Hands-on Learning About Urban Sprawl

Abstract

What is Human Geography in Action?

The hands-on learning approach to teaching human geography involves an interactive case study of urban growth in Colorado Springs. The activity has three parts. In the first, students run a computer animation of urban growth in Colorado Springs to see how growth patterns in Colorado Springs relate to the predicted model. In the second, students overlay several different data layers to assess the impact of growth on transportation and sensitive ecological zones. In the third, students express preferences for particular forms of urban growth and then break into citizen action committees to make a single recommendation to the City Council.

Activity 1: Transportation & Urban Growth

In this activity, you will watch Colorado Springs grow before your very eyes from 1950 to 2000 and assess the relationship between transportation and the patterns of urban growth. The idealized model of how urban growth is related to the spatial configuration of each new transportation facility (Fig. 11.2) was based on the history of midwestern cities like Chicago and St. Louis.

Activity 2: Urban Sprawl Scenario Analysis

In this section, you will use the power of GIS to explore five urban-growth scenarios for Colorado Springs. For each scenario, you will be able to overlay several different data layers to see what effect the scenario might have on transportation and sensitive ecological zones. In the following table, identify the scenario(s) that are best performing and worst performing for each criterion.

Activity 3: Urban Sprawl Debate and Consensus Building

In this activity, you will play the role of one of the stakeholder groups. You will first participate in a debate about the issues. Then you will be appointed to a citizens’ working group charged with reaching consensus and making a recommendation to the City Council.

The major stakeholder groups include:

1. Low-income single mother
2. Real estate developer
3. Middle-class family with school-age children, new migrant to Colorado Springs
4. Middle-class family with school-age children, previously 3 years earlier bought home in urban fringe
5. Environmentalist
6. Elderly person
7. Young, single urban professional ("Yuppy")
8. Farmer on urban fringe
9. Fast-growing high tech employer

Steps in the Debate

Step 1: Prepare a written position statement for which scenario your stakeholder group prefers, and why.
Step 2: Read your position statement aloud.
Step 3: Form Citizen’s Committees made up of one student from each stakeholder group, reach a consensus recommendation to the City Council, and prepare a position statement.
Step 4: Present your new position to the class.

Collaborative Learning Structured Debate

The collaborative learning approach to teaching human geography involves an interactive case study of urban growth in Colorado Springs. The activity has three parts. In the first, students run a computer animation of urban growth in Colorado Springs to see how growth patterns in Colorado Springs relate to the predicted model. In the second, students overlay several different data layers to assess the impact of growth on transportation and sensitive ecological zones. In the third, students express preferences for particular forms of urban growth and then break into citizen action committees to make a single recommendation to the City Council.

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