CUSS NEWSLETTER

CONFERENCE FEATURE:
URBAN CASCADIA

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For those of you attending the Seattle annual meetings: Welcome to the northwestern edge of the Americas – "Cascadia" – a region I am proud to call home, even though I currently live some 5,000 miles away in an increasingly provincial archipelago known as the British Isles. If this is your first encounter with the Pacific Northwest, you may be scratching your head. What is Cascadia? And how can someone so far away still consider it "home"? I aim to answer these questions while briefly conveying some of the distinctive features that define the three largest Northwestern cities of Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland (see map in Fig-

ure 1), including innovations and inequalities. Cascadia, to begin, is a somewhat contested term (Helm 1993; Smith 2008; Abbott 2009). As a regional moniker, clearly it references the Cascade Range of mountains that run from northern California up to southern British Columbia. Its vernacular origins derive from popular depictions of the Pacific Northwest as a kind of "ecotopia" (Callenbach 1975; Garreau 1981), reflecting both a unique landscape and unusual society-environment relationship. Seattle-based sociologist David McCloskey (1988: n.p.) developed the notion of a cross-border bioregion, noting that:

Cascadia is a land rooted in the very bones of the earth, and animated by the turnings of sea and sky, the mid-latitude

The Seattle skyline is in the middle of the Cascadia Corridor along I-5.

wash of winds and waters. As a distinct region, Cascadia arises from both a natural integrity (e.g., landforms and earth-plates, weather patterns and ocean currents, flora, fauna, watersheds, etc.) and a sociocultural unity (e.g., native cultures, a shared history and destiny).

Beyond these early reflections, the idea of Cascadia has been further developed along po

CHAIR'S MESSAGE
KEVIN FOX GOTHAM, TULANE UNIVERSITY

We have a fantastic ASA meeting coming up in Seattle in August. I hope everyone has made plans to attend. The newsletter includes information about the CUSS

Sessions at the ASA meeting, as well as award winners and election results for section officers held this spring. I want to express my thanks and appreciation

to a number of CUSS members who have given much of time and effort to support the section. First, I would like to offer a special thank you to

URBAN CASCADIA *FROM PAGE 1*

litical, cultural, entrepreneurial, and even athletic lines (Pivo 1996; Sparke 2005; Smith 2008; Shobe & Gibson 2016). There is broad acceptance that Cascadia signals and encapsulates a few abiding, unifying characteristics: a place that is geographically peripheral, aesthetically and politically green, and self-contentedly different. Urban Cascadia – from Portland to Seattle to Vancouver – represents a particularly uncommon bundle of shared features.

Distinctiveness

Seattle is the largest city in this part of the world, with a metropolitan population of 3.44 million (US Census 2010), but its nearby cousins of Vancouver, British Columbia at 2.31 million (Statistics Canada 2011) and Portland, Oregon at 2.23 million (US Census 2010) are certainly not small towns. All three cities were founded following thousands of years of continuous indigenous inhabitation of the region: first, Portland in 1845 near the end of the Oregon Trail and growing as a port for agricultural output; then Seattle was incorporated in 1869, initially flourishing from a timber boom and as a gold rush gateway; and lastly Vancouver, in 1886, was incorporated as the terminus for the Canadian Pacific Railway and an anchor of development on the west coast. All three cities were built up to serve largely agrarian or extractive rather than

industrialized economies. Over the decades, their economies have transformed several times. While they retain some key activities tied to the land, and did undergo industrialization to varying extents (especially Seattle, as the base of Boeing), these are now predominantly postindustrial cities, with technology and a variety of "creative" fields especially prominent.

