Globalization as it affects the American cultural landscape
by Ryan Scherner
Globalization defines the state of the world at this moment. It is an all-encompassing system that is fueled by the enormous advances in technology that permeate world culture. This system has brought with it many positive benefits and changes for individuals around the world, but the most dramatic change happens on a societal level. Unfortunately, this change is damaging to communities and the interaction between humans. Globalization reduces awareness and contact with our heritage and sense of origin. It lures us away from a sustainable society. These cultural losses haunt the positive change brought forward in an era of decreasing human boundaries.

The loss of the single family farmstead is an example of Globalization affecting the American cultural landscape. It takes less hands to farm the land due to advances in technology, so more people move away from the community to find jobs in larger cities. As corporate farms buy acreage from traditional farmers, small town farming communities become less sustainable. This study looks at the town of Holstein in western Iowa, as an example of this process. My grandmother currently lives in Holstein and my father was born there, so for myself as the designer, I have important roots at the site. A revitalization plan for the farming community dealing with the aspects of Globalization is needed. In this project, I have shown Holstein as it exists presently, what will happen to the community if the processes of Globalization continue, and an alternate designed plan that could help the community in this time of cultural change.
Globalization as it affects the American cultural landscape

Holstein, Iowa

Comprehensive Project Booklet   Spring 2000  Professor Ron Spangler  Advisor Tom Gallagher  Ryan Scherner

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for my family,

this is a study that goes
deeper than a landscape architecture
comprehensive project and
examines the roots
from which we came
The Lexus and the olive tree is an important analogy in the current era of Globalization. Thomas Friedman of the New York Times explains the analogy in his book, The Lexus and the Olive Tree. The Lexus represents the drive for sustenance, improvement, prosperity, and modernization fueled by technology. The olive tree represents our sense of place in a community, family, tribe, nation, and religion. Olive trees feed our emotions and stimulate our senses. They give us warmth, joy, intimacy, and a sense of individualism. We fight for our olive trees. We go to war for them. Globalization often turns its back on olive trees and pushes the Lexus as fast as it can go.

Currently, small towns across the Midwest are faced with the dilemma of the Lexus and the Olive Tree. As farmland changes ownership from single family to large conglomerate and corporate farms, the identity of the Midwestern cultural landscape faces multiple abrupt changes.

The loss of the single family farmstead is a symbol of Globalization in America today.

Advances in farm equipment technology have helped usher in this new era. It takes less hands to farm the land than ever before and this presents a major change in the social structure of farming communities and the small towns that represent them.
Holsten, Iowa is an excellent representation of a community faced with a change of identity. The settlement was established in the 1880's based around a trading post halfway in between the larger towns of Ida Grove and Cherokee. Holstein is named after a region in northern Germany called Schleswig-Holstein. Many of the settlers were of German descent. The first newspapers established were printed in the German language. Quickly, the immigrants adapted to the new resources and landscapes offered in 19th century America. The soil was rich and fertile and subsistence was focused around agriculture from the beginning.

Agriculture began to define the identity of the settlement, as well as the region of western Iowa. Changes that occurred during the town's first 50 years were centered around that internal identity of farming and the country lifestyle. The automobile was the first real technology to challenge that identity. There are many stories from first generation settlers saying that the automobile had no place in the country lifestyle. They thought it took away some of the ideals and behaviors vital to making the community work. But the automobile, and the tractor especially, revolutionized the farming industry. Early town residents adapted this new technology and used it to more effectively and efficiently farm the land.
The World Wars were an intense time in the town of Holstein. First generation immigrants were uncomfortable sending their sons to fight a war in their homeland with the possibility of confronting relatives. Under these unfortunate circumstances, emotions were high and this brought the community closer together. With wars come adjoining technologies. The roads were paved in the 1920's making the transition to the automobile fluid. The town was growing and expanding. All of this growth was based on internal identity changes. It reflected what was going on in the community, what was best for the community.

After World War II, the whole country boomed economically affecting everyone from inner cities to small towns like Holstein. The birth of television and rock and roll began to alter some of the ideals established through the years of settlement. The whole nation was changing and becoming aware of civil rights and the environment. Again, Holstein grew in size and population, adapting these new technologies, but retaining their internal identity.

