a. Geographic Terms and Concepts Census 2000.  
<[www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/glossry2.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/glossry2.html)> (13 March 2004).

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration,  
Bureau of the Census. 2000b. Geographic Changes for Census 2000 and Glossary  
<[www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/glossary.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/glossary.html)> (13 March 2004).

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration,  
Bureau of the Census. 2000c. Population by Metropolitan-Nonmetropolitan  
Residence, Sex, and Race and Hispanic Origin: March 1999.  
<<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/black/tabs99/tab16.txt>> (1  
August 2004).

## **Vita**

Dawn Maya Dhavale  
Department of Urban Affairs and Planning  
Alexandria, Virginia

### **Education**

---

Master of Urban and Regional Planning	August 2004
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Alexandria, VA	
Master of Arts, Social Psychology	May 2000
Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH	
Bachelor of Arts, Sociology, cum laude	May 1996
Clark University, Worcester, MA	

### **Experience**

---

Graduate Research Assistant	1/03 – present
Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, Alexandria, VA	
Data Analyst	6/00 – 2003
The Stanley Medical Research Institute (SMRI), Bethesda, MD	
Graduate Research Assistant, Psychology Department	7/98 – 5/00
Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH	