

Walrus Research

A Sense of Place

The Value and Values of Localism
In Public Radio

September 2006

Reality has a way of eventually getting your attention

A Sense of Place

Like NPR does to national, if they could do that to local,
that would be dynamite

-- Listener

'There's no forgiveness just because it's from 'here'

-- Program Director

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Introduction

In the spring of 2006 we conducted 36 focus groups with public radio listeners in nine markets. This was the fifth round of Core Values focus groups for the Public Radio Program Directors.

Audience research for the PRPD Core Values project began in 2001 with focus groups of news and information listeners. The following year we interviewed listeners to full-time classical music stations. In 2004 we conducted two rounds of focus groups: one with listeners to full-time jazz stations and the other with listeners to dual-format news/classical stations.

The 2006 groups were organized around the idea of Sense of Place, with reference to the value and values of localism in news and information.

In its proposal, PRPD stated three goals:

- To gain a better understanding of the value and values public radio listeners hold about Sense of Place
- To articulate a vocabulary that clearly and concisely defines those values and qualities
- To explore how a deepened understanding of the value of place can help us improve both public service and public support

PRPD set three criteria for participating stations:

- Have already made a serious commitment to local news and information programming
- Have made an attempt to sharply focus their local programming around Sense of Place
- Represent a range of geographical regions, size of markets and newsroom resources

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Credits

This project originated with Marcia Alvar, the PRPD President who has rallied public radio stations, producers and networks around the vital principles of Core Values.

In addition to making it happen, Marcia took an active role in the design and conduct of this research—recruiting stations, selecting airchecks, observing groups and editing 54 hours of video tape.

National Public Radio provided major funding for this research through its Local News Initiative. Dana Davis Rehm is NPR's project leader.

Nine public radio stations provided funding and other research support:

KNPR Las Vegas – Lamar Marchese and Flo Rogers

KNAU Flagstaff – John Stark and Geoff Norcross

WUNC Raleigh – Joan Rose and George Boosey

KNOW Minneapolis - Erik Nycklemoe and Sarah Lutman

WUWM Milwaukee – Dave Edwards and Bruce Winter

WHID Green Bay – Phil Corriveau and Anders Yocom

KUOW Seattle – Wayne Roth and Jeff Hansen

WBUR Boston – Sam Fleming and Paul La Camera

WSLU Canton - Jackie Sauter and Ellen Rocco

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Key Findings

- Public radio listeners feel a strong Sense of Place. In the high country of Flagstaff it is “Poverty with a View.” In family-friendly Minneapolis it is “Minnesota Nice.” Bostonians are proud to be living in “the Athens of America.” We found a different Sense of Place in each market.
- The dimensions of each place are mental, and the maps in the minds of public radio listeners do not match political geography. We found that dimensions of environment, history and culture are more important than standard boundaries like city, county and state.
- Despite differences of place, we found that public radio listeners who are drawn to news and information programming are the same from market to market. When they tune to public radio they are seeking depth, intelligence, authenticity, civility and a global perspective.
- Younger respondents explained that they had grown up with public radio in the household. We called them “NPR Babies.” When they tune to news and information on public radio they are seeking the same values as older listeners.
- Metro daily newspapers, which may have provided respectable coverage of their home markets in the past, have deteriorated both in quality and quantity of local coverage. The national and world news stories that do appear are picked up from syndication. Public radio listeners would rather go directly to the source by accessing Internet sites such as the Manchester Guardian, the New York Times or the BBC.
- Public radio listeners would value a station that covers their place with depth, intelligence and a wider perspective, just as NPR covers the nation and the world. But the actual performance of local news and information programming too often fails to deliver on its promise.
- We found that the problem with locally produced talk shows is not just the problem of quality control. The live call in talk format itself tends to alienate an important segment of our audience.

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- Local showcase programs too often fail to deliver—even on the selection of topics. Respondents used the term “hit or miss” to describe local showcase programs, even where the station had already invested substantial resources.
- Public radio listeners want more from local newscasts than the typical reading of headlines. They would rather have fewer stories, in relative depth, even within a cutaway newscast.
- Public radio listeners are working with their minds as they listen to local news and information. They are thinking about connections, other angles and a wider, even global perspective. There is no forgiveness of how the story is framed just because the station is local.
- If producers working at local stations more clearly understood the Sense of Place in the minds of their listeners, they could sharpen their editorial judgment. That understanding would help producers frame their stories beyond the merely local.
- But focusing on Sense of Place will not save local news and information programming that fails to deliver essential Core Values such as depth, intelligence, authenticity, civility and a wider, even global perspective.

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PRPD Core Values

Audience 98 found and the Public Radio Tracking Study confirmed that listener support of public radio is a function of how much they use and value the service. Listeners are more likely to send money when the programming becomes personally important in their lives.

Important programming is that which resonates with the Core Values of public radio, such as intelligence, depth, civility and authenticity. In recent years, the PRPD has taken the lead on projects designed to articulate and implement the Core Values of public radio's news, information, classical and jazz formats.

Localism as a Core Value

In 2001, PRPD's first round of research on the Core Values of local news and information programming found that listeners hold public radio programming to the same high standards regardless of source – local or network.

We also found that listeners who prefer an NPR station as their primary source for radio news and information will use similar language from market to market when articulating the fundamental values of public radio. But the way they talked about their own communities seemed to be distinctly different from market to market.

PRPD President Marcia Alvar wondered whether localism itself might constitute a “phantom Core Value” that needed to be clearly defined.

In our 2001 report, we left that possibility open:

Public radio listeners are the same all over. Yet the listeners to a given station may have a particular sense of place when they think about their local community.

Understanding their sense of place may be a prerequisite to the design of truly valuable local programming.

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In 2006, with support from NPR and nine leading stations, PRPD created the opportunity for us to directly investigate the value and values of localism in public radio through the concept of Sense of Place.

We designed a large-scale project involving multiple markets:

In this rapidly changing media landscape, we need to find out how public radio listeners think and feel about place, or placelessness, and how local public radio stations might serve their needs.

It is possible that local stations can deliver significant value to public radio listeners by deepening their sense of place. We propose to probe for greater definition of sense of place, for greater clarity about what public radio core listeners value about place, and language that captures that vocabulary in much the same fashion as PRPD's Core Values studies did for news, classical music and jazz.

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Research Questions

1. Do public radio listeners feel a strong Sense of Place in their local community? Or do they suffer from a sense of placelessness?
2. What are the dimensions of place for public radio listeners? Do they relate to the history of their community? The natural environment? The cultural landscape?
3. Which media reinforce a Sense of Place or a sense of placelessness? In particular, the Internet with its websites, downloads and streaming, also satellite radio and satellite television. What about national newspapers vs local papers? And radio, both commercial and public?
4. Does Sense of Place work differently for public radio listeners who are new to a community vs long time residents?
5. At present, do public radio listeners perceive their station as providing a local Sense of Place or mainly a conduit for the network service?
6. Does the current news and information programming on their station provide a Sense of Place? Is that a significant value? Does it stimulate listener support?
7. If the station were to produce local news and information that was focused on Sense of Place, would such programming deliver greater value?

Actionability

What practical guidance can we offer for local producers who each day make hundreds of microformatic decisions in story selection, editorial judgment, talent coaching, mixing, writing and editing?

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Research Design

We grounded our selection of markets on a renowned work by Joel Garreau, The Nine Nations of North America. Rather than dividing North America by political boundaries, he drew a map of nine regional “nations” based on culture, environment, economy, politics and media.

According to Garreau, the Nine Nations include:

NEW ENGLAND

Pride themselves on being the most civilized of the nine nations
Capital is Boston

THE FOUNDRY

Not so important as they used to be
Capital is Detroit

DIXIE

Most whip sawn and future shocked by change
Capital is Atlanta

MEXAMERICA

Only limit to growth is the human ability to dream
Capital is Los Angeles

ECOTOPIA

Small is beautiful/growth is bad/don't "californicate"
Capital is San Francisco

EMPTY QUARTER

Rich in energy
Capital is Denver

BREADBASKET

Ratifier of social change
Capital is Kansas City

The remaining two “nations” of North America are Quebec and the Caribbean Islands, which are located mostly outside of the United States.

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Markets

Marcia Alvar identified stations within different “nations” that had already invested in significant local news and information and were eager to find out what their listeners thought about that programming.

	Large Market	Small Market
NEW ENGLAND	WBUR Boston	
THE FOUNDRY	WUWM Milwaukee	WSLU Canton
DIXIE	WUNC Raleigh	
ECOTOPIA	KUOW Seattle	
EMPTY QUARTER	KNPR Las Vegas	KNAU Flagstaff
BREADBASKET	KNOW Minneapolis	WHID Green Bay

Notes:

Keep in mind that we used the Nine Nations framework only for the purpose of selecting markets. Our findings are based solely on what we heard from the listeners to each station, in that particular market.

While the city of Green Bay might belong in The Foundry, the station carries the state-wide talk network of Wisconsin Public Radio.

A state network like WPR serves multiple markets that may be quite different.

Program Examples

We asked the participating stations to supply airchecks of their local production according to set criteria:

- On a day that we specified, the 7am local newscast
- On the same day, the station’s local news and information programs, such as WUNC’s State of Things and WUWM’s At Ten
- From recent months, any features, interviews or reports that in the station’s judgment reinforced the listener’s Sense of Place

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Place or Placelessness

Going into this study, we reviewed the literature on Sense of Place across disciplines including architecture, urban planning, sociology and the like. We learned that some critics deny that place has meaning anymore in contemporary America. In fact they argue that we all suffer from a sense of placelessness.

A typical criticism would be “Our country is already too much alike, with the same chain stores and generic architecture from sea to shining sea.”

According to the critics, placelessness could appear in two forms:

Homogenized – strip malls and suburbs that look the same everywhere

Fake environments – constructed to look like a real place, a theme park

In contrast, an authentic place evolves unselfconsciously from its environment.

We already knew that when public radio listeners move from one market to another they seek out the NPR station. With life and job changes, it is comforting to find public radio in their new location.

So we might ask: if a highly educated public radio listener were to move from an affluent suburb of Boston to an affluent suburb of Raleigh, flowing from WBUR to WUNC, has that listener in fact moved to a different place?

Recall our first and second research questions:

1. Do public radio listeners feel a strong Sense of Place in their local community? Or do they suffer from a sense of placelessness?
2. What are the dimensions of place for public radio listeners? Do they relate to the history of their community? The natural environment? The cultural landscape?

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Strong Sense of Place

We found that public radio listeners definitely feel a strong Sense of Place.

In all nine markets, our respondents were eager to give us their heartfelt and eloquent description of what it was like to live in that place.

We can be confident that public radio listeners do indeed feel a strong Sense of Place for three reasons:

- Within each focus group, there was consensus around the table. That is, respondents quickly agreed on the characteristics of that place.
- There was agreement across the four groups in each market, even though the groups had been factored by sex (men in two groups, women in two groups) and length of residence (long vs short term).
- Between markets the descriptions of place were strikingly different.

We documented their descriptions by asking respondents to write down a top-five list of characteristics that identify their place. Then we distributed large sheets of paper and asked them to draw a “mental map” of their place.

Localism vs Sense of Place

The term local, as it is used by broadcasters, typically refers to the geographical area within the station’s signal coverage. Journalists are trained to think that local news is organized by political boundaries like city, county and state.

We are using the term place to refer to other dimensions of where our listeners live—dimensions like their sense of history, environment and culture.

Place is the map that exists in the minds of our listeners.

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Dimensions of Place

We think that producers working at local stations could sharpen their editorial judgment if they more clearly understood the dimensions of place in the minds of their listeners.

Here is the form we used to document the dimensions of place:

The Identity of this Place

Think about this place where you are living.

Its identity might be reflected in its culture, history, population, environment, economy, architecture, problems or aspirations.

List the top five things, events or ideas that characterize the identity of this place.

#1

We supplied each station with its complete, detailed documentation.

What follows in this report is a brief summary, quoting selective respondent verbatims from each of the nine markets.

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Las Vegas – Isolation in Sin City

KNPR listeners described the identity of Las Vegas as “gambling casinos – the only business in town.” The place is characterized by “sleaze,” “immorality,” “neon, hotels, resorts” and “wide open gaming, clubs, shows.”

The upside is “energy--always going, 24 hour everything,” but the downside is “more crime, more pollution, more traffic.” Las Vegas is “overpopulated” because “people move here from all over country and now world.”

KNPR listeners explained that the “city has changed so much in last 35 years” from its “Mafia history” to a “booming economy, no state taxes.” As one respondent wrote, “lack of tradition is key to its tradition.”

We found that KNPR listeners feel that Las Vegas is “isolated in the desert” in the “middle of nowhere.” Even within the city, Las Vegas is a desperate place where “anyone can be bought” and “people remain strangers.” Residential developments are “struggling communities” that are surrounded by “walls.”

Interpretation

Public radio listeners do not feel a sense of belonging in Las Vegas. They are repelled by the immorality and tourists who treat the city “like a frat house.”

Living behind their walls, public radio listeners in Las Vegas feel a sense of isolation from each other.

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Flagstaff – Poverty with a View

KNAU listeners described Flagstaff as a “beautiful landscape” in “beautiful surroundings.” As a “mountain town” its primary characteristic is its “natural environment – the peaks, Colorado plateau.”

From the quaint downtown you can view the “San Francisco Peaks – sacred mountain to so many tribes.” Just outside of town you can experience a “diversity of environment – habitats – mountains & deserts,” “many different life zones within short distance,” including the majestic Grand Canyon.

The high country climate means “beautiful spring and fall, cool summer” with “great outdoor activities and beautiful mountain area – drive an [hour] or 2 south and go from cold weather to hot weather.”

KNAU listeners take great pleasure in the “environmental consciousness of the community” where “everyone knows everyone.” The university community shares “good collective attitudes.” The “liberal population” can enjoy a “small town atmosphere – for now.”

But Flagstaff is a “government employment town” including the observatory and NAU, resulting in an “underpaid and overeducated workforce – we live here because we like it.” They call it “poverty with a view.”

KNAU listeners, many of whom are employed as teachers, told us that housing costs are “way too high to accommodate most people.” Yet the beauty of the environment is attracting real estate buyers who bring their own wealth into the mountains making it more “expensive to live here and going up very quickly.”

Not everyone in Flagstaff has a degree. Below the educated professionals there are “low paying exploitative jobs for Hispanics, Native Americans and college students.”

Interpretation

Flagstaff is all about its natural environment, mountain peaks in the largest Ponderosa forest. Professors and researchers who value an active outdoor lifestyle are more than willing to take a job at NAU.

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Raleigh – South but not South

WUNC listeners described Raleigh as a changing mix of “south culture and rapidly developing city of the world, many opportunities.”

“Southern society ladies” still exist, and the state fair features “grits, sweet tea,” but the “rapid growth” economy is driven by the “international research headquarters” based in Research Triangle Park and three universities.

UNC and Duke are known for their “top medical facilities.” Sports fans align themselves with “Tar Heel basketball – UNC and all ACC basketball” rather than professional teams.

The Raleigh economy also benefits from being the “capital city – home of legislature and state museums.”

The resulting qualities of life are “safety, wholesome, affluent” in sprawling suburbs of “highly educated homeowners-PhDs, engineers, faculty.” To long term residents, they are known as “transplanted Yankees.”

Raleigh is having “difficulty in adjusting to rapid growth and change of culture.” While there are still “civil war and civil rights attitudes strong in both directions,” the place is an “aspiring cultural center” and “ranked one of the best places to live.” Yet Raleigh suffers from “bad roads & transportation planning” with “shopping sprawl on every corner.”

Interpretation

Recall that Garreau summed up the nation of Dixie as the “most whip sawn and future shocked by change.” That’s how WUNC listeners see Raleigh.

Raleigh’s “identity crisis” is reflected in its sprawling, expansive growth. The freeways always under construction allow developers to build further suburbs for the new arrivals.

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Minneapolis – Minnesota Nice

To KNOW listeners, the identity of Minneapolis is its people who “are really nice and friendly here.” The term “Minnesota nice” came up in all four groups.

It means “open warm welcoming people,” “good feeling people.”

Minnesota’s heritage of “Scandinavian socialism” encouraged the development of “good schools kids are #1.” The “friendly, well-educated, hard working people” have created a “family oriented atmosphere (science museums, zoos, fairs).” “Great education system/colleges – Midwestern values/friendly.”

KNOW listeners are proud of their “multiple cultural opportunities – plays, concerts,” “theater, ballet, opera, orchestra.” According to our respondents, Minneapolis has the “most seats per capita than any US city but NYC.”

As a “healthy population,” they value the “outdoor environment like lakes, parks, bike paths, beautiful area.” Even during the winter the “hearty people” are “outside all day all year biking, walking dogs.”

Despite their “homogenous population” based on “established neighborhoods – families,” KNOW listeners are proud of their “progressive political climate” which has welcomed “people of many cultures and ideas.”

Interpretation

The primary dimension of Minneapolis is its people. True to their heritage, they value education, family, health, the arts and hard work.

Within their livable city or at their cabin on the lake, KNOW listeners enjoy outdoor recreation in all four seasons.

Family is at the center of all issues and opportunities.

