A Critical Geopolitical Analysis of Urban/Suburban Green Spaces: Meadowbrook Park as a Material Discourse

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Critical Geopolitical Approach to Analysis

Seeks to identify **collective priorities** about **something** through three main questions:

1. How are the role and meaning of the environment described/defined?
   a. Commons, planetary systems, resource use etc.

2. What is the role of human agency within this claim or view of the world?
   a. Often invisible power dynamics
   b. Cause and effect relationships

3. What is the spatial focus of this particular claim?
   a. “True impact”
   b. Scale

TLDR: “Nothing really happens on accident”
Material Discourses

Material:

➔ Physical manifestation
➔ How do power and knowledge translate into infrastructure in a physical place?

Discourse:

➔ Narrative force
➔ What is being said or communicated?
Urban/Suburban Green Spaces: Background

World Health Organization says:

- Urban/Suburban green spaces can serve to:
  - Promote mental and physical health
  - Promote psychological relaxation and stress alleviation
  - Stimulate social cohesion
  - Support physical activity
  - Reduce exposure to air and noise pollutants
Meadowbrook Park

Background:

- 1953: Meadowbrook Golf and Country Club established
- 1976: voters reject to rezone
- 2005: Opus, LLC offers mixed-space plans
- 2008: economic recession, Van Tuyl acquisition
- 2015: ground break on Meadowbrook Park

Map:

- Located in Prairie Village, Kansas
- Population: ~22,000
- Median home value: ~$261,500
- Median household income: ~$88,000
Meadowbrook Master Plans

136 acres total:

- 94 public
  - Paved trails
  - Event spaces
  - Three playgrounds
  - Eight pickleball courts
  - Shelters
- 42 private
  - Single family homes
  - Villas
  - Hotel
Role and Meaning of the Environment

Goals:

- Maximize community benefits
  - Health
  - Social
- Maximize business interests
  - Investors
  - Land developers

Pros:

- Stormwater management
- Air, water quality improvement

Cons:

- Construction impacts
- Resource use

(Photos from Shawnee Mission Post)
Role of Human Agency

Key Stakeholders for Meadowbrook Project:

- Cecil Van Tuyl/VanTrust Real Estate
- JCBOCC
- City of Prairie Village
- Johnson County Parks and Recreation Department
Spatial Focus

Scaleable:

1. Individual level
   a. Improvements to physical and mental health
2. Community level
   a. Improvements to social cohesion and capacity for gathering
3. Global level?
   a. Physical environmental benefits?
Big Picture: What is Being Secured and For Whom?

- Who benefits the most from the construction of Meadowbrook Park?
  - Private business interests (Greenwashing)
- Who or what is being overlooked?
  - Accessibility
  - Gentrification
- What information is missing?
  - Empirical health benefits
  - Environmental Impact Statement
What I Learned: How to Build a Better Park (And a Better World)

Urban/Suburban Green Spaces: Results May Vary

- Re-assert the value of the physical environment in development
  - Emphasize sourcing local materials
- Acknowledge possible gentrification and accessibility
- Integrate community involvement in development
- Resist private profit off of green spaces
- Develop capacity for empirical analysis of benefits

Data USA (2020) Prairie Village, Kansas. [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/prairie-village-ks/#economy](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/prairie-village-ks/#economy)


Johnson County Parks & Recreation District, (2020). Meadowbrook Park Project. [https://www.jcprd.com/262/Meadowbrook-Park-Project](https://www.jcprd.com/262/Meadowbrook-Park-Project)

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