Present day Holstein is again facing a period of growth and change. But, with the shift away from a farming community, happening more and more everyday, the identity is beginning to be shaped by external forces. The growth reflects that alteration as new buildings, homes, and open spaces resemble urban and suburban ideals instead of the roots established in the life of farmers and country living.
It is important to define the terms used in the title of my project. The next few pages will explain important concepts dealing with Globalization, American culture, and the cultural landscape, and how I am using these terms in this project.

key components

1. how it differs from the cold war era

The Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There were no longer two dominant super-powers controlling global affairs, with everyone else lining up neatly underneath them. In the era of globalization, only America remains as a superpower and the enemy is no longer communism and the nuclear bomb, but an unknown enemy that can affect the world economy overnight. If the Cold War was a sport, it would be sumo-wrestling; Globalization is the 100 meter dash over and over again.

2. technology as a catalyst

The symbol of the Cold War was the Berlin Wall that kept everyone apart, the symbol for Globalization is the World Wide Web which brings us all closer together. The picture to the right shows a Jewish man holding a cell phone to the Wailing Wall so someone far away can speak to it.
key components

3. free-market capitalism as the only economic system
No other more communal system of government or economy worked in the 20th century. Free-market capitalism thrived and continues to grow everyday.

4. western/americant mono-culture
The world is quickly “americanizing.” Other cultures are compromising valuable ideals to become like America or “catch up.” Advances in technology make this easy because people all around the world are seeing the same images. McDonalds still prospers in countries that hold cows sacred.

globalization

5. the lexus and the olive tree
Again, this analogy is a perfect example of what is happening in the era of Globalization. They are pitted against each other in a war, and recently the Lexus has won most of the battles.

The Globalization Paradox
As we grow technologically and are able to connect with more people on the world-wide scale, we can also push farther apart from the community we belong to, and more easily subscribe to haphazard individualism, and in the case of our profession, haphazard development.

"the lexus" vs. "the olive tree"
America has become an “either/or” society. Either something is white or it is black. Good or Bad. Right or Wrong. We also do this with the individual and community. We push individualism so heavily, many Americans view it as the opposite of community. They feel they need to retreat away from society so they can become an individual and truly “find themselves.”

Globalization is aiding this movement away from community. Retreating into yourself and away from the world (the cowboy/loner ideal) is not the way to become an individual. The best way this can be done is to immerse yourself in a community that you can become an individual in. We have made this very hard to do in American culture because we give people the impression they are opposites.

“either/or” society

individual                      community

autonomy/self reliance vs. life community

classic polarity in american culture

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-we equate autonomy and being alone
(Is an on-line trader more self-reliant than a small business owner?)

We need to change autonomy to someone who can exist and add to a community instead of being alone trying to “find” themselves.

If people don’t care about community, society begins to fail. American culture lets you be self-sufficient and lose the interconnectedness to culture, community, and even family. Without these things, you lose democracy, which is the guiding principle we built this country around.

"Americans don’t like culture because it impinges on free will.
(they feel annoyingly restrained, confused by it)"
-Tocqueville,
quote from Habits of the Heart
The cultural landscape can often be represented through physical characteristics that define who we are and where we came from by creating a sense of place. These characteristics can be geological and topographical features, climate, proximity to water, monumental icons of ceremonial use, and/or architectural representations of everyday life.
the cultural landscape

architectural representations of everyday life

climate/proximity to water

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Holstein, Iowa
the cultural landscape

Physical characteristics create sense of place, but landscapes have an even deeper cultural significance through social characteristics. People have always been connected to the land for means of subsistence. The way different cultures get food affects almost every facet of their society. People also turn to the surrounding landscape for ideological and spiritual answers and guidance. There is a strong tie between the landscape and these aspects of culture in every civilization around the world.

Globalization as it affects the American cultural landscape

Holstein, Iowa
Ideas, artifacts, behaviors, and morals can often be lost as a society makes significant advances in technology. The sense of place we all define through physical and social characteristics of the cultural landscape can become challenged and altered to fit these new technologies.

The globalization paradox: As we grow closer together than ever before by technology, we grow further apart on a one-on-one human level.

