

COMMENTS ON EDWARD ULLMAN'S "AMENITIES AS A FACTOR IN REGIONAL GROWTH"

By: [Susan M. Walcott](#)

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Article:

The novelty of the notion that amenities could be an important mobility magnet takes us back to the beginning of what would be a historically lengthy, sustained post-World War II period of prosperity. New industries and urban landscapes were blossoming in the previously peripheral states of California, Florida, and Arizona, whose populations in the decade of the 1940s increased by a net of 53 percent, 50 percent, and 46 percent, respectively (Ullman 1954, 121). Their climatological charms were starting to attract a wave that would reshape the American urban, economic, and political landscape. Seven years after the publication of Edward Ullman's classic article, my family became part of the midwestern migration that followed the defense industry to sunny Southern California. The notion that "climate and legend" could motivate an industry as mighty as the U.S. military to choose to relocate and prosper there seemed farfetched (Ullman 1954, 120). But, as Ullman began his article, the times were unleashing a revolutionary prosperity.

Empowered by possession of an automobile, a college degree, and abundant job opportunities, a newly expanded middle class realized the American Dream of a (usually suburban tract) home. Interviewees often cited preference for a salubrious, if less "efficient," climate as an explanation for their relocation (Ullman 1954, 122). Writing at the dawn of the quantitative revolution from its birthplace at the University of Washington, Ullman balanced his qualitative observations by noting that quantitative contributions could be made with further research. Motivating factors likely to continue this trend, dismissed earlier by others as highly anomalous population shifts, included early paid retirement and compensated vacation time (a painful reflection on our benighted present). Ullman also presciently predicted a jump in tertiary-sector footloose workers. An upsurge in the efficacy of transportation and communication technology also enhanced the business viability of the southeastern and southwestern periphery. In economic geography terms, Ullman foresaw a further movement of production sites closer to the market of the new population base.

Ullman listed additional factors that included "word-of-mouth" inducement for relatives to follow each other to sunnier climes. This prediction parallels my childhood memories of recurrent trips to Disneyland with Ohio-based extended-family members who came to check out the postcard pictures—and some did indeed eventually stay. Only when I went to college in the Northeast could I truly comprehend the impact on midwesterners of sunny skies over blooming orange groves behind hedges of rose and eucalyptus in December, while I dreamed of a "white Christmas" concocted next door in Hollywood.

The lower cost of fuel to heat homes became even more important, along with the huge livability impact of air conditioning for the South. Charming "place product packaging" advertisements also amused: British Columbia as "the California of Canada" (Ullman 1954, 122). The land founded by Puritans and Calvinists seemed to be slipping rapidly into a nation of hedonistic sybarites, ineluctably pulled by "the climate of California and Florida [away from] . . . the coal of Pittsburgh and the soil of Iowa" (p. 131). Amen. The final ironic set of predictions warned that, although "improvement of amenities of a city or region may actually pay off in the long run, something no planner has ever been able to prove"—see Richard Florida's 2002 *The Rise of the*

Creative Class—lack of planning might lead to “intolerable traffic, smog, and other conditions” (Ullman 1954, 132), foreshadowing a monstrous metropolitan Los Angeles slouching toward the future (Dear 2002).

According to citation indices such as the ISI Web of Science and Google Scholar, as of mid-2009 almost eighty books and scholarly articles have cited Ullman’s article since its 1954 publication in the *Geographical Review*. While major intellectual contributions came in the areas of the shifting geography of manufacturing and postindustrial urban reconfigurations, particularly in formerly peripheral southern and western locations, ripples reached an amazing variety of scholarly inquiries. These include articles on second homes in Sweden, Greek-Canadian culturescapes in South Florida, U.S. military retirees in Central America, high-technology parks in China, the economic base of rural areas in Scotland’s Western Isles, and the rise of golf courses in the United States.

A selected progression of articles over the intervening fifty-five years demonstrates the impact and range of developments that Ullman presciently forecast. One strand of articles continued to examine impacts of population increase on arid lands (Wilson 1960; Dunbier 1968). Another set of articles examined population movement to new areas across the U.S. since the 1950s (Zelinsky 1970; Berry 1973; Champion and Fielding 1993), as well as its effect on sending areas (Coppack 1988). Economic geographers picked up on the new shape of labor mobility in postindustrial America (Roseman 1983; Clark 1985; Dicken and Lloyd 1990; Beyers and Nelson 2000; Wheat 2006). Urban geographers calculated the impact of population movement and reconsolidation on city size and function (Parr and Jones 1983). By early in the twenty-first century, geographers had expanded the amenity gaze by casting it on tourism and recreation pursuits and their impact on the environment (Butler 2004; Hansen and others 2005), and in very different climate settings (Argent, Smailes, and Griffin 2007; Loeffler and Steinicke 2007). Although some of the phrases in Ullman’s article reveal the gender bias of his time, his Big Ideas remain relevant. The resulting urban-economic reconfigurations are still unfolding.

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