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Milwaukee – Churches and Taverns

Like other rusted cities in the Foundry, Milwaukee is “challenged to adapt to a knowledge economy.” The “loss of manufacturing jobs” has caused “poverty, racial divide, slow moving economy.”

In the industrial days, Milwaukee thrived on a population base of “blue collar down to earth people who work and play hard.” The factories supported “an amalgam of ethnicities – from the olden days of Germans (beer city) to Polish and nowadays Latinos.” Blue collar workers patronized the “taverns and bars, lunch at bar on Saturdays w/neighbors.” The ethnicity of each neighborhood could be identified by its churches.

Now the “lack of dynamism in local economy” means that Milwaukee is “striving to improve its image.” It is left with an “awkward racial balance” and a “declining middle class.” Economic stagnation means “people born and raised and stayed (or maybe came back here)” with “very little influx from outside.”

WUWM listeners sense a “good energy for the most part – lots of things are happening to make the city better,” but they characterize Milwaukee as suffering from “racism” and “segregation.”

Those who stay in Milwaukee value the “hometown feel” and “family nearby for myself and husband.” It is “not too expensive to live in.” It’s a “big small town, small big city” with “sufficient entertainment to be attractive.”

Interpretation

WUWM listeners still think of Milwaukee in terms of ethnic working class neighborhoods, where European languages could be heard in taverns and churches. But the city now struggles with race, segregation and poverty.

Milwaukee’s positives are mediocre—such as being “relatively clean” with a “reasonable cost of living” and a “slow/declining growth/loss of talent.”

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Green Bay – Family, the Northwoods and the Packers

WHID listeners are happy to live in a “safe, family oriented area” with “friendly people, low crime.” Green Bay enjoys a “positive culture – people seem to care earnestly about each other and this community.”

As in Minneapolis, “neighbors help each other.” The “schools are great!!” and it’s a “great place to raise a family.” “People have strong ties and don’t stray far.” “People still know their neighbors.”

Green Bay is “nationally recognized because of Packers,” but the real impact of the football team is that the “excitement during the season brings everyone together.” “Football – ties together the community.”

The “stable industrial economy” is based on the strategic Fox River which is lined with paper mills. Families in Green Bay enjoy that “stability – economic and social – traditions 50+ years or more.”

WHID listeners strongly value their proximity to the Northwoods, with “lots of fishing and hunting activities.” “Good recreational opportunities, state and national forests.” Nearby are Wisconsin’s “lakes, forests, farmland, rivers.”

For those who occasionally need more shopping, entertainment or culture, Green Bay is “close to large cities” like Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis.

Public radio listeners may find Green Bay to be “a bit on the conservative, intolerant side (not a place to attract the young creative types.” Some would criticize the community as too “conservative – not open to change, growth.”

Yet what is conserved in Green Bay is “community – strong ties through sports teams, churches, schools.”

Interpretation

Green Bay is a strong community based on the values of family, neighbors, sports, church and outdoor recreation.

The paper mills provide good work. The Northwoods provide hunting, fishing and boating opportunities for the family.

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Seattle – Like Minded Liberals

KUOW listeners see themselves as functioning at a high “level of intelligent discourse and discussion.” They love living in Seattle because of its “liberal, accepting intellectual climate.”

They feel fortunate to be surrounded by “like-minded people-similar approach, don’t need to explain yourself.”

Seattle is controlled by “environmentally aware, liberal people” who actively support “environmentally conscious public and elected officials.” Politicians must be “gay friendly, environmentally sound.”

KUOW listeners appreciate “the closeness and readiness of natural beauty; also the ease of access to these things.” They actively participate in “boating, hiking, rock climbing, running, everything is outdoors.” Seattle is blessed by an “easy climate all year round,” for the enjoyment of “lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls, snow season, sand dunes.”

KUOW listeners recognize that the history of “Indian culture is all over and impactful for a lot of the arts,” but today Seattle means “wealth, commerce, opportunity. Microsoft and their ilk have brought unlimited opportunity here.”

Interpretation

Garreau’s term for this “nation” is Ecotopia, which matches the way KUOW listeners raved about the snowy mountains, green forests and blue waters.

Ecotopia also implies a utopian social community, with collective enforcement of “environmental conscious/awareness, care for and maintain personal health, environmental health, community health.” Environmentalists are in control.

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Boston – Athens of America

WBUR listeners boasted that Boston is “home to the best universities in the US – Harvard, MIT, BC, BU, Tufts.” The literate citizens of this city enjoy a “rich intellectual life” under a value system that “emphasizes education, culture, social consciousness.”

In addition, WBUR listeners are proud that Boston is “home to American history.” They live in “the birthplace of the nation,” celebrating a political lineage from “Paul Revere” to the “Kennedys.”

WBUR listeners see themselves as “progressive, “politically liberal and open minded.” The city has become a “melting pot of peoples, cultures, lifestyles, nationalities, political views – still decent level of acceptance of others.”

Like Seattle, Boston is politically “blue,” meaning “liberal Democratic, gay marriage, healthcare reform.” An important marker is “no death penalty.”

WBUR listeners get pleasure from the “compactness of Boston, easily explored on foot or by public transportation.” The city is valued as “compact/livable with integral/vital urban center (not spread out, sprawl area with a center that empties out at night).”

The architecture of Boston reflects “New England flavor of traditions and history.” It is “a revolutionary war era city, a long history, cobblestones.”

Interpretation

Garreau wrote that New Englanders consider themselves to be the most civilized of nations. We heard that boasting in our focus groups. WBUR listeners are self-satisfied about living in a “progressive” place.

They have an “attitude – pride” based on their sense of “a class city with original history.”

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Canton – Town and Gown

North of the Adirondacks, in Canton, New York, there are “four colleges within [a] 15 mile radius.” Public radio listeners who live up there are grateful that the colleges “bring culture to this small town.”

Otherwise they see the place as “socio-economically deprived, poverty, lack of industry – farming failing as a way of life, low housing value, very high taxation.” The “lack of industry creates a middle class void” and “tensions between town and gown.” The “population has two classes – educated and drop outs.”

Yet public radio listeners in Canton find that there is a “friendliness and trust among residents, generosity toward those in need.” In an “inter-dependent community – people help each other,” such as in a recent ice storm.

One WSLU listener wrote “when I leave my house even for 3-4 months I leave the door unlocked and my neighbor looks in on it, unasked, daily.” Another wrote “I teach at SUNY college, my neighbors are a farmer and a foreman in a manufacturing plant. Good friends.” In Canton there is a “sense of community: you know your neighbors; they are always available to help.”

The living is “rural, plenty of outdoors to be in,” which gives the “opportunity to live as self sufficiently as one chooses to.” People are “not on top of each other.” “People love to maintain their individuality, which is easy to do simply by never going anywhere.”

Public radio listeners lament the “distance to civilization like shopping or theatres.” Also the lack of “research libraries – no restaurants.” But the return is the “wilderness region – Adirondacks!” “Beautiful countryside.” “Nature is not lost here.”

Interpretation

The small college town of Canton, NY, is surrounded by failing farms and “plenty of outdoors.” The Adirondacks are nearby. “Civilization” is distant.

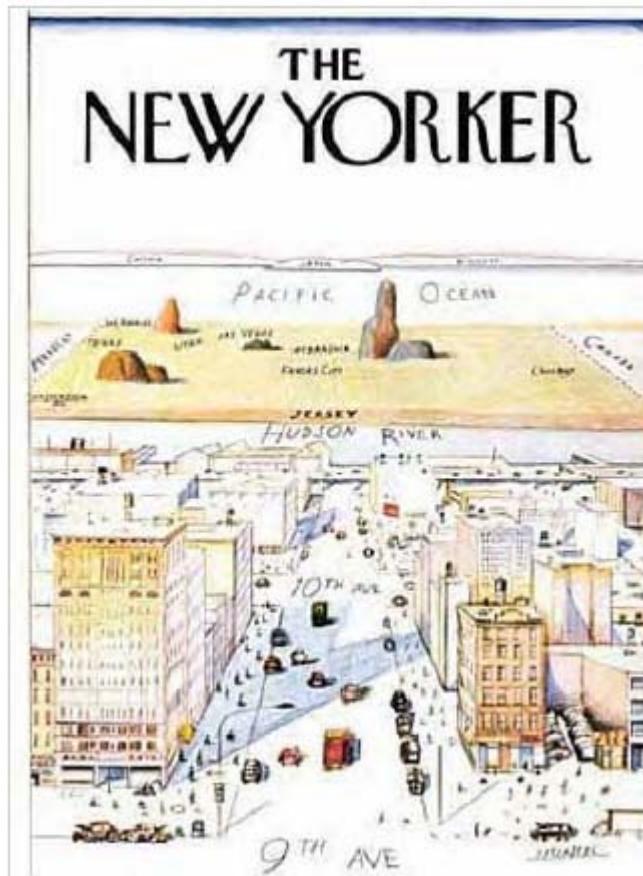
Between the two classes, “educated and drop outs,” there is “social cohesion – despite our relative poverty and the lack of employment other than colleges, we take care of our needy.”

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Mental Maps

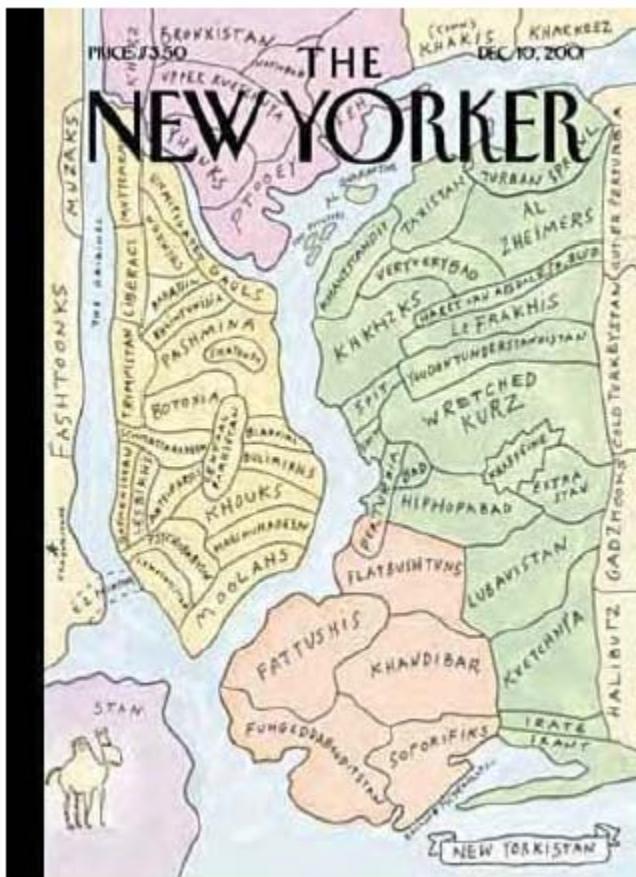
In the focus groups we displayed two famous artworks, both of which ran as covers for the New Yorker magazine.

View from 9th Avenue was created to show how a Manhattan resident would see the country. Manhattan itself takes up half of the illustration, while the rest of the United States is a barren wasteland.



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The other artwork we displayed was a more recent cover titled New Yorkistan which shows the tribal enclaves of metro New York.



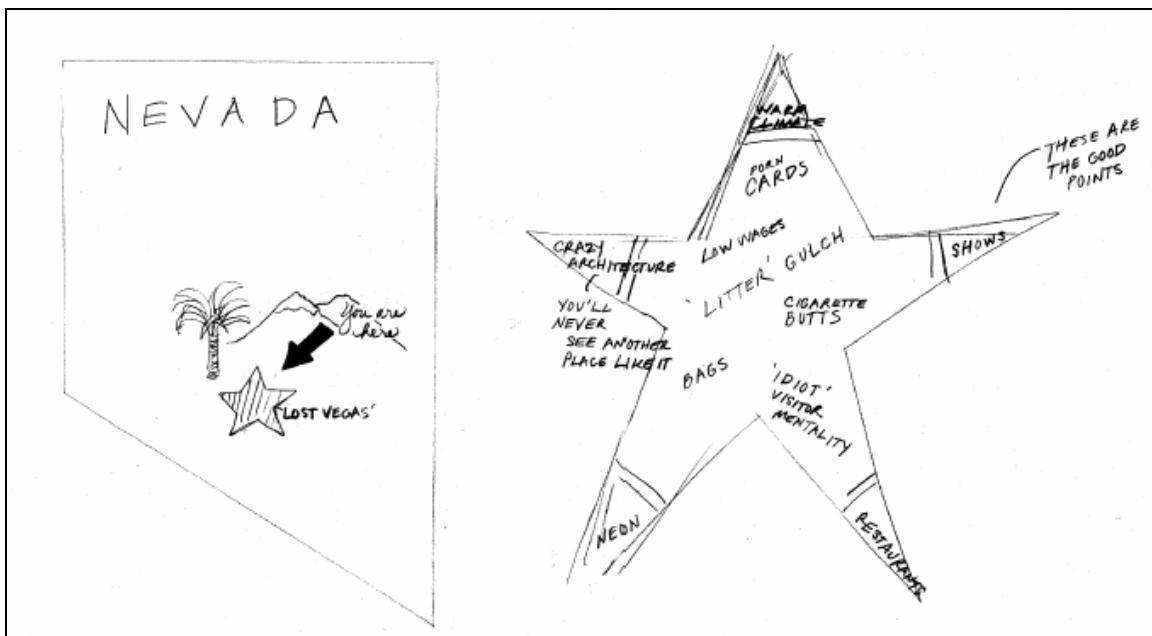
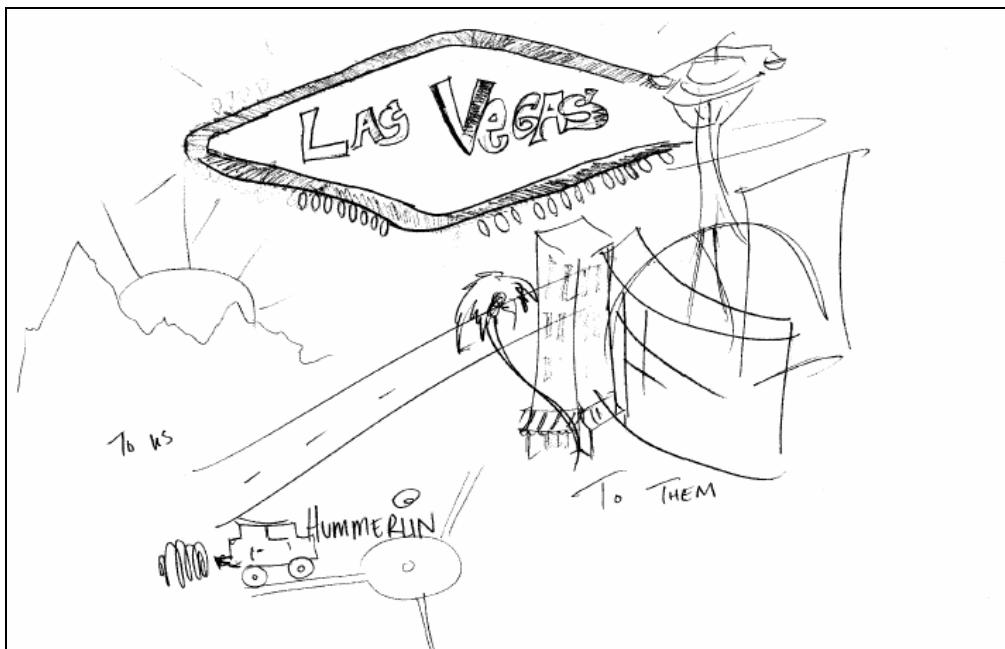
One tangential finding of our research was that most of our respondents were already familiar with both of the New Yorker covers—another bit of evidence that public radio listeners are the same wherever you go.

In any event, having displayed the two artworks we distributed large sheets of paper and marking pens to our focus group respondents. We asked each of them to draw “mental maps” of their place.