With Seattle in the middle of this urban axis, each of the other cities is a 3-hour drive to the north or south. Despite a national and state borders, proximity bonds this urban Cascadia troika. This is especially clear in contrast to their shared distance from other major cities of the continent (San Francisco is closest, at a 10-hour drive from Portland; in contrast, non-stop flights from this region to the densely urbanized Northeast are only slightly shorter than air travel between the East Coast and Europe). Objectively then, urban Cascadia is peripheral; this edge location is a recurring, generally proud element of self-narratives about Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver (e.g., Sterrett *et al* 2015; CascadiaNow! 2016). These places are far from DC and Ottawa, and they are not trying to be New York or Toronto or Los Angeles. Such a positioning makes it is impossible for urban Cascadia to fool itself into believing it is the center of the universe. It can foster, instead, an awareness of

marginality, an appreciation of the local as both intimately place-bound and constituted through connections to elsewhere.

On the ground, urban Cascadia is obviously green. Visitors frequently comment they have never seen such intense, abundant green before. The verdant landscape owes much to steady if typically light precipitation through the winter months, and a temperate climate year-round. Evergreen forests – although routinely clearcut – are the natural terrain of this region. But green is also political in urban Cascadia. This is the heartland of the "Left Coast" (Gregory 2015), where progressive, environmentally minded politics and policy are relatively mainstream. There is robust opposition as libertarianism or traditional conservatism; some of this comes from within these cities, but much of it is centered in suburban and especially rural areas of the region, making for stark contrasts and precarious balances in politics at the state/province level in Cascadia. Neoliberal (i.e., markets-first) values are also embedded in many versions of ostensibly left politics here. Political categories aside, Cascadia is home to some of the most landscape-focused cities in North America. Nature literally looms large in these cities, with mountains (including active volcanoes) and significant bodies of water punctuating the green
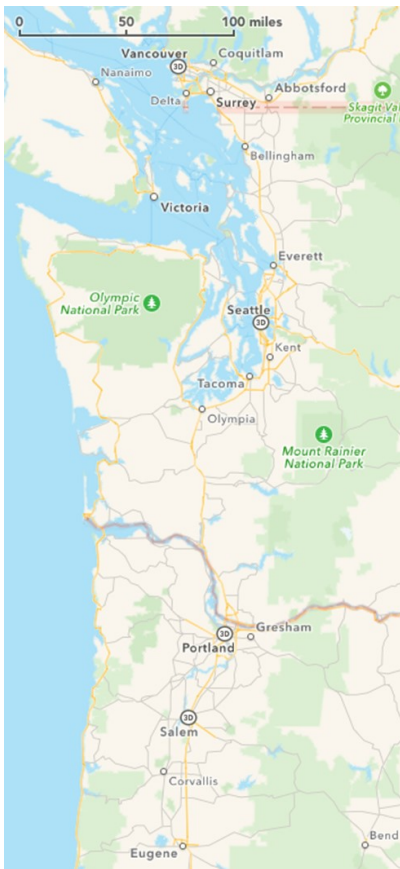
The Urban Cascadia region stretches from Vancouver to Portland.

terrain visible in Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver. Indeed, these features comprise the stripes of Cascadia's unofficial tri-color flag, with green, white (for snowcapped peaks), blue (for sea and sky), and an archetypal Douglas fir as center-piece (see Figure 2).

The natural environment – whatever its actu-al color – is a frequent point of reference in Cas-cadian cities, from pedes-trian commentary about how "the mountains are out" (meaning the weath-er is clear enough for the highest summits to be visible), to widespread participation in wilder-ness-based recreation, to policies that actively seek to conserve or revitalize resources whether in terms of recycling or limit-ing urban sprawl or pro-moting public transport. Indeed, for North Ameri-ca, some of these poli-cies where pioneered or revolutionized in Cas-cadia (see next section on "Innovations"). In sur-veys about resident prior-ities, Cascadians have repeatedly placed envi-ronmental concerns above crime and the economy (e.g., Pivo 1996: 347-348; Rutland 2016). These places are renowned as especially "liveable" year on year in various global rankings (e.g., Holden & Scerri 2013) – often as the only North American cities to qualify. By some counts, these are forerunner la-boratories for urban sus-tainability practices, even if quite contested (McLain et al 2012; Lubitow & Mil-ler 2013; Sterrett *et al*

2015; Goodling *et al* 2015; McClintock *et al* 2016).