American culture is prescribing to the globalization paradox, retreating into their individual worlds and away from the community.

How do we preserve important cultural beliefs and revive American communities?

The identity of many small Midwestern towns has been lost as they try to “keep up with the Jones” in urban and suburban settings. The internal identity and cause for growth and change has been replaced by external pressures that force growth and change.
Holstein's identity is rapidly changing.

Community change has always happened internally. Most of the development that occurred was centered around the improvement of country (rural) living.

The development that is happening in the era of globalization is often lead by external forces that have little to do with country living or the identity of Holstein.

Holstein is quickly losing their internal identity.
hypothesis

Sensitive landscape design principles employed in small town revitalization can result in a healthy balance between globalization and cultural landscape preservation. Design can help to offset some of the negative impacts and assist in re-uniting communities with their original values.
To show the negative impact globalization and technology can have on the American cultural landscape

- by presenting a revitalization design for a small Midwestern farming community
  - by understanding historical and cultural patterns in the landscape
  - by understanding the affects of globalization and the technology it breeds on everyday life
  - by designing community spaces that reflect culturally strong ideals that have become challenged in modern times
  - by letting the design be a true synthesis of future growth and past success, a bridge between cultural generations
the aerial view of Holstein on this page and throughout the rest of the project is looking southeast across the town. A plan view is also used and has north pointing to the top of the page, so the directional orientation may change from page to page. Please use the Main Street and 2nd Street cross-axis and the rail line as guides.

inventory

highway 20

2nd street

main street

old railroad tracks

Holstein as it exists today

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Holstein as it exists today
historical circulation

The pattern established in the traditional town plan was a grid off the cross-axis formed by Main St. and 2nd St. The railroad was another contributor to town form because of the industry located along it and the feeling that no one wanted to live on the "other side of the tracks."
modern circulation

The increase in importance of Highway 20 made Holstein a turn off. Fewer visitors travel along Main Street and 2nd Street than in the past. The grid pattern continued, adjoining streets and neighborhoods to the historical town pattern. The rail line is no longer in use, but development has still not crossed the tracks. The town's future growth already shows a pattern of sprawling to the highway.
land use zones

- commercial
  The commercial zone extends along the two major roads of Holstein.

- residential
  The residential zones fill in the quadrants between the major cross-axis.

- old industrial
  The old industry was located along the rail line.

- new industrial
  Van Top Industries, a major employer in Holstein, is a counter top manufacturer.

- green space
  Most of the green space in town is located on the golf course.
community patterns

-town center (figure ground)

The town center is shown by the massing of buildings at the cross-axis of Main and 2nd St. This is where the governmental buildings are located, as well as, most of the commercial buildings.

-1/4 mile radius

The town has grown to 1/4 mile radius which is a comfortable walk in any direction. Future growth threatens to break out of this radius.

-dispersed community

Farm life has always constituted a dispersed community. The residents of the community really span in an eight mile circle around the heart of the town.
In residential neighborhoods, the architecture was often German arts and crafts homes with a focus on porches and house entry. The scale of the two-story homes was brought to human scale by the use of dormers and other elements in the façade.

German arts and crafts architecture

Neighborhoods were formed on a grid based off the cross-axis of 2nd and Main Street. Streets were tree-lined and always had ample room for sidewalks. Garages and driveways were built to the side of the homes. Adaptations were made to include the automobile in the design of the home. But it was never the deciding factor for the rest of the design. The residents of the home were.
Originally the grid streets of Holstein were lined with elms, but a disease struck and wiped them out. Different varieties of maples have grown to recreate the canopy effect, but there are unfortunate gaps. The drawing to the left illustrates how aesthetically pleasing the historical canopy and setback easements made the streets of Holstein.
Many of the businessmen working in the town center of Holstein were successful retired farmers. The town leaders were knowledgeable about farming and country living. This helped the community thrive despite being fragmented and dispersed.

Main Street was two lanes of traffic, angled parking, and ample sidewalks. The streetscape lacked any forms of vegetation, but human scale was created by the use of awnings, large storefront windows, lampposts, and appropriate signage.
land use zones

-commercial
The new commercial area will be right at the entrance to the community off Highway 20. It will include large box stores like Wal-Mart and Lowe's, as well as, fast food chains like McDonald's and Dairy Queen.