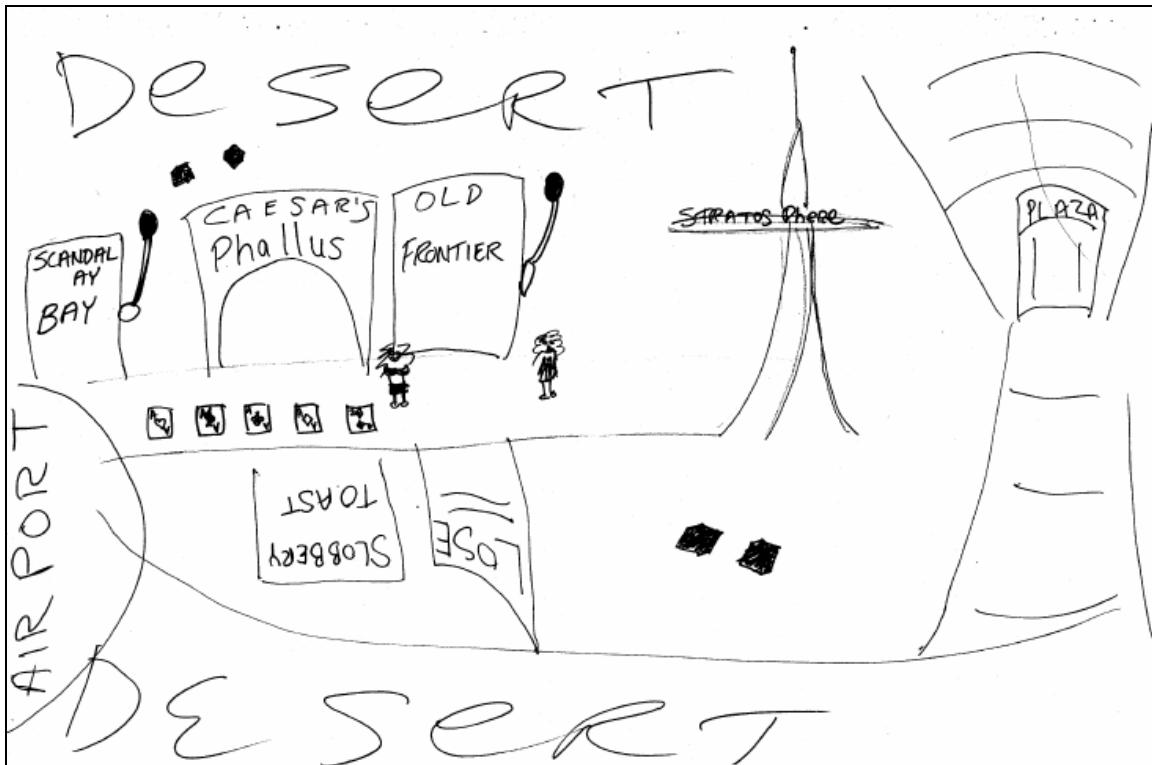
After the groups we delivered electronic copies of the “mental maps” to each participating station. In the following section of this report we show a few representative examples for each market.

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Las Vegas



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Interpretation

The mental maps drawn by KNPR listeners are negative and sarcastic.

The first map shows the isolation between us and them, with them being the disgusting tourists in the casinos. The drawing of a Hummer is a mocking reference to an exclusive, gated community, another form of isolation.

The second map shows Lost Vegas as the only place in the state of Nevada, surrounded by emptiness. (Yet KNPR produces a showcase program titled the State of Nevada, including news from all around the state.)

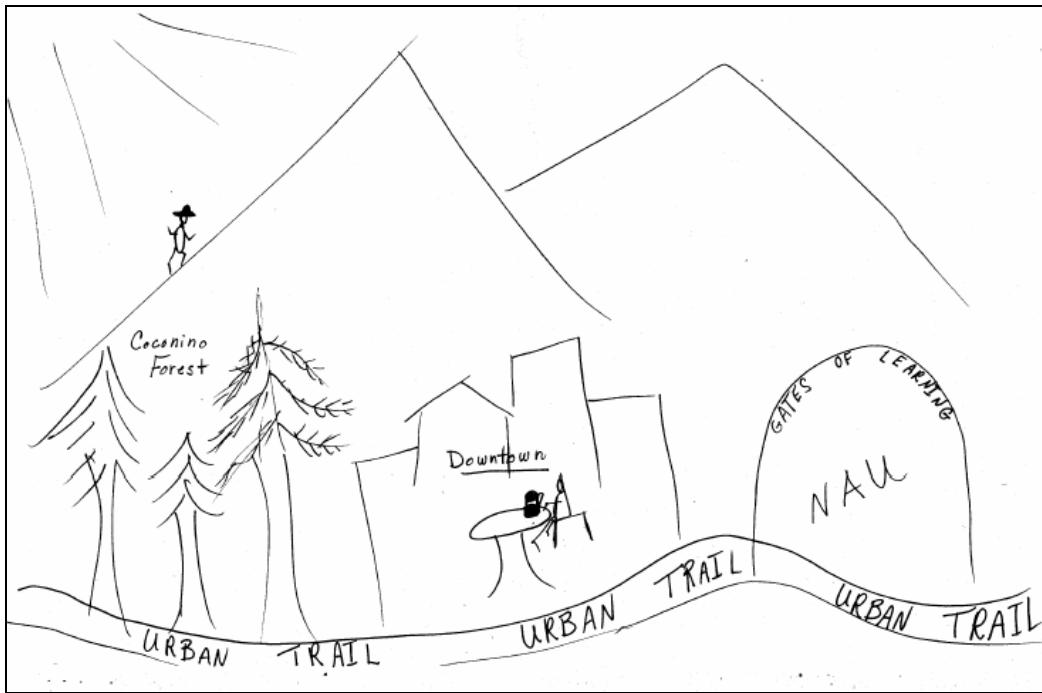
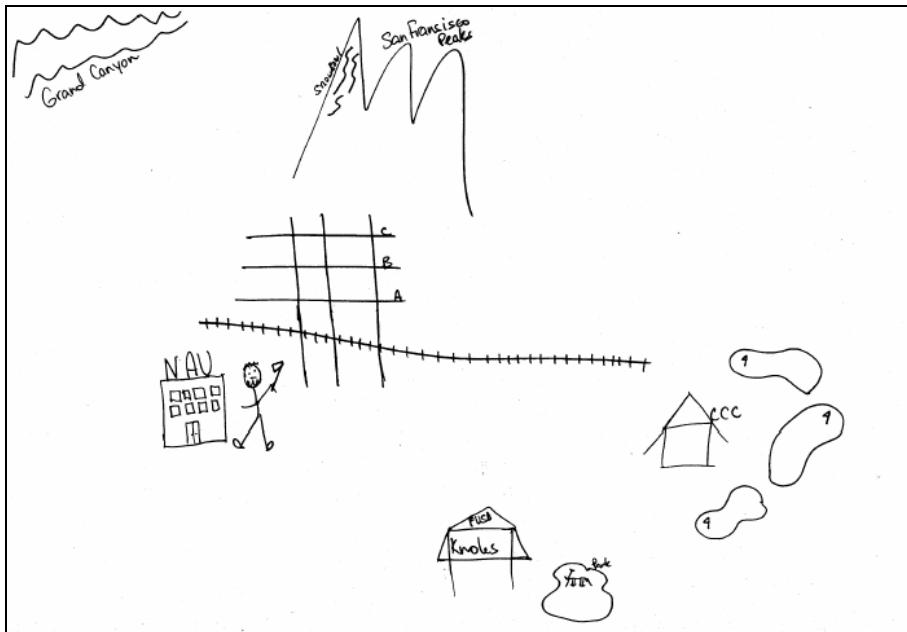
The conceptual star figure contains sarcastic references to Litter Gulch, Idiot Visitor Mentality and Porn Cards.

The third map shows the casinos (Caesar's Phallus and Slobbery Toast) taking up nearly all of the area. Beyond the casinos, the boundaries of place are the airport, the desert, the plaza and the desert. The only people are tourists.

Las Vegas is not public radio country. One opportunity for KNPR would be to provide a way for its listeners to find each other.

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Flagstaff



A Sense of Place



Interpretation

In sharp contrast to Las Vegas, the first map of Flagstaff shows a happy, pennant-waving public radio listener at Northern Arizona University, which is close to the quaint downtown where freight trains rumble through.

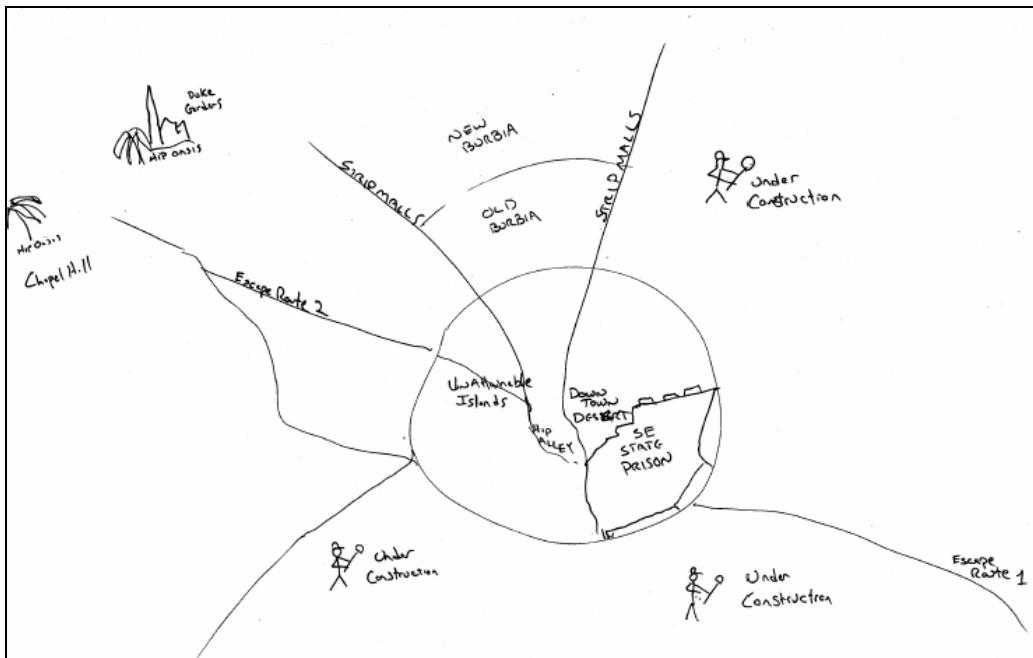
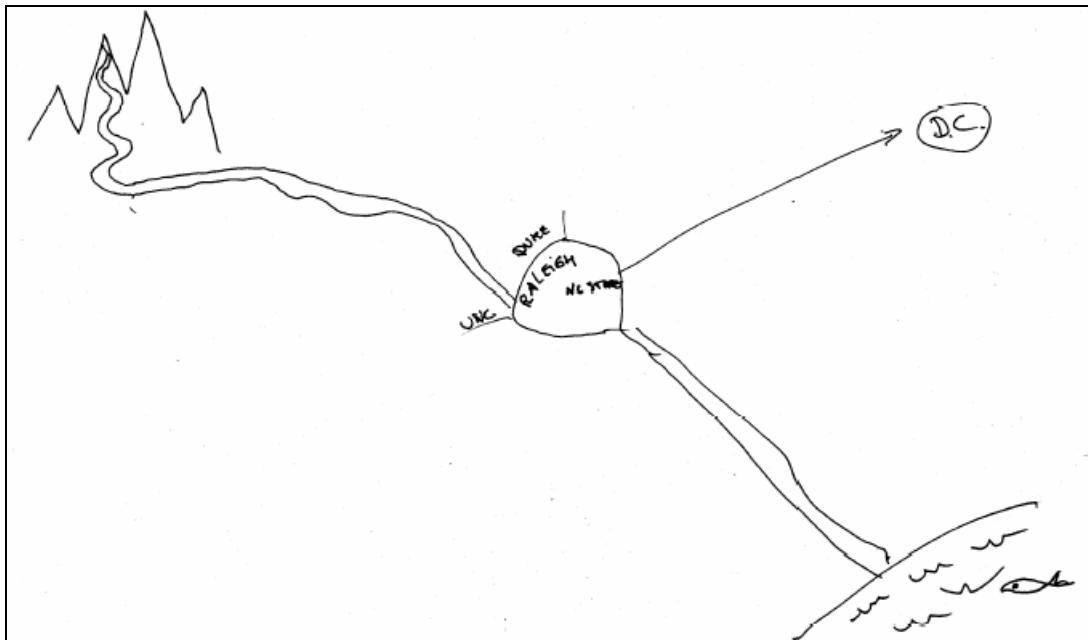
Just north of town we can see the snowy San Francisco Peaks and the Grand Canyon. A golf course offers other recreation.

The second map shows two happy KNAU listeners—one enjoying a beverage at a downtown café, the other hiking up the Peaks in the sunshine. The urban trail for hiking and biking runs from The Gates of Learning through the little downtown and out into the Coconino Ponderosa forest.

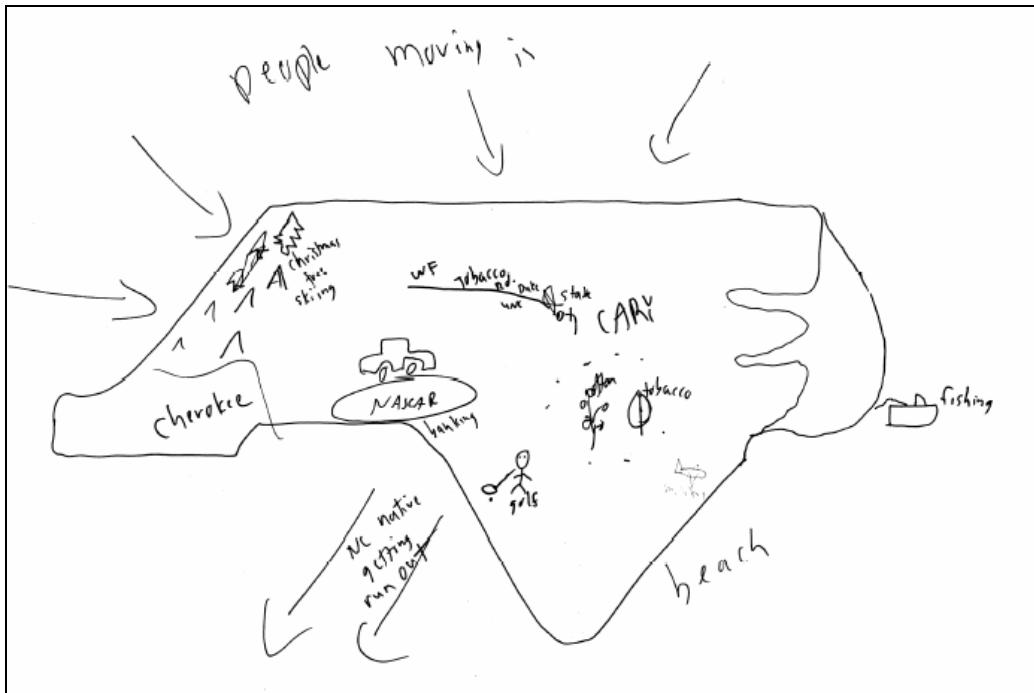
But the third map shows a less idyllic future for Flagstaff, given the pressures of population, resources and wealth in the West. This listener already sees too many mini-ranches and manufactured, unaffordable housing. Along I-40 there are gates! Overgrowth and traffic!

A Sense of Place

Raleigh



A Sense of Place



Interpretation

The center of the first map is the Interstate loop around the city. Only three points are identified on the loop—UNC, Duke and NC State. Otherwise we see the mountains and the ocean, both vacation spots, and Washington, DC, perhaps where the research money comes from.

The second map is zoomed in to show the problems of the metro area.

The prison dominates the city. Highways leading out of the city are lined with strip malls and under construction. Two are marked as escape routes, one towards Chapel Hill the other towards the ocean. While Chapel Hill and Duke are identified as hip oases, the city is surrounded by old and new burbia.

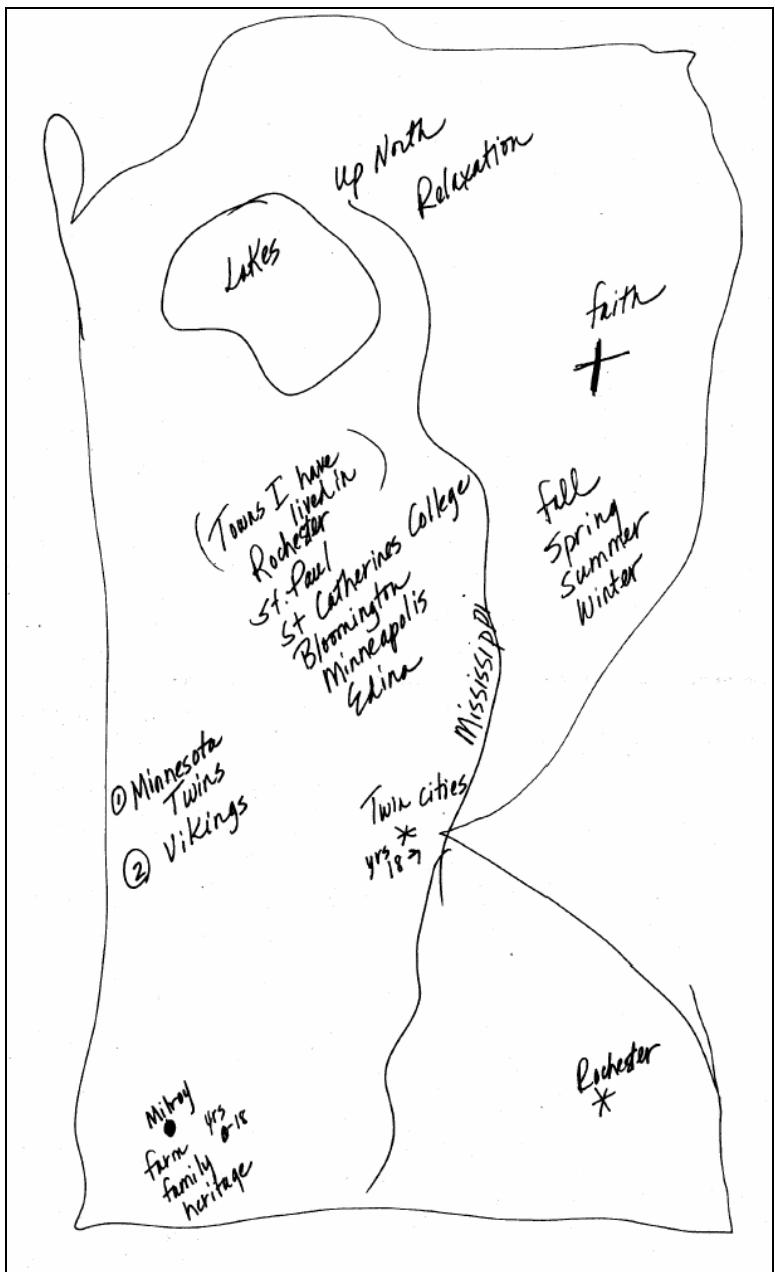
The third map shows a state-wide view. Arrows from the North show new people moving in. Arrows to the South show the natives moving out.