Partly building on en-vironmental superlatives, urban Cascadia has gained fame as atypical – both reflecting and shap-ing the local cultural realm. In the early 1990s, Seattle was the epicenter of the grunge aesthetic and the bands that spear-headed its sound (Bell 1998), serving as home base for Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and others. More recently, Portland achieved celebrity through the satirical se-ries *Portlandia*, with an anthem announcing that "the dream of the '90s is alive in Portland" – refer-ring to the alternative scene centered in Seattle once upon a time, but also lampooning Port-land's urban milieu as "like an alternate uni-verse…where the Bush years never happened" (Harris 2012). As *Port-landia* heads toward its seventh season, it pokes fun at local quirks but has thrust the city into a pop-cultural limelight like nev-er before (London 2014; Wrotham-Galvin 2015). In a different register, the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver brought global attention to the image – if not always the reality – of Canada's west coast me-tropolis as a sleekly de-signed, stunningly situat-ed, cosmopolitan host city (Brunet-Jailly 2008; Edelson 2011; Hutton 2011; Kennelly 2015). Across these different modes of ascent into broader view, there is a consistent narrative about each city being different

as hip, beautiful, and live-able.

By now these cities have been narrated as distinctive or "unusual" for so long that this has be-come an attraction – and not only for tourists whose curiosity is piqued. Each city in urban Cas-cadia has experienced rapid population growth over the last decade (higher than 10% in all three), largely through im-migration from other re-gions of the US and Can-ada, especially among younger adults. While economic opportunities play a part in this scenar-io, these flows do not necessarily follow an abundance of jobs on offer, but demonstrate instead an elective affinity

.Figure 2: Cascadia's unofficial tri-colored flag.

for a certain Northwest-ern lifestyle (real or imag-ined) that embraces na-ture, art, and alternative values. In the case of Portland, this has been apparent in nationally high rates of unemploy-ment among residents in their 20s and 30s over the last decade, often attributed to new arrivals pursuing a distinctive ex-perience rather than job

prospects (Jurjevich and Schrock 2012; Cain Miller 2014; Cortright 2014). Portland's self-awareness as an unusual context has become so common-place that the phrase "KEEP PORTLAND WEIRD" is emblazoned across much of the city – both in celebration of ec-centricity and out of con-cern that new arrivals ought to embrace such "weird" Portland traits rather than push it to con-form with cities elsewhere (see Long 2013: 56-62; Fitzgerald 2016).

While most cities now engage in some kind of branding and self-promotion, deploying lo-cal slogans and iconic images in the service of touristic and commercial development, the Cas-cadian version of this takes a turn. There is widespread local con-sciousness as different, and pride in that differ-ence, which is apparent in official and clandestine or artisanal ambits alike (e.g., Heying 2010). It is impossible to miss how much these are cities in love with themselves and their uniqueness.

Innovations

Bucking trends – and setting new ones – is part of what makes urban Cascadia so in love with itself. From urban plan-ning to the "creative" economy to locavore ma-nia, these places have innovated for decades.

Portland, the smallest of these cities, has per-haps the longest and most specifically urban history of innovation. While dismissed as beau-

tiful but boring and aim-less by Lewis Mumford (1938; in Artibise et al 1997: 151, 160) on a planning consultation vis-it, Portland quietly trans-formed in the last quarter of the 20th century, using techniques atypical else-where in the US, at least at first. Experiments root-ed in the 1970s, but with lasting effects are, in chronological order: (1) Portland's downtown revi-talization, which diverged from a typical midcentury American urban renewal program and prioritized public transport intensifi-cation; (2) the urban growth boundary; and (3) metropolitan-level gov-ernance, orchestrating multiple municipalities and counties.