-residential
The future residential growth will continue the subdivision trend and will completely surround the golf course.

-new industrial
New industries will grow on the fringes of town and will have little to do with farming or country living. They will bring many needed employment opportunities that will attract people from the larger cities in the region.
future growth

sprawl

The future growth will follow a sprawl pattern spilling down the major roadways to the larger cities in the region.
Holstein in the near future

future growth
The residential growth will sprawl away from the town center taking many community members further away from the heart of the commercial district. This development will be characterized by suburban architecture and subdivision land planning. These areas will segregate the small town according to social class. Development of this nature is usually dominated by vehicular access with little attention to the pedestrian’s needs.

Development will cross Highway 20 in small pockets and eventually the residential growth will begin to sprawl towards the three larger cities in the region. This occurrence will complete the loss of an internal identity for the small town.
future growth

haphazard development

Highway 20 will soon have a cloverleaf exit system and overpass for Holstein. Fast-food commercial development and clearance roads will pop up at the entry intersection into Holstein taking revenue from the town center. This is a prime example of globalization in America.

Residential growth will increase rapidly with the new employment opportunities presented by incoming industries. Parcels of land will be bought and developed upon. Some of this development will differ from the established grid creating cul-de-sacs, and curved roads.
future growth

haphazard development

New industry will move to town bringing important employment opportunities, but they will be located on the fringes causing the town to grow to encompass them. This industry could be very heavy on the environment and almost certainly will not reflect the character and identity of Holstein.

Haphazard development will continue in the historical industrial section of town along the former railroad tracks. More trailer parks, storage sheds, and temporary garages will define this area.
forms of globalization

The newest residential architecture in Holstein seems to be focused on one-story ranch homes with more detail given to vehicular entry than pedestrian entry. These designs do little to promote community interaction and let residents further isolate themselves from the larger whole.

suburban architecture

The new neighborhoods are suburban in nature, lacking sidewalks and having garage dominated architectural facades. Lot sizes are larger creating more yard space, but causing little interaction between adjoining neighbors.
The new community center is located on the fringe of town and has an unattractive, unimaginative, and unwelcoming atmosphere.

Could this be a preview of future development across the small town of Holstein?

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Open space will become a valuable asset as the small town grows. This is a view of the golf course which has some recreational value for people other than golfers, but it is currently off limits to the non-paying public.

As the new residential districts grow, will open space be a consideration and what will the quality of it be?
An exit with cloverleaf ramps is in the plans for access to Holstein off Highway 20. Haphazard fast food chain development usually comes with this development.

How can Holstein avoid this haphazard development and possibly funnel people and revenue back into the town center?
My first concept was to continue growth within the 1/4 mile radius playing off the traditional town plan (grid). This would follow up on historical patterns of the town plan and address the area on the "other side of tracks," which is currently misused and barren. This idea would keep every part of town a walk-able distance and could rejuvenate the town center.
My second concept dealt with the formation of satellite communities with strong ties to the original center mimicking the dispersed community of farm life. There would be a strong importance placed on a green space buffer of farmland surrounding the community with the satellites being located on the fringe of these open spaces.

This concept was very interesting, but I never felt totally comfortable with it. It does have some value for future considerations, but I focused my design primarily on the first concept.
an alternative approach

commercial

industrial

residential

Globalization as it affects the American cultural landscape

Holstein, Iowa
an alternative approach

commercial district
Main Street's existing streetscape is bleak and out of proportion with the human scale. The vehicular right of way is intimidating to pedestrians and there are no outdoor spaces to sit and relax, giving residents no reason to stay and experience the town center. Getting residents to come to this space is vital to the revitalization process because it is such an integral part to the underlying fabric of the small town. The pictures to the left show how dramatic of a change Main Street went through in thirty years. The awnings and lampposts have been lost. Storefronts have been boarded up and the street widened to four lanes.
two-lane traffic
The four-lanes currently are not being used. It seems like an incredible waste of space. Reducing the street to two-lane and slowing down speeds will be beneficial to the new design of the town center.

crosswalks

commercial buildings

median
The median is a safe divide of traffic and a nice place to put out of scale utilities such as lighting.

plaza space
Can be cut off to traffic and serve as a major plaza community space for Holstein.

pocket park
This can be an area where the town deli spills out to an outdoor café. A place for residents to come and stay a while, a meeting place.

angled parking
revitalizing main street

new design for main street

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revitalizing main street

Community activities, such as parades, could revitalize Main Street by bringing residents to the town center for a whole day experience. Filling the space with smells and sound would encourage residents to keep coming back.