Outside of Cary, an upscale suburb that is populated by “relocated Yankees,” the state of North Carolina is still identified with NASCAR, Cherokees and tobacco.

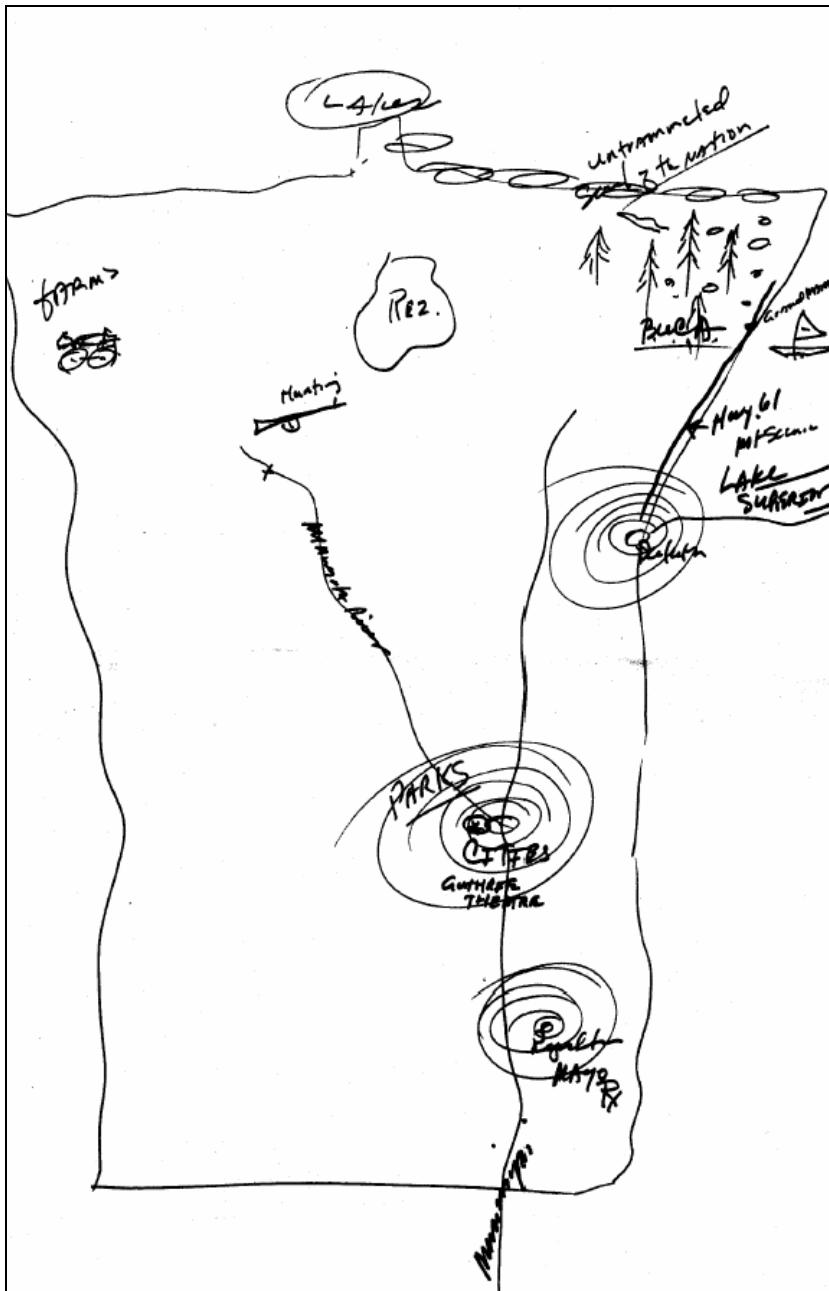
Both types of people enjoy vacations in the mountains and the ocean.

A Sense of Place

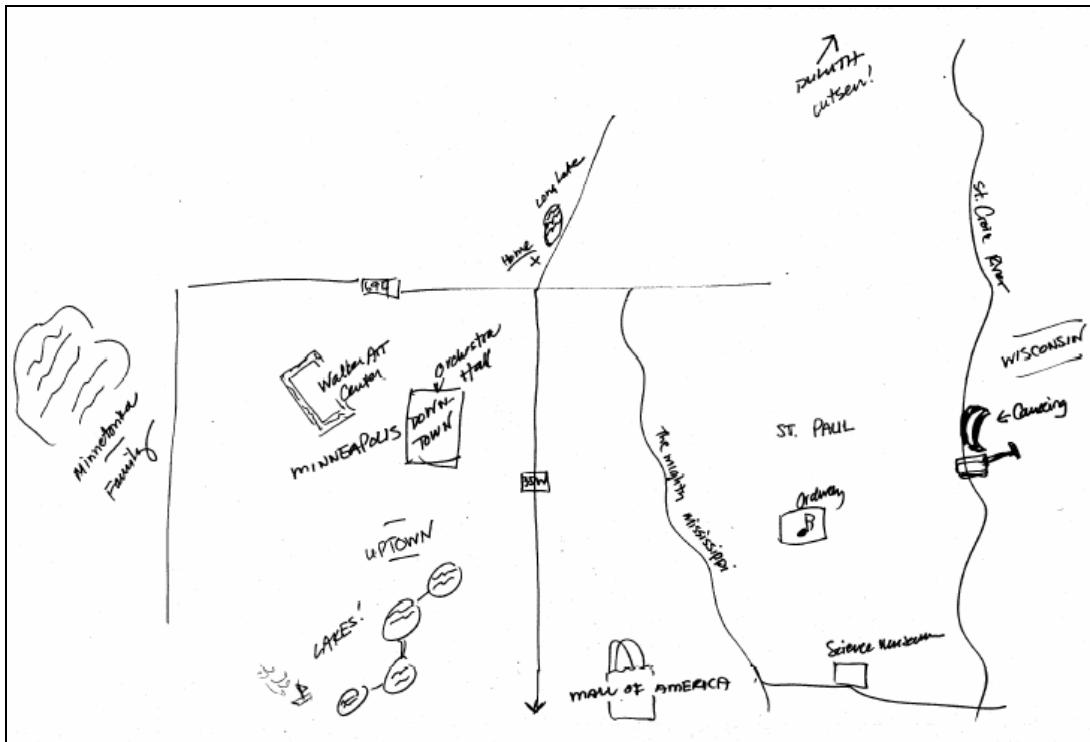
Minneapolis



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place



Interpretation

The first map shows the entire state of Minnesota, not just Minneapolis. This respondent marked his heritage in the family farm down in the southwest corner of the state, as well as a big lake for relaxation Up North. In the southeast the Mayo Clinic is a source of pride.

The four seasons are listed just below a cross of faith. Also listed are the Minnesota Twins and the Vikings. The axis is the Mississippi River.

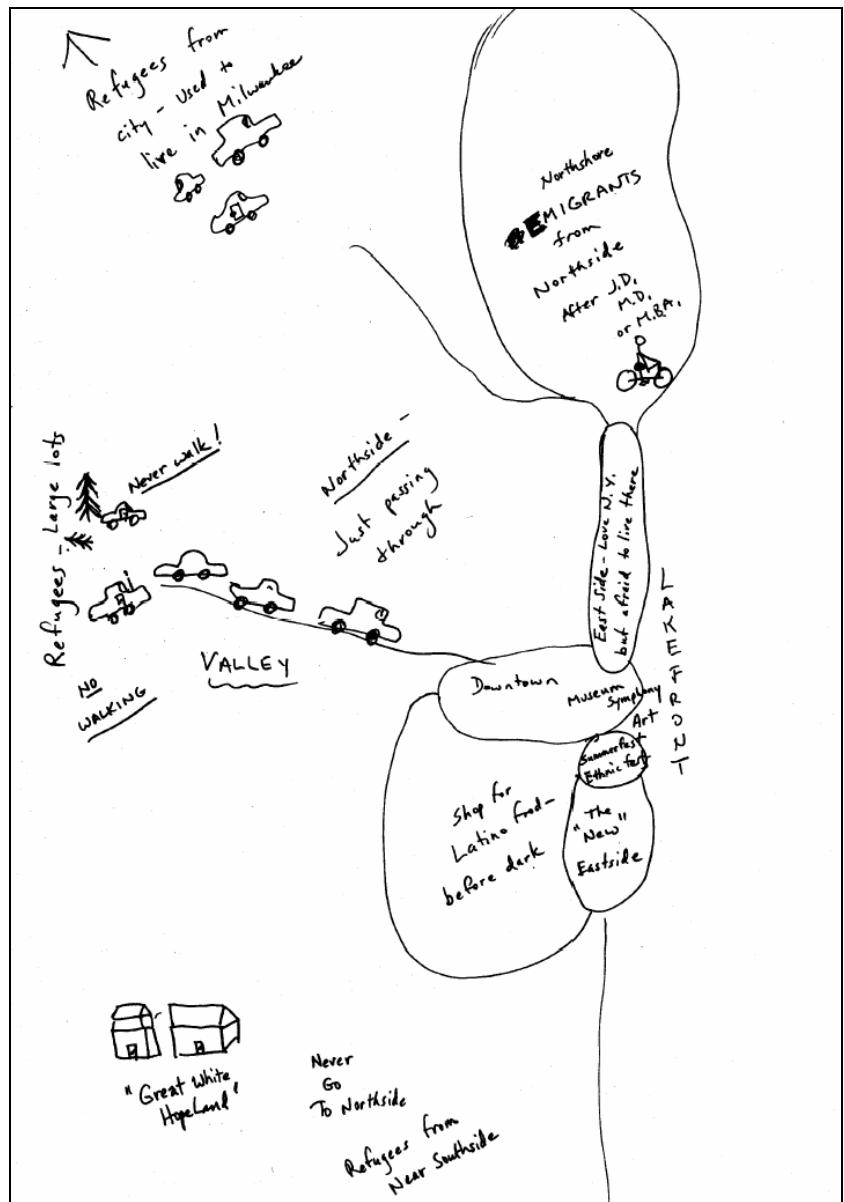
The second map also shows the state of Minnesota and the Mississippi. Across the northland there are farms, hunting, the Rez, lakes and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. One KNOW listener said that the BWCA wilderness is the “soul” of Minnesota.

On this state-wide scale, the Guthrie Theater stands out in the Cities, as does the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

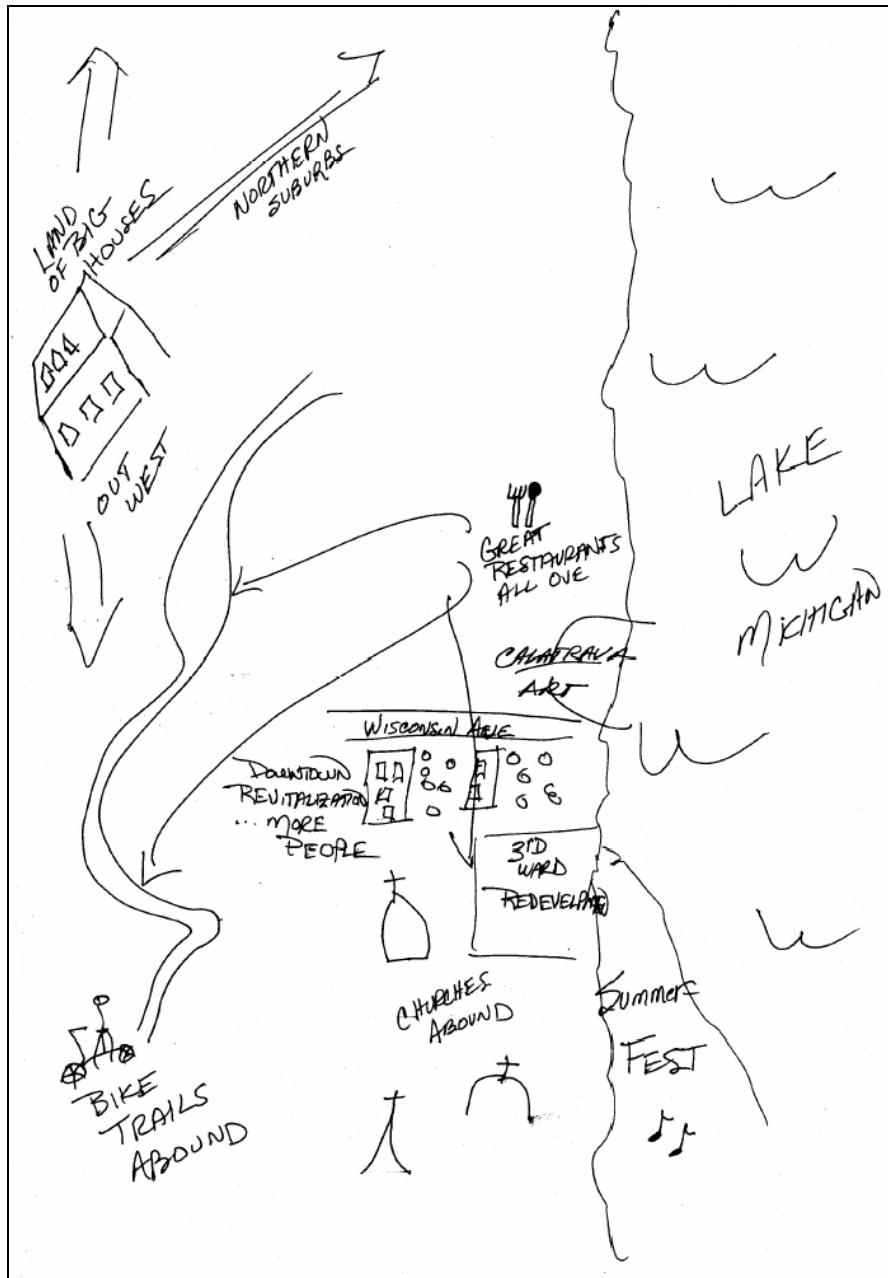
The third map is a close-up of Minneapolis and St Paul. This livable metro offers lakes as well as the Walker, Orchestra Hall and the science museum.

A Sense of Place

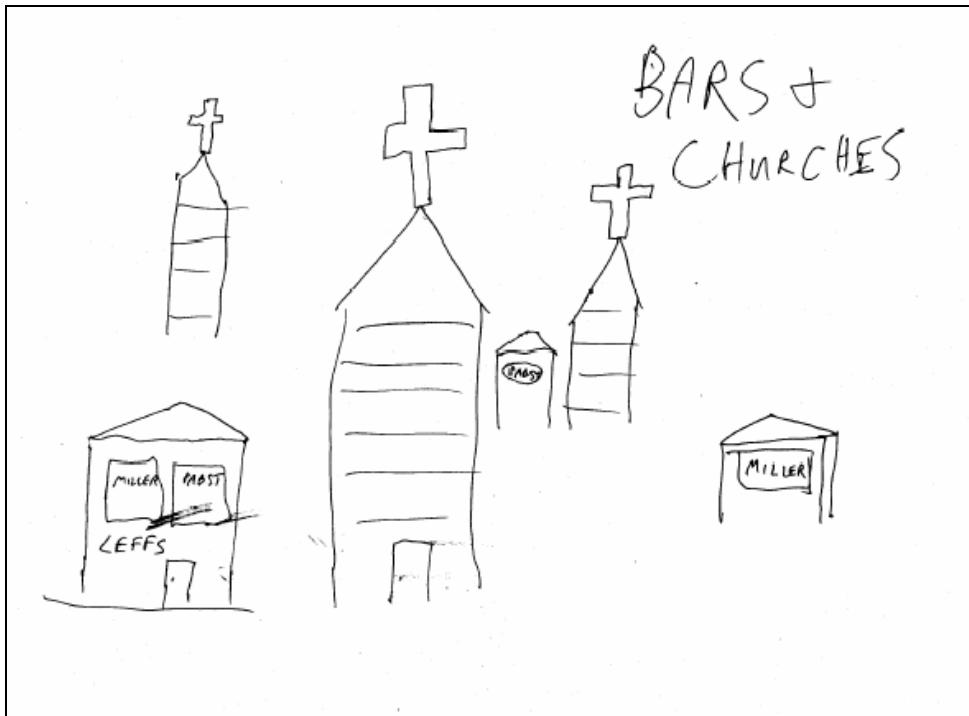
Milwaukee



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place



Interpretation

The first map of Milwaukee shows the segregation of race and class.