In 1972, the "Downtown Plan" for Portland aimed to enliven and expand the city's central district, bringing greater flows of people and more activities than 9-to-5 office use, which was the planning fulcrum of "the Portland Revolu-tion" (see Irazábal 2005: Chapter 5; Abbott 2011: Chapter 7). Rather than aiming to displace "blight," a key emphasis was provision of inviting public spaces and im-provement of public transport, first with densi-ty and quality of bus ser-vice, followed by inaugu-ration of a new light-rail system in the mid-1980s – highly unusual for North America at this time, and virtually non-existent in cities of this size (Dotterrer 1987). In 1973, pursuant to state-level legislation, the first "urban growth boundary" in the

contemporary US was established around the outskirts of Portland, clearly defining urban and rural land, and limiting uses for certain kinds of development in each ar-ea, and channeling dens-er settlement in the city, but open to revision – as it has been expanded numerous times over its 40-year existence (Abbott & Margheim 2008; Adler 2015). By the close of the formative 1970s, Portland also adopted a new scale of government coordina-tion by creating the Met-ropolitan Service District, unprecedented in the US but underpinning a re-gional growth strategy and facilitating harmoni-zation rather than compe-tition between municipali-ties (Huber & Currie 2007: 715-719). Innova-tions in Portland have continued through the present, but largely within this framework: in particu-lar, the massive retrofit-ting of transportation in-frastructure in favor of pedestrians, bicycles, and a proliferating rail-based network has oc-curred since the late 1990s.

Seattle evinces the most prototypical North American urban patterns among Cascadian cities. It was home to the world's first suburban shopping mall at Northgate in 1950, spawning a model that morphed into an Ameri-can norm (Clausen 1984; Crawford 1992: 20); it also was the first US city to claim federal funds for historic preservation, up-lifting the Pioneer Square district and Pike Place

Market rather neglecting or replacing them (Artibise et al 1997: 164-165). By the 1980s, as physical and demograph-ic growth continued apace, there were strong, broad activist currents that aimed to counter the feared "Los Angelesiza-tion" of the region's de-velopment (Artibise et al 1997: 166), yet almost all efforts to innovate in pub-lic transport failed at the polls (MacDonald 1987: 192-193). One field where Seattle has suc-cessfully innovated is in its community policing program, becoming a nationwide model by the early 2000s (Reed 1999). The city around Puget Sound has fared much better at fostering entre-preneurial endeavors over the decades: Star-bucks, Microsoft, and Amazon were all born here, going on to become massive, mainstreamed, global corporations. This has bolstered the area as a booming technology hub, fitting into schemes to create a "spectacular city" with an image of Northwestern develop-mental success that pre-sents the image of sus-tainability – yet entails many exclusions (Gibson 2004; Owen 2015).

Vancouver, like Port-land, has innovated in the channeling of its urban development, but with a far greater priority placed on design, and the use of megaevents. In what has been described as "the Vancouver achievement" (Punter 2003), the city has built with far greater density and height than any other North American

city of its size. A uniquely Vancouver aesthetic defines the city's core, partly due to its hosting the World Expo in 1986 on the occasion of its centennial, and series of later developments (Olds 2002), capped off by the Winter Olympics in 2010. But more than simply promoting itself to the world, Vancouver has increasingly been host to the world – not just as visitors, but housing the largest foreign-born resident population in the region. Immigration is especially prominent from Asia; flows began from China and Japan a century ago, but now all Asian subregions are represented with sizeable populations of immigrants and Canadian-born descendants. This has led to several neighborhood clusters in the Vancouver region with distinct ethnic identities, although these are internally diverse themselves, despite vernacular names such as "Little Punjab" (Hiebert 2015). In a broader sense, while there are significant frictions and contradictions, Vancouver has innovated in remaking itself aesthetically but also socioculturally (Blomley 2004; Edelson 2011; Menéndez Tarrazo 2016).

