

# How can resident place attachment inform management approaches to tourism and amenity migration?

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## Can Resident Place Attachment Inform Management Approaches to Tourism & Amenity Migration?

By: Manasseh Franklin

Like many residents of amenity-rich communities in the Mountain West, I have witnessed drastic and swift changes in my community over the past decade that went into warp speed during and since COVID-19. Those changes include several catalogued previously on the GNARly blog: increased tourism and amenity migration leading to higher housing costs, decreased housing availability, heightened traffic, crowded trails, and new faces outnumbering familiar ones around town. As I witnessed these changes, I felt my relationship with my home place of the Roaring Fork Valley, Colorado shifting as well. I began to wonder, is this place still the one I call home? And do I belong here any more?

This question was the catalyst for thesis research I pursued as part of a Master of Science program in

Environment, Natural Resources, and Society at the University of Wyoming. With the high-profile amenity-rich community of Teton County, Wyoming as my case study, I sought to explore how increased tourism and [amenity migration](#) impacts resident place attachment in mountain communities.

To do this, I interviewed eight newcomer (residents for fewer than 10 years) and eight old-timer (residents for more than 15 years) residents. I developed interview questions using [Raymond et al. \(2010\)](#) dimensions of place attachment and [frameworks of resident empowerment](#). Interviews took place during July and August 2024, with the majority in person in locations throughout Teton County, two by phone and two over Zoom. I coded interview transcripts using [atlas.ti](#) and conducted thematic analysis to identify dominant trends across the responses. The resulting article is currently under review for publication and offers unique insights into how residents in amenity-rich communities form attachments to place, how those attachments shift under abrupt and significant changes, and how place attachment can inform approaches to resident empowerment in amenity-rich communities.

Here are a few key takeaways from the article:

### **Community and the natural environment are cornerstones of place attachment.**

For newcomer and old-timer residents in Teton County, proximity to the unique natural landscape of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem was a major point of attachment. Residents cited the feelings they experience when in nature there—awe, respect, perspective, to name a few—as connection points to the landscape that also helped them know themselves. The wildness of the ecosystem was significant, with several interviewees citing the presence of large predators as a draw and said it was intriguing to ‘still be part of the food chain’.

The small-town feel of Jackson and Teton County were also important, where residents felt part of a close-knit network. Recognizing faces in the grocery store and around town, having proximity to town council members and other local government, as well as being part of a conservation-minded culture with a legacy of environmental stewardship gave residents a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

## **Old-timer and newcomer residents experience impacts of tourism and amenity migration similarly.**

Surprisingly, newcomer and old-timer residents experienced tourism and amenity migration impacts similarly. Rather than length of residence, socio-economic status and homeownership determined more consistently residents' perception of tourism and amenity migration impacts. Residents who owned homes were less directly threatened by housing limitations and more concerned about the impacts that limited housing would have on the broader community, rather than those who rented or lived in workforce housing and expressed resignation that they may not have a future in Teton County.

Many residents considered tourism to be part of Teton County's identity and an inherent part of living there. Aside from the general annoyances of traffic and needing to adjust their behavior to adapt to large numbers of visitors—including observing 'no go' times to visit Grand Teton National Park and other popular recreation areas—residents largely considered tourism responsible for bringing amenities to the community that contribute to a high quality of life.

Amenity migration had more sweeping impacts. Residents identified amenity migrants as full time or second (or third, or fourth) homeowners, many of which arrived since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were characterized as having primarily come from urban locales such as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, with many working remotely (if they worked) and having made their money elsewhere. This segment of newcomers has had a marked impact on Teton County, particularly in terms of housing availability, affordability, and stability; growing wealth disparity; and shifts in community values and engagement.

## **By driving up housing costs, decreasing housing availability, and contributing to shifts in community culture, affluent amenity migrants contributed to feelings of place disruption, or loss of sense of self, among residents.**

In place attachment theory, [place disruption](#) is understood as a response to abrupt, significant, or unexpected changes. While place attachment can [inform self identity](#), place disruption can lead to a loss of identity that affects how residents make sense of their place and their belonging in it. Teton County residents attributed the

prohibitive housing costs, dwindling housing supply and overall housing instability driven by affluent amenity migration to making them feel like a future in Teton County wasn't possible, even if they had lived in the community for a long time.

They also saw amenity migration contributing cultural shifts in the community, citing community turnover and the outflow of long established residents, along with the arrival of different values and priorities held by amenity migrants, as a threat to the tight-knit community they felt attached to. One resident referred to wealthy amenity migrants as having "just a completely different lived experience" than that of locals and another shared that they had built their community in Jackson but now their community lives in Idaho, citing the number of friends who had migrated over Teton Pass to the neighboring state for a cheaper cost of living.

## **Rapid changes spawned by amenity migration led to residents feeling disempowered and like they had no sway to stop the community-shaping changes happening around them.**

Unobtainable housing costs left many residents feeling economically and socially disempowered because being unable to own a home limited the extent to which they could fully engage as members of the community. One resident of 20 years shared: "it's incredibly frustrating...when you've worked so hard to be a part of the community, and there's still a piece of that community you will never fully attain."

Residents also expressed they felt generally powerless to push back against the affluent class of newcomers that "underwrote their checks" and had political weight to influence changes in the community through their wealth.

## **How can this information be applied in communities facing similar changes and pressures from amenity migration?**

I wrapped up each interview by asking residents what qualities Teton County would need to retain to continue to be a place they felt they belonged to. Not surprisingly, residents brought up the things they had originally voiced deep attachment to: the natural environment and community. They stressed that development should prioritize housing that enables a diversity of residents, specifically those in the working class, but not at the expense of elk migrations and other vital habitats. Residents also expressed the need to somehow harness wealth so that it could contribute to supporting

an authentic community of people who 'make Jackson Jackson', perhaps through a real estate transfer tax or other mechanism that contributes to affordable housing development.

The lack of empowerment residents expressed is an area for attention. Although **resident empowerment** has been included in sustainable tourism development, it hasn't been explicitly applied to amenity migration contexts. Empowerment could be cultivated by inviting residents to share the things they feel most connected to and incorporating that information to shape the future of these communities. Identifying and incorporating the things residents feel most attached to could offer a promising avenue to develop policies, comprehensive plans, and other priorities that recognize and honor what makes amenity-rich communities the places they are and that residents are an integral part of.



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