At the upper left corner is an arrow heading out—suburban refugees who used to live in Milwaukee. A line of cars also heads west out of the city towards trees and large suburban lots.

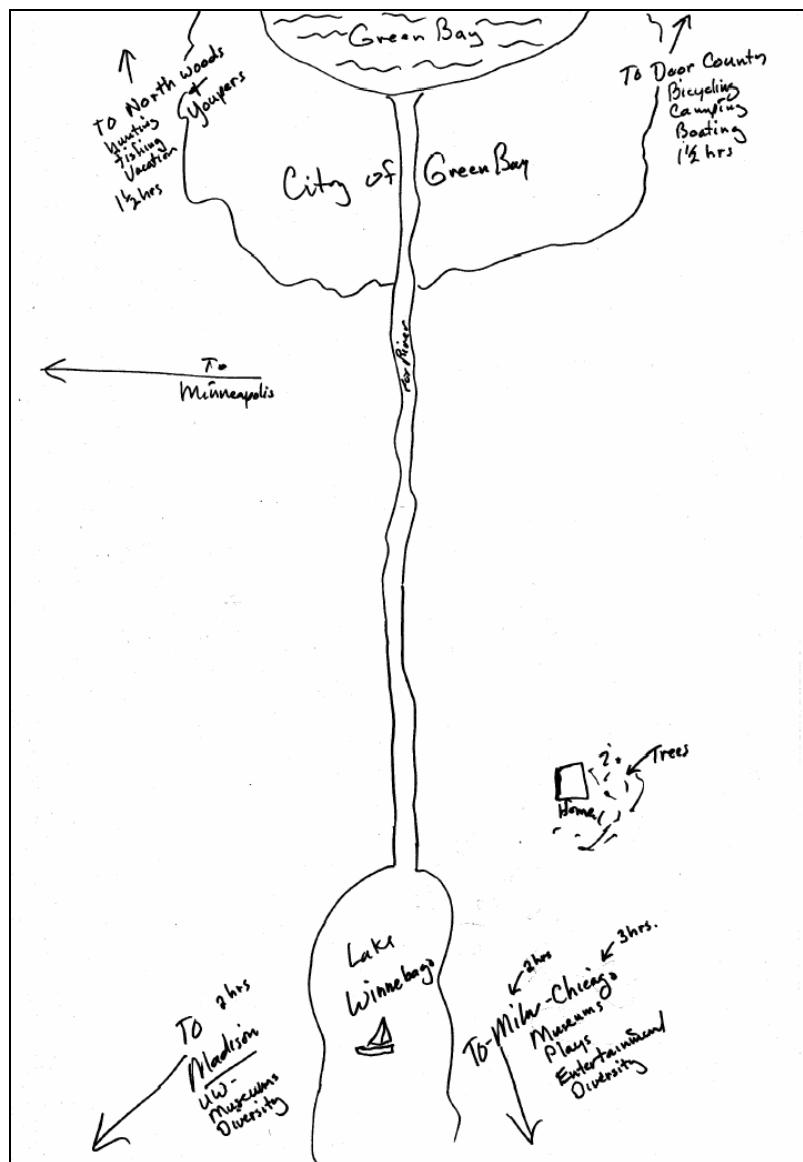
The city's Northside (high crime, black) is just for passing through. The Mexican area southwest of downtown is where public radio listeners can shop for Latino food—before dark. But you can ride your bike along Lake Michigan in the safe northern suburbs full of JD, MD or MBA degrees.

The second map shows some hope for Milwaukee, including downtown revitalization and the redevelopment of the trendy Third Ward. On the lake we see the art museum's famous Calatrava. But aside for the churches that abound in old Southside neighborhoods, other residential areas of the city do not exist.

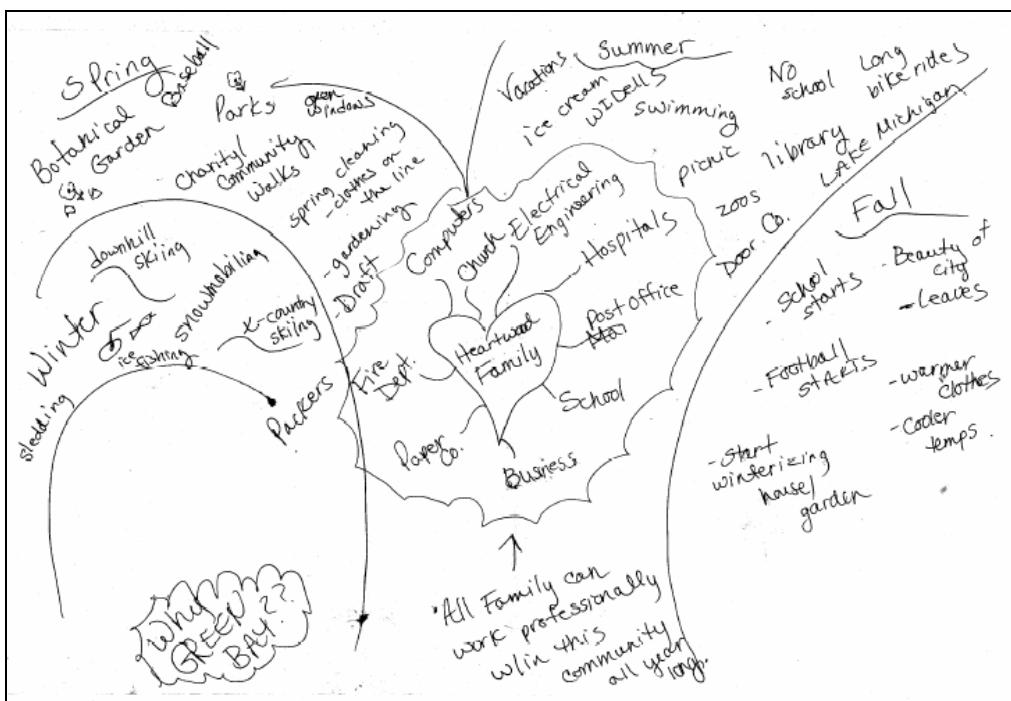
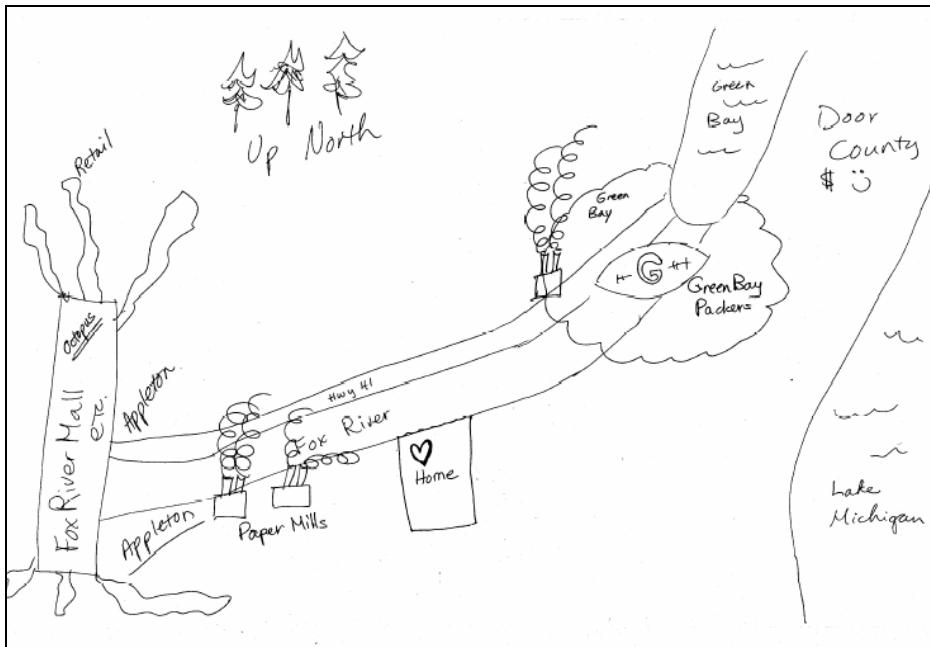
The third map consists of retrospective symbolism—bars and churches. In fact, WUWM has relatively few listeners who live in those neighborhoods.

A Sense of Place

Green Bay



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place

Interpretation

The first map of Green Bay shows the strategic centrality of the Fox River which gave the city its history and still supports its economy.

The city itself has no detail, rather there are arrows heading out to significant places like the Northwoods only 1 ½ hours away for hunting and fishing, as well as Door County for bicycling, camping and boating. Towards the south there are directions to Madison and Milwaukee-Chicago for “diversity.”

The second map is also centered on the Fox River, although there is a landmark within the city itself—the Green Bay Packers.

Up North and Door County are attractive destinations. Also large on this map is the Fox River Mall in Appleton, a more affluent city than Green Bay. Home is marked by a loving heart, located on the river between the paper mills.

The third map is conceptual and titled Why Green Bay?

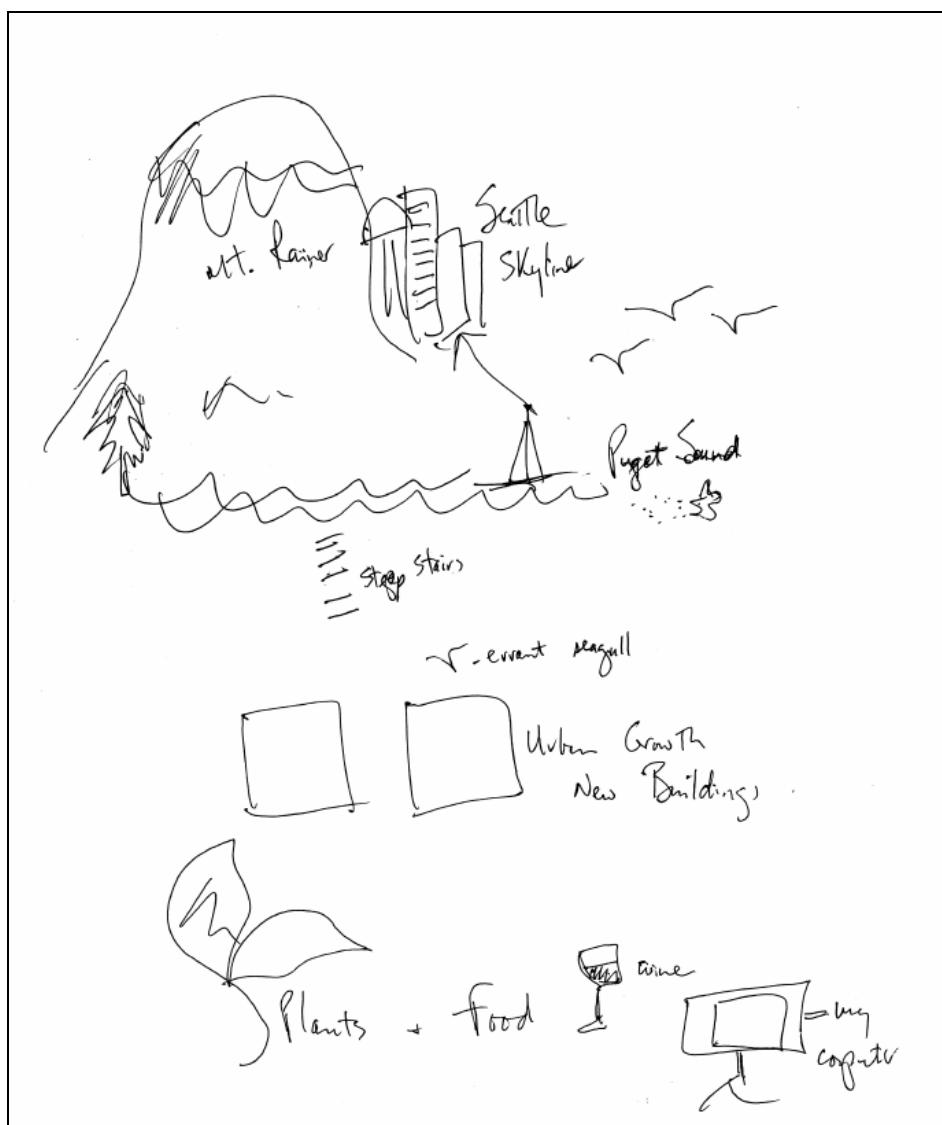
At the center is a heart for family. Around the family is a ring of employment opportunities including hospitals, the paper company, school and the fire department. All of the family can work professionally within this community.

Beyond the family and employment, there are the seasons. Spring, for example, means gardening, baseball and charity walks. Fall means the start of school and football.

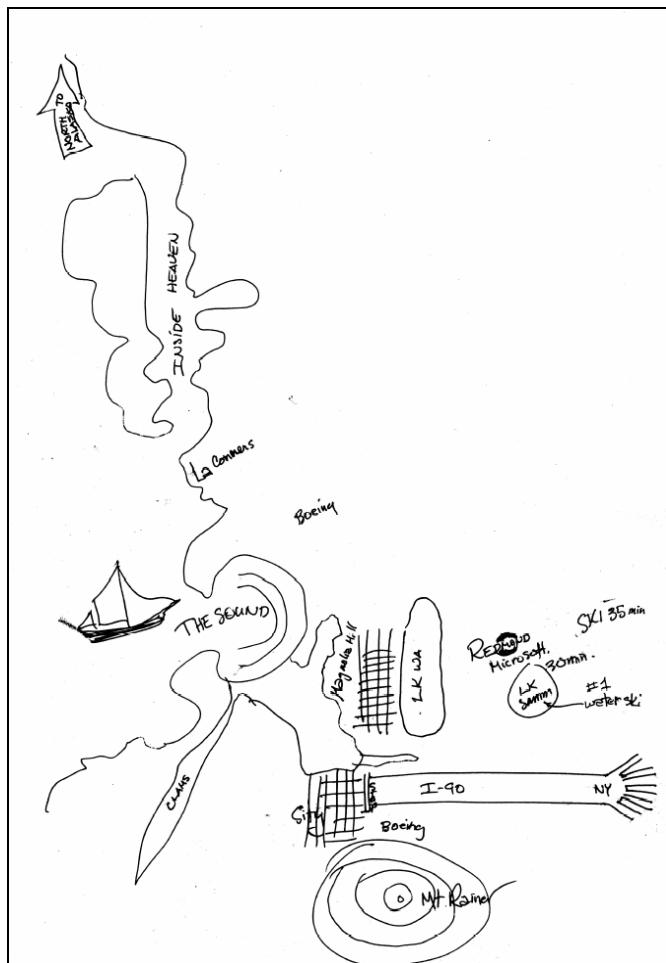
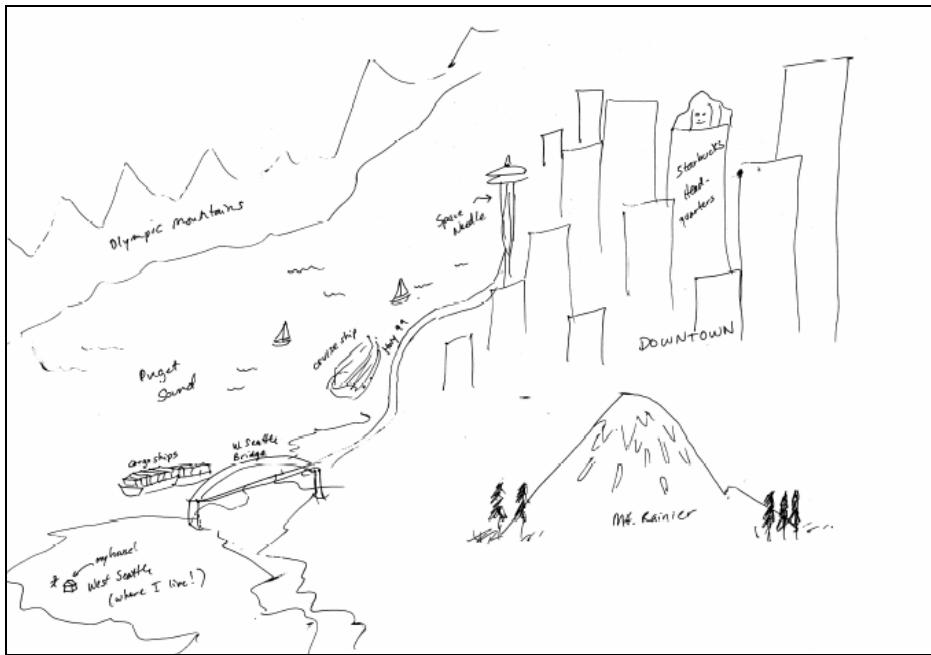
All three of the Green Bay maps project happiness, fulfillment.

A Sense of Place

Seattle



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place

Interpretation

The first map of Seattle is dominated by Mt Rainier from its snowy peak to the waves, gulls and sailboats on Puget Sound. Thus nature is the beautiful setting for Seattle's skyline.

This map also includes conceptual elements that sum up the public radio lifestyle as plants, food, wine and a computer.