Across all three cities of Cascadia, the tenets of "new urbanism" have broadly defined the ongoing realization of 1970s planning innovations in the region. Taking the form of compact mixed-used development that aims to foster neighborly interaction and discourage car usage through

walking and public transport, this is a major feature of Northwestern planning (Ozawa 2004; Sterrett et al 2015). Some of its influence can be traced to the proliferation of parklets (former parking spaces that become miniature public spaces) and a range of other innovative public infrastructure (see Ozawa 2004; Banis & Shobe 2015). These elements, although far from uniform in their application, have been aggressively applied in urban Cascadia, placing the region on the cutting edge of some city-making (and remaking) techniques being rolled out around the world.

Another innovation shared by Seattle, Vancouver, and Portland has been the promotion of the "locavore" scene. This is especially about craft cuisine and beverage production, but it exceeds this as well – in the prizing of all kinds of local goods, businesses, ideas, and strategies (Fitzgerald 2016). This has been part of the flourishing food – and especially food cart – scene in these cities, underlining their status as innovators from donuts to whiskey to coffee (e.g., Heying 2010; Newman & Burnett 2013; Koch 2015), all within a frame of ostensible sustainability. Yet locavorism runs the risk of romanticization (Heying 2015), much the same as New Urbanism. These susceptibilities points to the need to look beneath the surface of this innovation and those above to understand more thoroughly

the sociology of urban Cascadia.

Inequalities

The pristine image of Cascadia often appears too good to be true, and in some important ways it is. In particular, economic inequality has become significantly more pronounced in the region's cities over the last generation. Racial inequality has a less straightforward trend as the demographic structure of each city has shifted in the same period, and earlier histories of diversity (including both its promotion and its suppression) continue to exert local influence. To be sure, inequalities intersect clearly with the innovations and overall distinctiveness outlined above.

Although all three cities are seen overall as economic successes in recent years – especially Seattle's technology sector – there is a clear crisis of urban affordability across the region. This has resulted in significant gentrification, including some of the worst homelessness on the continent (Blomley 2004; Gibson 2004; Shaw & Sullivan 2011; Chen *et al* 2012; Moos 2014; Hyde 2014; Kennelly 2015). Despite the persistently green narrative of Cascadian cities outlined above, there are the region's poorest residents are not able to enjoy many of the fruits of so-called sustainable development – whether through disproportionate exposure to pollution (Bae et al 2007); lacking access to public

transport (McKenzie 2013); or other forms of striking unevenness in incomes and amenities (Butz & Zuberi 2012; Goodling et al 2015).

The ethno-racial profiles of Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver have diverged from each other despite shared origins as settlements with relatively large, homogenous white populations and comparatively sizeable indigenous populations. All three metropolitan areas are home today to more robust indigenous populations than most large North American cities, but this share is now decreasing. The white proportion of the population is also in relative decline. Vancouver is the most ethnoracially diverse in this set, with large populations of people of color (in the official Canadian lexicon, this is "visible minorities," plus "Aboriginals" ["First Nations" and "Métis" and "Inuit"]) together forming the majority of the population – 53.8% in 2011. Within the heterogeneous Vancouver population of color, there are significant pockets of extreme poverty (Hiebert 2015); this minority population is predominantly Asian, whereas Latinos (1.6% of city population) and Canadians of African descent (1% of city population) are particularly few in Vancouver (Statistics Canada 2011), compared with US and eastern Canada counterparts. The large presence and relative wealth of immigrants

from Hong Kong and China in particular have not led to always-easy relations with white Vancouverites; tensions have been especially strong around priorities of residential development and construction regulation (Olds 2002; Mitchell 2004).

Seattle and Portland have significantly smaller immigrant populations, especially Portland. Both were disproportionately white as large US cities until the 2000s, having also – relatively – larger indigenous populations (US Census Bureau 2000). Despite the relatively small size of Portland's African American community, it has been an important locus of mobilization historically (Burke & Jeffries 2016). Over the last 20 years, however, Portland's neighborhoods have lost African American density, with analyses showing this is not so much about residential integration as overall population decrease and displacement across a range of neighborhoods (Shandas & Dann 2012: 16-17). Partly this is due to declines in public housing, especially via HOPE VI (see Gibson 2007; Sullivan & Shaw 2011). In contrast, the Asian American and Latino populations of Portland have increased substantially in number since 1990, and spread across more areas with greater density; nonetheless, Portland Latinos are overrepresented in poorer areas of the city (Shandas & Dann 2012: 17-19).