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an alternative approach

industrial district
The new industrial district in town will retain some of the character established in the revitalization of Main Street. The concentration will be on light industry with some commercial spilling over from the town center. It is designed along the historical industrial axis of the rail line. This will help clean up this haphazard and ugly area of town. It will also help if a Wal-Mart or fast food chain that will build out by the highway would locate in this district bringing visitors and bonus revenue to the town center.
The new industrial section of town is located along the old railroad tracks where the original industries in Holstein began. If a light industry moved its warehouse here it would provide many needed employment opportunities and still adhere to the new design principles of the town.

Residents walking to the grocery store with a tree framed view of the grain elevators, Holstein’s primary industry and vertical feature. Transition from the industrial district to residential homes and the town center is a key to the revitalization effort.
Holstein needs to embrace its cultural heritage as it changes its identity. In the new industrial section of town, old farm machinery can be reinterpreted as environmental art pieces. The areas where the industrial district and residential districts meet are vital gateways. These art pieces can smooth the transition and serve as border elements of the districts. The industrial district would be concentrated on industry, but would definitely contain some commercial buildings. If a bar or restaurant and church bordered on these capstone “parks,” it would create an energetic community node and this would become one of the most successful parts of the design.
Scaling is a very important element for the transitions from the new industrial district to other areas in town. The use of dormers on architectural facades and landscaping techniques can help cut down on the drastic change of scale.

*taken from a study by Portland Community Design
residential district
The latest residential districts have strayed from the atmosphere that has helped mold Holstein as a thriving Midwestern small town farming community. The forms looked more like the suburbs outside larger cities in the region. A return to the historical character of homes and neighborhoods is essential to the success of this design. So the revitalization design re-embraces the historical grid and provides opportunities for streetscape improvements and community interaction.
residential district

Example of German arts and crafts façade.
residential district

other recommended examples of architectural facades

*taken from a study by Portland Community Design

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This example of a corner home has strong pedestrian entries on both sides. The front yard is small, formal, and welcoming. The opposite side of the house spills out into a communal backyard without fences. There is also a lot of space for neighborhood activity in the backyards which can be extremely beneficial for children because they do not have to cross any dangerous streets. This is a residence that displays a conscious effort to re-establish a lost identity and regain community interaction.

“mosaic of subcultures”

residential district

formal frontyard (entry)
communal backyards

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community interaction

Holstein is a spiritual community dominated by 4 Christian parishes. These represent the few subcultures within the small town. Encouraging these churches to become community hubs is a vital component to successful revitalization.

Churches can act as community hubs for the new residential neighborhoods. Promoting residents to walk to church and sponsoring weekly activities are some ways for churches to perform as a community "mosaic of subcultures."

residential district

In new residential neighborhoods, a return to the grid pattern should happen with architectural guidelines promoting two-story German arts and crafts homes. An earnest effort to bring back front porches and side garages will help in community interaction and the overall process of revitalization.

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conclusion

This project has shown the affects of Globalization on a small Midwestern farming community in America. It is amazing to see how much can be lost in times of change. Americans do not believe they are dominated by a very strict culture, but studies like this allow people to see how strong these forces can be. Mainstream society keeps plugging away, while cultures that have dwindled in immediate importance can vanish in a few decades. It is vital for landscape architecture and other design professions to understand this new era and begin to address key issues of cultural identity loss before we blindly let technology make the decisions for us.

I would like to thank all of my professors for their guidance and all of my classmates/friends for contributing to my knowledge. Thank you for helping me to find myself by immersing myself in you.


Holstein Centennial Book 1882-1992

*Landscape Architecture*. March 1993 (whole issue devoted to cultural design)


*Globalization as it affects the American cultural landscape* Holstein, Iowa

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