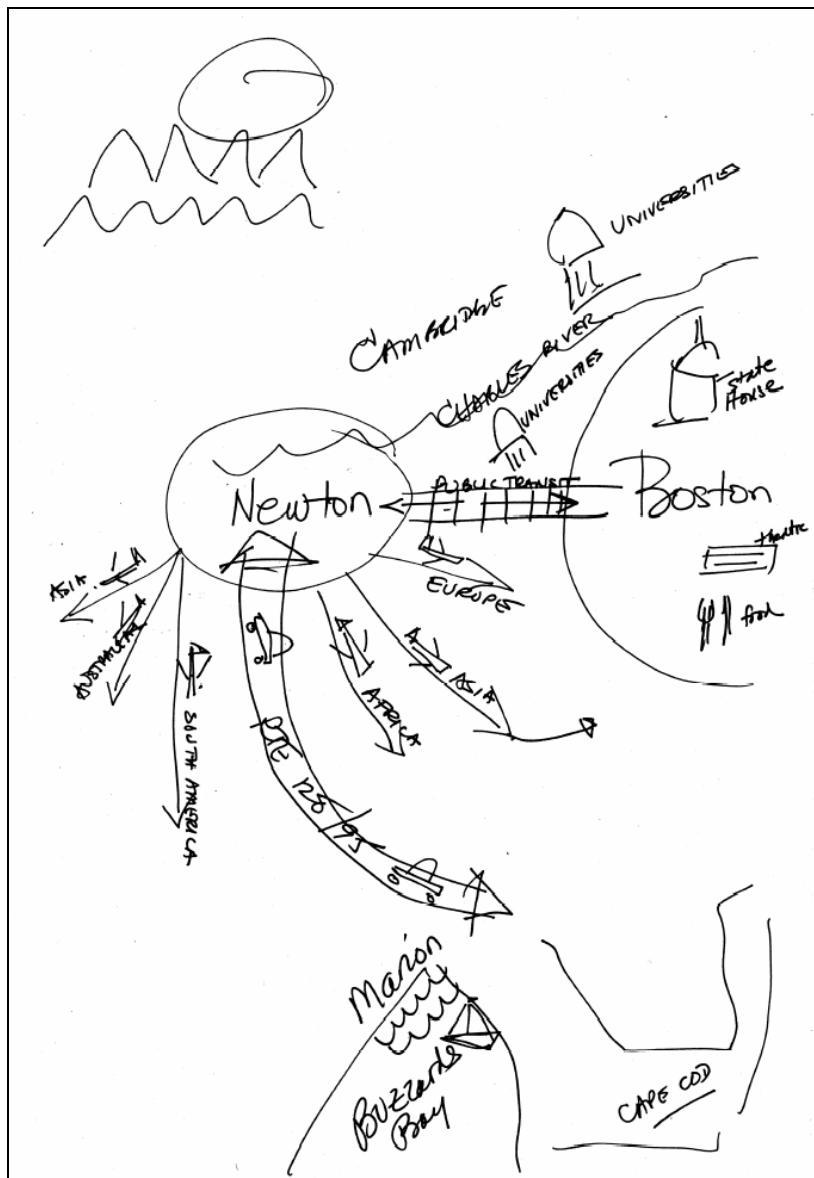
The second map also features Mt Rainier as well as sailboats on Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. The center of downtown is the headquarters for Starbucks. As in the first map, the skyline is set in beautiful nature.

The third map of Seattle features the ocean coastline including the Inside Heaven water route to Alaska. The high tech corporations that boost the economy are represented by Boeing and Microsoft. Heading east on Interstate 90 the next stop is New York.

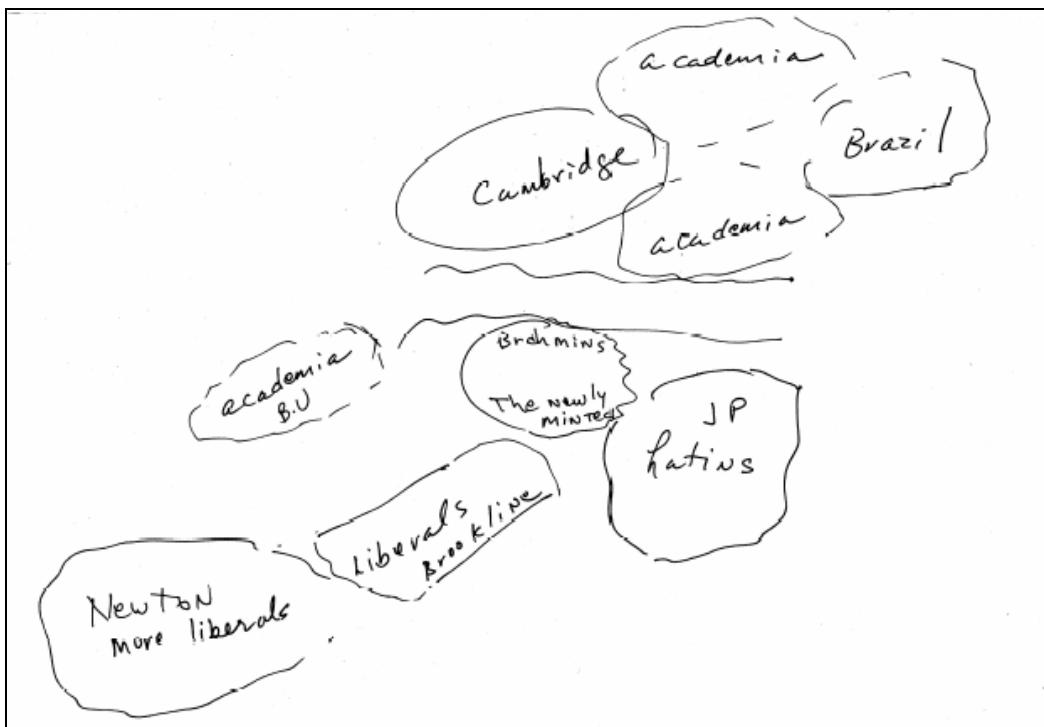
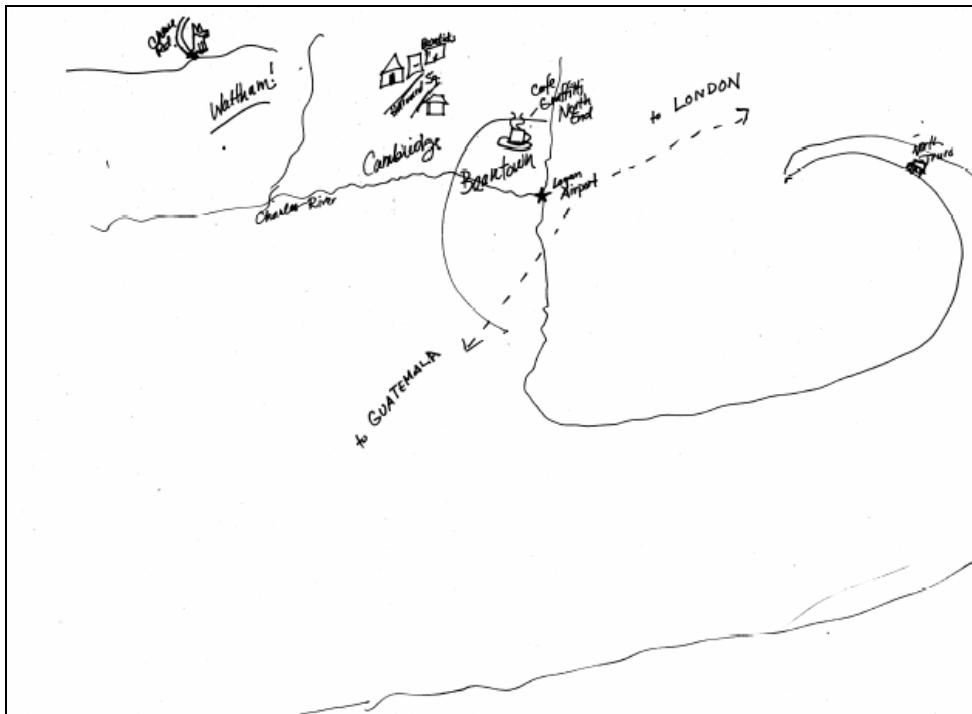
The beautiful Northwest environment and an economy based on scientific knowledge combine to make Seattle an Ecopian place, a modern city of gardens, coffee and computers—ideal for affluent, liberal public radio listeners.

A Sense of Place

Boston



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place

Interpretation

On the first map, Newton is as large as Boston. The old city contains no residential neighborhoods, just theater, food and the state house. Between Boston and Newton are the universities.

From Newton, apparently the center for highly civilized WBUR listeners, the arrows point to Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.

Yes, this respondent did illustrate two vacation destinations that are closer to Newton—the mountains and Cape Cod. But completely missing is any town or city in the state of Massachusetts west of Newton.

The second map also cuts off any part of Massachusetts west of Waltham, where we conducted the focus groups. A major feature of Boston itself is Logan Airport, with flights to London and Guatemala. There is one tiny car driving along the Cape.

Both the first and second maps give the impression that cosmopolitan WBUR listeners consider Newton, Cambridge or Waltham to be connected to London or Asia. Given their proud history of intellectualism, their place is the world.

The third map provides some relief through self-deprecating humor.

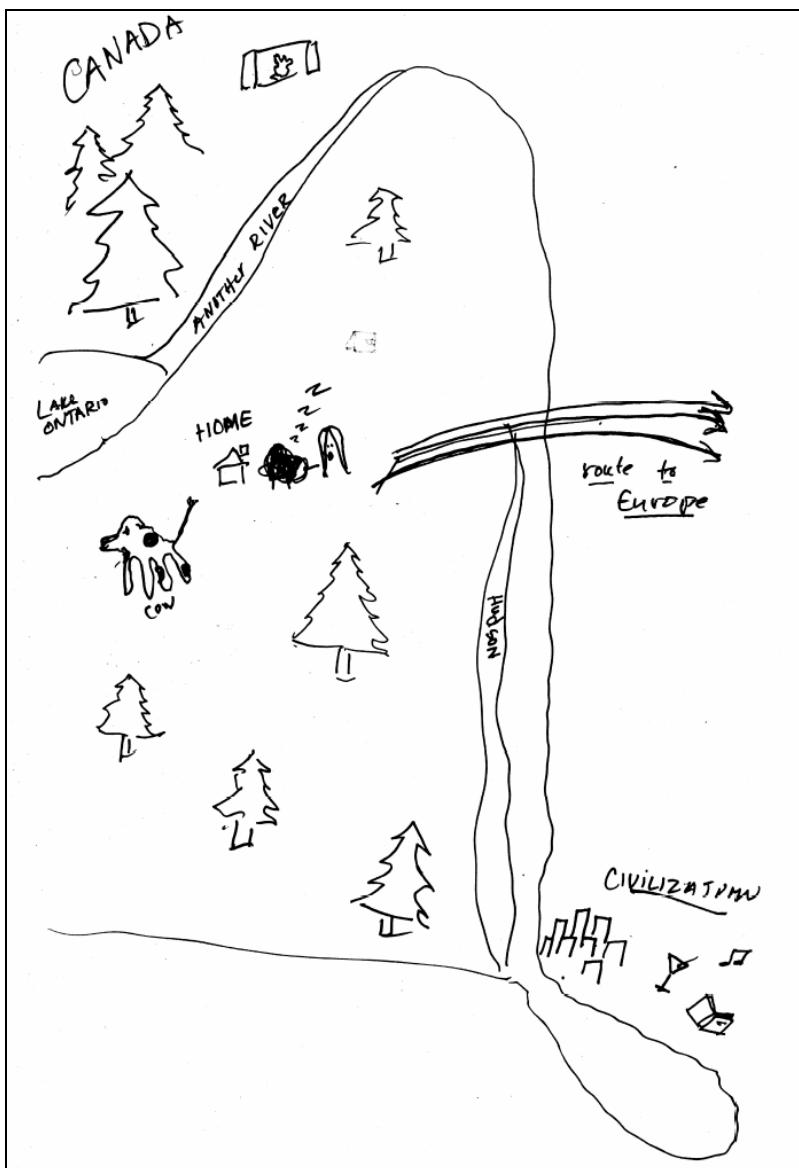
The Brahmins along the river are neighbors with the newly minteds. The liberals in Brookline are neighbors with more liberals in Newton. But this territory also ranges from Cambridge to Newton.

Boston does not appear, nor does any other part of New England.

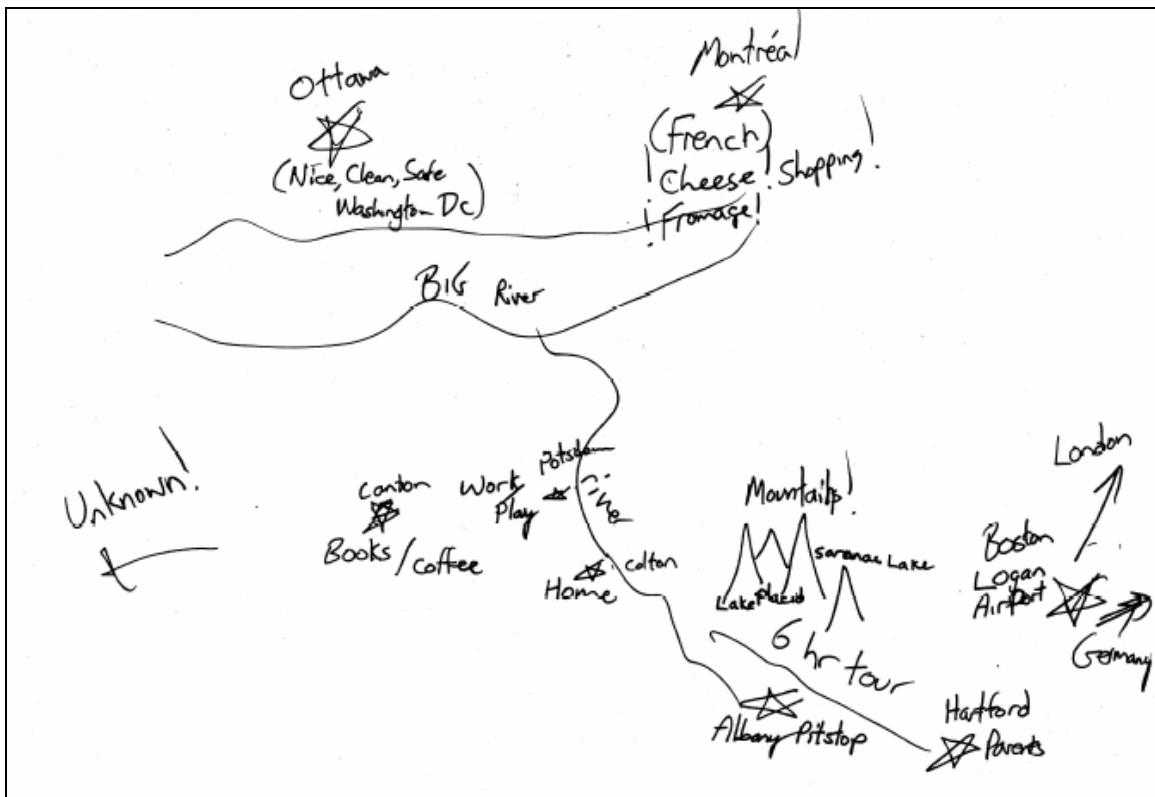
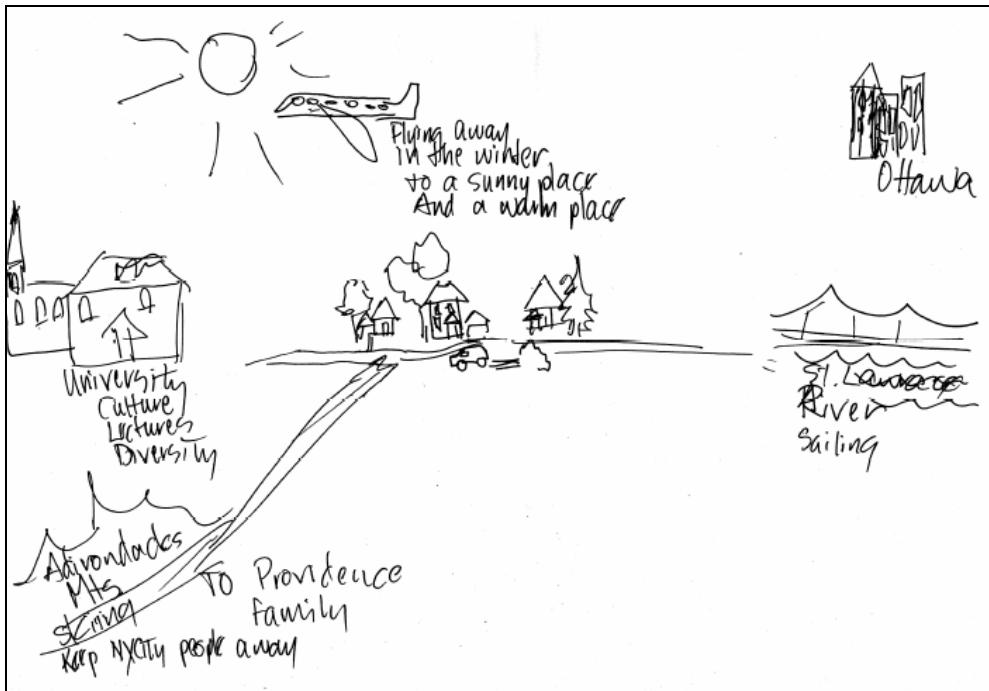
For WBUR listeners, place is mostly interior. In their minds they are the most intellectual and cosmopolitan of public radio listeners. Thus their mental geography may include London—another highly civilized city--rather than other parts of New England.