In Seattle, the African American population has historically been numerically and politically more robust (Singler et al 2011). Since the 1990s, however, while th population size of black Seattleites has remained steady, their relative wealth has declined due to gentrification and their composition has become more foreign-born, due especially to the influx of some African refugee flows (Balk 2014). Seattle's Asian American and Latino populations have continued to grow over the last two decades, with Asian Seattleites as the largest non-white population in 2010, and Hispanic Seattleites as the fastest-growing population of color (Brunner and Mayo 2011). According to recent research, these shifts in Seattle have accompanied decreased access to quality education for K-12 students of color, especially African Americans (Oliver 2016). Asian Americans have relatively high household incomes by US urban standards, and are often on the positive side of gentrification scenarios in Seattle (Hwang 2015). American Indians in Seattle, with a long and influential presence in the city, face the most structural disadvantage as a demographic group, in terms of rates of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness (Thrush 2007).

These snapshots of change in urban Cascadia point to connections between the innovations for which the region

is known, and its inequalities which receive less widespread attention. New urbanism (especially its emphasis on sustainability), rising economic tides, and locavorism can obviously all shape unique, inspiring urban places. Yet several lines of research show how Cascadians of color are significantly excluded from these forms of development: most basically, these are almost never geographically uniform in their rollout; not everywhere benefits from new transit-oriented development, not everyone can afford or physically reach new city amenities (Bae et al 2007; Podobnik 2011; McKenzie 2013; Moos 2014; Mills et al 2016). Nonetheless, important efforts are underway in some of these cities to rectify wrongs of the recent past. This trend – albeit small – includes a program in Portland to counter African American neighborhood displacement by returning former black residents to gentrified areas that were majority African American within the last generation (see Theen 2015; Tremoulet et al 2016). Such approaches could represent a new paradigm for urban sustainability that goes beyond simply shifting risk and hardship, as is currently the norm in Cascadia, in ways that are disproportionately detrimental to poor communities of color (Dierwechter 2014; Abel et al 2015).

Closing
Thinking about inequality

and innovation together is important for grasping how urban Cascadia is a place with real challenges rather than a kind of utopia where somehow the prosaic dilemmas of city life have been resolved. This joint consideration is also paramount for finding new, more just solutions. But it is especially imperative in keeping all Cascadians – not just the stereotypical ones with hipster beards or lattes in hand or dressed for camping at a moment's notice – at the forefront of our urban imaginations, whether for crafting analyses, assembling strategies, or forging alliances. Urban Cascadia has aimed at inclusion, at least in broad strokes. This is a part of the world that continues to attract rapid growth, and has endeavored to find solutions to that growth other than mere expansion. It is a place that has inspired many with its sense of identity, but from many quarters there has been a constant effort to push that identity to evolve rather than to cordon itself off. There is no doubt that urban Cascadia is in love with itself, in love with "the local." But this is a very flexible category; across these cities there is clear sense that newness is welcome, but that respect and a willingness to prize and further uniqueness are required. For some people, once they have experienced urban Cascadia, it becomes more than a place on a map, turning into a state of mind, even a sense of home. So on my

all-too-rare visits back to the region where I grew up, where I first learned to think about cities and society, urban Cascadia is always beautiful, yet puzzling; it makes me think, but it makes me feel welcome. I cannot shake this feeling even as I write from so far away, in a United Kingdom that is, in the wake of "Brexit," currently roiling with anti-innovation, pro-inequality, anti-welcome sentiments, where the notion of "the local" is exclusionary rather than open-minded. The cities of the Pacific Northwest – shortcomings and all – embody a very different set of experiences and values. I hope you find ways during your time in urban Cascadia to discover these for yourselves.

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URBAN CASCADIA *FROM PAGE 13*

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