A Sense of Place

Canton



A Sense of Place



A Sense of Place

Interpretation

The first map from Canton shows a remote home surrounded by pine trees, a dairy cow and “another river” which constitutes the border with Canada, where there are more pine trees.

While a home way back in the woods might seem blissful, this WSLU listener depicted herself as snoring. She drew several arrows towards Europe and wrote the title “civilization” over the skyscrapers of New York City.

The second map is centered on a cute little village in the trees, but right above is an airliner flying away in the winter to a sunny, warm place.

On the perimeter are the city life of Ottawa, the St Lawrence River for sailing and the Adirondacks (“keep NY City people away”) for skiing. Closer to home the only landmark is the university, with its “culture, lectures and diversity.”

The third map identifies Canton as the place where a public radio listener may obtain the essentials of “books/coffee.” The rural area to the west of Canton is “unknown!” Albany is just a pit stop on the way to Hartford.

On the perimeter of this map, intellectuals may find civilization—Ottawa (like Washington, DC, except clean and safe), Montreal (cheese and shopping) and Logan Airport (gateway to London and Germany).

All three maps reflect the cosmopolitan perspective of public radio listeners, who live, clustered around a college, in a small town.

A Sense of Place

Length of Residence

In our review of the literature of Sense of Place we encountered the sensible notion that length of residence may be a factor. That is, the people who have lived all their lives in a particular place may have a different sense than those who recently moved in. Thus our fourth research question:

4. Does sense of place work differently for public radio listeners who are new to a community vs long time residents?

To answer that question we used a factorial design in our study. In each market, two focus groups were recruited from long time residents, while the other two groups consisted of short time residents.

We found very few differences, nothing actionable. Across the four groups in each market we documented the same dimensions of place and similar mental maps. Later, when we tested program examples, there were no differences.

NPR Babies

When we hired field services to recruit respondents, we ran into the reality of population dynamics.

In thriving upscale markets like Seattle and Minneapolis, it was easy to find short time residents. The unintended consequence was that the new arrivals were younger—mobile professionals from Gen X and Gen Y.

The younger respondents explained that they had grown up with public radio in the household, back in their home market. We called them “NPR Babies.”

What all respondents had in common was an appreciation of in depth news and information on public radio. The intelligence of public radio listeners and their love of learning have always mattered more than simple demographics, like length of residence.

A Sense of Place

TV, Newspapers and the Internet

After the dimensions of place and mental maps, the focus group agenda called for discussion of newspapers, television and other media that might compete with public radio for local coverage.

Recall our third set of research questions:

3. Which media reinforce a sense of place or a sense of placelessness? In particular, the Internet with its websites, downloads and streaming, also satellite radio and satellite television. What about national newspapers vs local papers? And radio, both commercial and public?

Before each group we rescreened potential respondents by administering a written questionnaire about media preferences.

Thanks for Coming!	
<p><u>Please fill out this brief questionnaire.</u></p>	
1.	Which <u>radio station</u> do you prefer for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____
2.	Which <u>radio station</u> would be your second for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____
3.	Which <u>TV or cable channel</u> do you prefer for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____
4.	Which <u>TV or cable channel</u> would be your second for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____
5.	Which <u>newspaper</u> do you prefer for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____
6.	Which <u>newspaper</u> would be your second for news and information ? WRITE IN: _____

The main purpose of the rescreener was to make sure that our respondents used the public radio station as their first or second choice. The rescreener also served as a basis for group discussion on the value of competing media.

A Sense of Place

Television

We found that local television newscasts deliver minimal value to public radio listeners. Typically the newscasts are dismissed as sensationalism because of their emphasis on crime, fires, accidents and live breaking local news.

In fact, when asked for the “TV or cable channel” they preferred for news and information, many of our respondents wrote down a national network.

The table below shows the first preference for TV news and information as written down by respondents in four of our 36 focus groups.

Seattle Women Group 1	Boston Men Group 2	Flagstaff Women Group 3	Milwaukee Men Group 4
5	CSPAN	PBS	MPTV
CNN	WBZ	Don't watch TV news	MPTV
Ch 9	CNN	None	WISN 12 ABC
CNN	CBS 4	CNN	Fox
KING	2	Link TV	CNN
KING 5	CPB – Public TV	CNN Headlines	CNN
Channel 9	Fox	Ch2 local NBC	WTMJ Ch 4 NBC
KCTS 9	Fox	NBC	CNN
NW Cable News	Channel 9	Ch2 KNAZ	?
CNN	CNN	NBC	PBS
	PBS	Don't watch TV	10
		MSNBC	MSNBC
			CNN

In a Seattle focus group of ten women, three listed CNN as their first TV news preference. Three others listed the PBS station KCTS channel 9. Only three women listed KING TV 5, the dominant commercial station in the market.

In a Boston group of eleven men, three listed CNN or CSPAN. Three others listed the PBS station WGBH channel 2. Only two listed WBZ TV 4.

A Sense of Place

In a group of twelve Flagstaff women, four listed the commercial station KNAZ TV2. Three of these women don't watch any TV news. Two prefer CNN and one MSNBC. One wrote down Link TV, an obscure digital channel that carries Democracy Now.

In a group of Milwaukee men, the market's long time leader WTMJ TV 4 earned a single vote. But the national news channel CNN was listed by four men. Another four preferred PBS TV 10.

Interpretation

Across the nine markets we did find a few exceptions, such as the relative strength of WRAL TV in Raleigh. But our general finding was that public radio listeners find minimal value in local television newscasts.

When public radio listeners turn on the television in search of news, they are more likely to seek world news on channels like CNN, BBC and PBS.

After all, highly educated people are light TV viewers to begin with, and the short, sensational, superficial stories on local TV newscasts project the very opposite of public radio's Core Values.

In television, as in their use of radio, our listeners always seek out wider perspectives. Cable systems and direct satellite provide the global channels.

A Sense of Place

Newspapers

We were not surprised that public radio listeners find minimal value in local TV newscasts. However, we were surprised at the way our respondents criticized their local newspapers—even local papers that they read on a regular basis.

“You only got two of them, one and a half of them, you’ve got the Review Journal, which in my personal opinion is a right-wing reactionary paper with an agenda, and you’ve got the Las Vegas Sun, that is now part of the RJ as part of an operating agreement. Neither one of them is even a poor newspaper. One of the newspapers is fit to line the bottom of a parakeet cage, the other isn’t.”

-- Las Vegas

“I have no problem with the N&O for sort of standard news stuff, but to really get a feel for stories I actually think that the Independent out of Durham, the weekly paper, I really like. It seems they have only two stories in the whole paper but they’re like five page stories, and I feel like I understand.”

“But something like the nuclear power plant here, they’ll do a huge ten page story on that, the Independent. They can do hard news, and you won’t get that from the News and Observer.”

“They play it safe, just like most of the newspapers I read. I travel a lot around the country and usually pick up the local paper. I find to be honest that most of them seem to have the same slant universally, and that they all tend to play it safe.”

“I read it because it’s local, it’s what’s in the box for 25 cents.”

-- Raleigh

A Sense of Place

“I read the Wall Street Journal, the Chicago Trib, the New York Times, the Waukesha Freeman and the Journal-Sentinel. Because of my interest in business, my interest in what’s going on in the world, those publications serve my needs greater than the local papers. If I’m looking for a national and world view on business and economics, the military, condition of our world, I’m going to turn to the Wall Street Journal or New York Times. But because I want to know what is going on in our city, for 15 minutes I can quickly scan, quickly scan the Milwaukee Journal.”

“I just don’t find much content in the Milwaukee paper. It feels like more gossipy and little funny stories, things like that. They seem to be wanting to exploit the emotional sides of things. They’re not analytical, not investigative.”

“I would rate it as mediocre, non-offensive. I don’t think they do real in depth reporting. I think like a lot of commercial, well it’s a business and they have to sell advertising, and any newspaper really, unless you have a real upfront political agenda, you have to very carefully walk the line between offending people and selling newspapers. But I do read the Journal every day. I grew up in the area and I always read it. Is it a great newspaper, no. But it does cover local things fairly well.”

“I don’t want to say dry, they’re endeavoring to give you some facts, and it does lack depth. Joe Blow robbed this place yesterday, police are investigating. And that’s it. Just the basics of what’s going on. There’s very little in depth, and I hardly ever read it, I’ll see it laying around at work and I will pick it up.”

-- Milwaukee

“I read the Press Gazette but that’s mostly to see what’s going on in terms of movies, social things, what they’re having at the Widener Center. But routinely I’ll go to the BBC or Canadian news. Chicago Tribune I’ll look at for some of the national news, but to be honest I don’t find most of the news media in this country to be honest—it’s so biased it’s ridiculous.”

A Sense of Place

“You get three pages devoted to the Green Bay Packers or sports in some form, and then one insert on world events. For me it’s disturbing, you get the impression that nothing else is important. I go on line to read because I’m a news junky. I read Reuters, sometimes the Associated Press, on a regular basis CNN and Reuters. You still get limited information but at least there’s more variety than what you get in the local newspaper.”

-- Green Bay

“I think that the Seattle Times is a rag. I buy it on Sunday for the TV guide and then I throw it away. It’s a rag, it doesn’t have real news. It’s opinionated, it’s not real news.

“It’s always something that shallow and meaningless on the front of the local papers, either one of them, the Times or the PI. I would go with the PI if I had to.”

-- Seattle

Interpretation

Public radio listeners, who always value a global perspective, criticize their local daily newspapers because they provide minimal coverage of national and world news. The national and world news stories that do appear in the local paper are picked up from sources like the New York Times or Reuters—which you can now access directly through the Internet.

The local news itself is often perceived to be lacking in analysis or depth. The paper may be more useful for its listings of movies, concerts and other events, along with services including the obituaries, rather than journalistic coverage.

With reference to Sense of Place, we found that local metro newspapers enjoy no particular advantage just because they originate from the home market.

A Sense of Place

Internet

In each focus group we asked respondents to talk about their use of newspapers and television channels but in the discussion, as the Internet popped up, the distinction between print and broadcast vanished.

We found that public radio listeners use the Internet to seek out trusted sources of news and information. Websites operated by the New York Times (a newspaper) or the BBC (a broadcaster) are functionally equivalent.

“I do read on line, the BBC, well that’s not a newspaper, and the Guardian, from Manchester England. I want to get a different perspective on the world news than the American media.”

“It’s the only major paper. I very rarely buy it but I often look at it on line. But it annoys me because there is no national coverage or international coverage. There’s the occasional AP story that they pick up a story from the New York Times, the LA Times, the Chicago Tribune, one of the major papers. I buy those papers more often than I buy the Journal.”

-- Milwaukee

“I don’t open a newspaper anymore. Yahoo is my home page, and all of the stories that are going on in the world are right there. We used to get the paper daily, but now when I want news I just go on the Internet.”

-- Minneapolis

“For local stuff I read the Post Crescent in Appleton. I only look at the local paper for local news for the obituaries and for business, what’s going on because that pertains to my life. For world news, for news of the United States, I go on line or the Wall Street Journal. For world I like to look at Canadian broadcasting or the BBC on the computer. A vision of what’s going on from an outside perspective.”

-- Green Bay

A Sense of Place

“You know I haven’t actually read a physical newspaper in months. I read the Star Tribune dot com every morning at work. I don’t ever pick up the paper. The news I use is the stuff that’s local and the more perceptual stuff or the stuff that I’m more aspiring to read is what I might find on the New York Times dot com, or like I traveled in Sydney so sometimes it’s fun to go to the Sydney Morning Herald on the computer, just to see how they’re reporting international news, but that’s only when I have really nothing to do at work.”

-- Minneapolis

“I can pretty much get all of my news within 35 seconds by looking on line. I’ll go to the local papers, they have their on line versions, if I really want local news. But the major stories you want to hear aren’t offered or they aren’t that interesting. The New York Times is more worldly, a more global perspective of things, or some of the stories themselves are a little more interesting.”

“If you want the news locally you can usually get it in under a minute somewhere on line. I usually go to KOMO News 4 on line because it doesn’t require a log in, you can grab it quick, look at the news.”

-- Seattle

Interpretation

It has become so easy to use the Internet that metro newspapers have to compete directly against world class media. Bypass is a concern.

When you can easily access the Guardian, why waste time with the local paper?

Price points are virtually zero. Why pay 50 cents for the paper?

A Sense of Place

Value of Localism

In the last decade nearly all of the growth in public radio has resulted from listening to network news and information programming. At the same time, the rise of the Internet and satellite radio has raised the possibility that active NPR listeners might bypass local stations by going directly to the source.

In recent years NPR stations, especially those that have adopted a news and information format, have increased their investments in local showcase programs. Their belief is that local production has the potential to connect the station to the community, paying long term dividends.

Keep in mind:

- This particular study was not designed to quantify the economics of local programming.
- Within this study, we cannot say whether the economics of local programming are realistic now or sustainable in the future.

For quantitative research see studies like Audience 2010. This study was qualitative so that we could document how public radio listeners evaluate local news and information programming.

Promise vs Performance

From Audience 98 and the Public Radio Tracking Study we know that a strong predictor of listener support is personal importance. Listeners send money when they realize that public radio programming has become personally important in their lives.

Two of our research questions addressed the importance of local programming:

5. At present, do public radio listeners perceive their station as providing a local sense of place or mainly a conduit for the network service?
6. Does the current news and information programming on their station provide a sense of place? Is that a significant value? Does it stimulate listener support?

A Sense of Place

Across nine markets, we found that listeners are generally content with the proportion of local vs network news and information programming on their station. They are happy that their station carries a mix of both.

- However, the actual performance of local news and information programming too often fails to deliver on its promise.

We found that locally produced news and information must rise to network standards and resonate with Core Values, otherwise it is not valuable to listeners. Local production enjoys no starting advantage because it is local.

Both the promise and performance of local programming are documented in the following verbatims.

A Sense of Place

The Station for Local

In each focus group the moderator asked the respondents for their recommendation. Which radio station is the best source of local news?

Nearly everyone recommended the public radio station. This finding should be understood in the context of how respondents were recruited. Most of them were core listeners.

Yet their recommendation does not mean that all is well:

They were saying that relative to the commercial stations in town, the public station was a good source of local news and information.

The following verbatims document that perception as expressed relatively early in the focus groups, before we played any airchecks of local programming:

“I have KNPR on all the time because of its national news and reports and stories and commentaries, that’s why I have it on all the time, but I get my local news that way.”

“They have a lot of really good local spots. 3 to 5 minute spots, one on traveling rural Nevada, I can’t even think of the name of them.”

“A couple things on the history of Nevada, they’re what I call soft news, but they’re fun. They don’t have a lot of local hard news. It’s a nice break from the hard news.”

“Once they were running a series, the Las Vegas I remember, which was really neat, people who lived here like a million years, and they told how it used to be, and some of those stories were fascinating.”

-- Las Vegas

A Sense of Place

“KNAU does have some local stuff. Every hour, and when there are local events they do cover them in depth. If there are elections, local or state, they will have in depth interviews.”

“I really enjoy, for example, the spots they have on the environment. Because of the place that we live, exactly. If you were two years ago wondering about the bark beetle, they would have a spot on that. If I lived in Kalamazoo or something I wouldn’t care, but I’m here.”

“It’s a local station. I think it’s their attention to local community issues, needs, and things that are relevant to people who live here. They have the issues that they do, programming on the reservation, they’ve got any sort of political as we approach the elections, they give adequate equal coverage to all groups.”

“The outdoors, the Grand Canyon, stuff like that. There were three major reports, eight minutes apiece, on the reallocation of permits to run the river. They have the only reporter in the state house who works for public radio, who will do about six minutes a day.”

-- Flagstaff

“It’s ten percent local but you don’t get all the rapes and fires and stabbings. You get real news, like what’s going on in the whole state.”

“Bigger things that are influencing everyone’s lives, as opposed to what happened on the street. WUNC does the larger kind of state-wide issues.”

“I think they do enough stuff daily, but once or twice a week they’ve have an in depth story. A month ago they did the closing down in Charlotte. They spent a good 20 minutes talking about the entire development of the area and the impact, that’s the kind of stuff I appreciate.”

-- Raleigh

A Sense of Place

“Their local news is thorough, it’s always there, it runs all the time.”

“Coverage of local news and national news through NPR. Minnesota Public Radio gives you a full view of what’s going on in the state, in the communities, in the United States, in Canada and the world.”

“I think out of all the news that I could possibly get including the paper KNOW does a better job of reporting valuable news of what’s actually going on as opposed to reading the paper. The paper, I read it but they have this man lost his dog a couple weeks ago, and I’m like come on, can you do real things. KNOW is not trivial news.”

-- Minneapolis

“I listen to it all day long and they do both. Primarily the morning format is local interspersed with every hour on the hour NPR international and national. I think the local coverage is great, because they bring in a lot of people in, they bring actually the community in. There’s a lot of discussion about monorail, yes or no. Taxation issues, what’s going on with bands, there’s a program on at 2pm that talks about arts in the Seattle area. So I think their local coverage, regional coverage is quite good.”

“I think it’s a pretty good mix. Issues of regional politics are not terribly interesting to me. I vote and I vote on issues that I care about. But I don’t want to sit and listen. What’s going on overseas or what’s going on in Iraq seems a lot more important to me.”

-- Seattle

Interpretation

Public radio listeners say that they appreciate the mix of local and network news programming on their station. We heard that even though the stations in our study present local programming in widely varying proportions.

Our respondents perceive the public radio station to be better than any of the commercial radio stations for local coverage that is of value.

Now let’s look at typical production—talk shows, showcase hours, newscasts.

A Sense of Place

The Problem with Talk Shows

Aside from local newscasts and produced news features that are inserted into NPR newsmagazines, much of the local information programming on public radio stations consists of talk shows.

We found that listeners distinguish between two types of talk shows:

An interview program like Fresh Air is recorded before it is aired. While the conversation may sound spontaneous, it has been edited for quality control. The anchor does not open the lines for listeners to call in.

A call in program like Talk of the Nation may have a plan, but it goes on the air live. If the anchor stumbles, we hear that. Even if listener calls are screened, opening the phone line is always a crapshoot.

We found that listeners are sensitive to the two different types of talk shows, with consequences for the personal importance of local programming.

“The person being interviewed had credentials. Later they said they were going to take calls from the audience. [Do you think that’s a good idea?] I never or rarely think so. I mean I like the person to be interviewed has good credentials, and the person with their cell phone pulled over to the side rarely does.”

“The format’s bad. Don’t set up callers to argue with the guest. If you’re going to have a discussion you ought to have two or three qualified points of view. I would rather listen to that than someone who is sitting in their kitchen.”

“You’re just getting entertaining callers and listening to this crazy who really doesn’t make sense, and you’re not really learning anything.”

-- Milwaukee

“I’m not saying they should have no call-ins but for a while I lived in the western part of the state and listened to Minnesota Public Radio, and they have a whole lot less call-ins.”

A Sense of Place

“I was just gonna say the one thing that I don’t like, as much as it’s nice to have conversation, sometimes I wish that they would just not take any callers and let the guests talk a little more. I don’t really want to hear what my neighbor thinks, I can go across the street and ask my neighbor. I want to hear what their guests have to say because they have so much to offer, they’re such interesting guests.”

-- Green Bay

“He has a little difficulty staying on point sometimes. The good side of that is he brings in local citizenry, local listeners, and experts on both sides of the story, a nice depth, and you get a broad view. But sometimes the listeners who call in can set him adrift on another point and goes off on that tangent.”

“I really enjoyed his intro and I was dreading the moment the conversation started. Because I always turn it off. Because I feel that it’s kind of a lazy way to do the news. That guy gave us a whole lot of information in the space of a minute or two, and as soon as people start talking and he starts talking its very repetitious, often they don’t have too much to say.”

-- Seattle

Interpretation

A few years ago NPR Research presented an interesting segmentation study of the potential audience for news and information on public radio.

One segment consists of Intellectual Challenge Demanders who use radio as a “forum to learn” and seek “engaging content of the highest quality.” They are “very liberal” and “avid NPR supporters.”

A different segment consists of Personal Companionship Demanders who use radio “as a good friend” and for “social connectivity.” They have less education and lower income.

We found that the problem with live talk shows is not just the problem of quality control. The live talk format itself tends to alienate an important segment of the audience.

A Sense of Place

Showcase Programs

Stations like KNPR, WSLU or WUWM that commit to a daily hour of local programming have to come up with 5 hours a week. KUOW in Seattle and KNOW in Minneapolis endeavor to produce more than 20 hours per week.

Respondents told us that sometimes the local programming is great, but other times the performance does not match the promise.

“I really like it because it’s focused on local or state. They a lot of times get the people who are actually in the story, not just people talking about people in the story, so you get it from the horse’s mouth.”

“It often is interesting, but sometimes it’s terribly boring. Just some really boring topics. They’re doing a lot better. When they started I thought they were quite boring, and they’re getting a lot better, so I’m tolerating it better.”

“I like the idea and I was very happy when they started it. It seemed like it was a great opportunity to present North Carolina, and it’s a matter of the picking topics. Sometimes they’re wonderful and sometimes I’m embarrassed, it’s just a matter if they get it right. I don’t know what their idea is, but it seems like it’s wonderful to have that opening when you can spend an hour talking about what’s going on in the state, but it’s a hit or miss.”

-- Raleigh

“We’re not that big a market, you don’t have that much news.”

“Isn’t it about quality though? If it were good quality programming. If there was a better quality local show than national show, I think people would listen.”

A Sense of Place

“When I listen it is either really hit or miss with her. Like I will really enjoy the topic or the people she has on, or it will completely turn me off. It will be something that I could care less about or have no knowledge of. I’ll usually listen for a minute and when I’ve made my mind up, I’ll change the station.”

-- Minneapolis

“I think it’s uneven. I’ll often listen just before the 10 o’clock break and see what they’re going to have on and decide whether it’s worth having it on.”

“I listen to see what’s going to be on.”

-- Milwaukee

“The topics just don’t seem to me that interesting.”

“It’s kind of hit or miss, sometimes they’ll have a really interesting guest, then a classical musician who just doesn’t interest me, but sometimes they have interesting guests. It just depends.”

“They’re kind of limited to the people who are passing through town, in their defense. They’re sort of working with what they have.”

-- Seattle

Interpretation

While our respondents generally like the idea of local coverage, the showcase programs too often fail to deliver—even on the selection of topics. Across nine markets, we kept hearing verbatims like “hit or miss” ... “mixed” ... “inconsistent” with reference to the performance of local programming.

Based on the program examples we played in the groups, we cannot say that the stations with greater resources invested in local programming tended to achieve greater consistency of performance.

A Sense of Place

Local Newscasts

Newscasts are the most common form of local news and information produced by public radio stations. Eight of the nine stations in our study produce local newscasts within Morning Edition. Green Bay's WHID, which does not clear Morning Edition, carries a state-wide newscast produced in Madison.

We found that our respondents value local newscasts if they offer more than the typical run through the headlines. Public radio listeners are looking for depth and intelligence, even within a short cutaway newscast.

“The negative I would put is the fact that you had a one and a half minute thing and you jammed three stories in. One of the features of public radio is they’re not time limited because they got to get a commercial in every three minutes, so if in fact that regional story on Utah was of interest or if they had more local stories, they could have had a five or ten or eight minute local newscast as needed. If you want the world in two minutes you listen to ABC radio news. They’ll put 15 stories in two minutes.”

-- Las Vegas

“I was interested in some of the stories but I actually checked out because she was reading too fast for me. It was just like reading from a news wire, covering the main details really fast. I didn’t get the sense that the reporter had any interest or was talking to me about it, it was just kind of throwing out a list of details.”

“It wasn’t so much a story as just a litany of facts. I found myself really having trouble following it, even though I was interested.”

“They could have brought in some human interest, like talk to somebody who works at the power plant. You would like to know, what if something did happen, how would that affect us? It’s good to know what’s happening and what the topics are, what the latest is, but maybe go a little bit more in depth and how it does affect us here.”

-- Flagstaff

A Sense of Place

“I think the two subjects were important to Minnesota transportation. You didn’t exactly know they were going there, and when it got beyond the introduction it kind of presented one perspective on each subject, and I was disappointed in that. I thought these were subjects that might deserve more information from all sides of the subject.”

“I generally find that the newscasts are so redundant during the day, they don’t change that much, and I do get a little bored. But I do like the in depth things because they talk about the issues comprehensively and I learn a lot from it. The news is important to get but I probably got it already from my newspaper in the morning.”

-- Minneapolis

“I appreciated the length of the item. It just strikes me as being a longer state news item than they typically. It was the Governor’s State of the State, so I understand why it was longer in this case, but I would like to see that kind of in depth reporting more often. More in depth than is average on WUWM.”

“Part of it is just the contrast to the national and world news where they get more into the story. I think it makes it all the more striking when they do their litany of local news stories and they really don’t bring in quotes and sound bites from commentators. They don’t do as long a story, you really notice it. But as somebody who is interested in what’s going on in the state, just getting the information, there’s really no—we talked about the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel—there aren’t a whole lot of sources for it, and I turn to WUWM for my hard news. Because I turn to WUWM for that kind of content I’d just like to hear more of it.”

“We got like the governor’s voice, we got the opposition’s voice. That was like two sides, I thought it was done. Then we got a third voice, Walmart. I was impressed by that. The story’s gone one deeper than I’m used to. It made me happy.”

-- Milwaukee

Interpretation

A simple prescription is that public radio listeners would rather have fewer stories, in relative depth, even within a cutaway newscast.

A Sense of Place

Values of Localism

Here is the ultimate research question that we addressed in this study:

7. If the station were to produce local news and information that was focused on Sense of Place, would such programming deliver greater value?

In other words, do local public radio stations enjoy a unique opportunity to deliver significant value to listeners?

- We found that producers working at local stations could sharpen their editorial judgment if they more clearly understood the listener's Sense of Place.
- But our listeners assign less value to a story that has been approached from a merely local perspective.

In fact, one program director who observed the groups concluded that “the bar is probably higher for local production.”

Going Forward

Focusing on the listener's Sense of Place could increase the personal importance of locally produced programming.

But focusing on Sense of Place will not save local news and information programming that fails to deliver essential Core Values such as depth, intelligence, authenticity, civility and a wider, even global perspective.

A Sense of Place

Core Values Revisited

As the last agenda item in Boston, the moderator asked the respondents to think back over the past 90 minutes. He pointed out that the discussion had kept returning to the concept of personal importance or value. The moderator asked the respondents to sum up what the group found to be valuable about public radio programming.

The respondents quickly summed up the same Core Values we have heard expressed over and over in previous studies.

Intellectual Depth

“It’s not sensational, it’s more intellectual. You get a lot of the facts, and different perspectives.”

“I like that you go in depth. They just don’t say that a suicide bomber went off, but they go into detail what happened. They cover the story for probably two or three minutes.”

“Kind of folksy people. There’s more substance to the story and they go into depth.”

“In depth, there are more additional details to the story, than just a five second sound bite. Makes you question, is there more to this story than what I’m being told?”

A Sense of Place

Civility and Compassion

“No one’s yelling at you, there’s no Rush Limbaugh.”

“With NPR and even with PBS with Jim Lehrer you don’t get all that screaming like on Fox and CNN, all the talk radio. It’s serious and people seem to know what they’re talking about. It’s not just people who want to be heard.”

“I think they add a certain amount of additional information that’s intelligent but it’s also sensitive, like for a while there when they were reporting about Iraq they were talking about this soldier who had died, and they told a sort of personal history about that person. But it was very sensitively done. It was well written, sensitive and respectful at the same time. They do a good job of respecting humanity in people.”

“There seems to be a shortage in this country of informative news that’s not sensational. That’s why I tune into NPR.”

Love of Learning

“I always get the feeling they’re not going to waste my time.”

“It somehow resonates with my whole life, my whole experience. It triggers something, something that I’m fascinated in, want to know more about.”

“It’s not just about human tragedy. I feel like when you turn on the TV news, which I choose not to, that you hear all the horrible things that happened everywhere. I like to learn something. When I find that when I’m talking to somebody about something that I’ve learned, that’s a good measure.”

A Sense of Place

Authenticity

“I like it when there are people on who really know what they’re talking about, and they’re not talking just to hear themselves talk. They are really invested in what they’re saying, they’re not like sort of going on because they know there’s a big audience out there and they have to sound a certain way. It sounds as if you stopped this guy in the street and had a conversation with him, and he told you the story, and really got engaged with it. Something very simple and direct, also it pulls you in because it’s not affected, it’s not put on, it’s not fake.”

“Reliable, like after 9/11. I felt like I could count on them to cover everything that was happening in a way that was balanced and fair. Maybe it’s liberal or whatever but I felt they gave a lot of different perspectives, and I could count on them to not be crazy and sensational.”

Global Perspective

“Wider points of view, national and international. As opposed to just local. A lot of the news on other radio stations . . . you never hear about what’s going on in other countries, unless an American is involved.”

“The overall expansiveness of everything, they go into every area in the world, international news, I like that. It’s more interesting [than local] and its does affect you indirectly.”

Interpretation

Intelligence, civility, authenticity, depth, global perspective—we have heard public radio listeners list these values many times in previous research projects..

This project was new and different in that we spent the first 30 minutes of each focus group talking about Sense of Place. We discussed the local programming on the station, and then we played several examples of local programming.

Yet localism itself did not come up in their summary of Core Values.

A Sense of Place

Positioning Revisited

As we documented, the public radio listeners in Las Vegas certainly do not feel that their place is anything like Boston. KNPR management asked us to revisit the topic of positioning—how to promote a public radio station in Las Vegas.

But when we asked public radio listeners in Las Vegas to list their top of mind attributes of KNPR, there were no surprises:

- Informative
- Intelligent
- Intellectual
- Interesting
- In depth
- Less biased
- Entertaining
- Mind opening

Interpretation

In Las Vegas, as in other markets, the best positioning statement would include adjectives like “in depth” and “intelligent.” In other words, the Core Values.

Localism was not volunteered as an attribute of KNPR. When the moderator probed, asking if they thought of KNPR as a “local” station, the listeners said that their top of mind perception of the station was national, international and world, rather than local.

A Sense of Place

A Remote Community

Canton is a small town, hours away from an airport. In two of the Canton groups, when the moderator asked respondents to sum up the value of public radio, they talked about a sense of community that did not come up in the other markets.

We realized that the respondents were talking about the station itself and their friends who work at the station—right across from the Canton grocery store:

“They actually bring it home, you can identify with the North Country.”

“When you’re driving from somewhere else and you finally get back to the radio station that you want, we’re close to home now.”

“Very real sense of community.”

“The staff is remarkable good. They’re a combination of a kind of urbanity mixed with North Country that I think works very well. Even during the pledge week—we all hate the pledge week—but I think we feel guilty about turning it off because we like those people.”

“We know these people, they’re in our community. They’re our friends, our neighbors. We recognize their voices. I guess when you listen to your friends it makes it more intimate.”

-- Canton

The next evening, however, our Canton respondents summed up the Core Values that they associate with public radio programming:

“It’s intelligent, it’s international, it’s all levels—individuals, countries. It zeroes in, it takes some little piece that you think would be irrelevant. But they take a person in a situation and they can make it global.”

“Integrity. I want to hear a story and I want to know that the reporter has explored all the different aspect of the story. I want to hear different perspectives, but I want them to be honest about what perspective they’re coming from and why.”

A Sense of Place

“One thing that I expect is that especially when someone is being interviewed that they don’t necessarily just take whatever is given to them, but they actually go ahead and question them further. Because we’re constantly being fed lines by politicians. They will tell you one thing that you absolutely know is not the truth, and so many “quote” journalists just turn around and broadcast that as if it were the facts, so I want them to challenge the people.”

“I want to hear more things about long term trends, things that are hidden, that aren’t brought up much because they’re not breaking news. You only hear about the stuff that’s happened today or just came up.”

“The news—it has to do with my concept of citizenship—is not entertainment; it’s not happy feel good stories, human interest stories. News is not meant to entertain, not meant to make people feel good. It is to inform people in a democracy.”

“There’s a real sense that we are part of a greater whole. There’s an attempt to reach out and look out beyond our borders with international and national news, but at the same time there’s this focus, very clearly it’s an identifiable North Country centrality to it. I like that. But I like the fact that we’re part of a greater whole.”

Interpretation

Small stations like WSLU that serve remote communities may project value in the neighborliness of their studios and staff.

Yet the values that their educated listeners seek in public radio programming are integrity, honesty, depth and a global perspective, the familiar Core Values of public radio.

A Sense of Place

Actionability

The nine stations that participated in this research project approach local news and information programming in a variety of ways:

KNAU in Flagstaff produces local news features that run during the NPR newsmagazines. There are no local daily long form programs.

WUWM in Milwaukee, KNPR in Las Vegas, WUNC in Raleigh and WSLU in Canton produce a daily hour to showcase their local coverage.

KUOW in Seattle and KNOW in Minneapolis have invested in four hours of local news and information programs each day.

WBUR in Boston produces two hours of On Point for network distribution and one hour of a regional program Here & Now.

WHID in Green Bay carries ten hours of call-in talk shows daily. The anchors are based in Madison or Milwaukee for statewide distribution.

Yet, based on this study, we cannot say that such programming decisions made on the macroformatic level necessarily relate to the value received by listeners.

That is, we cannot say that WUWM's approach is better than KNAU's because WUWM has scheduled a daily showcase hour. Nor can we say that KUOW's approach is better than WUNC's because KUOW schedules four local hours.

Instead, we found that public radio listeners respond to programming decisions that are made on the microformatic level. That's the level upon which listeners evaluate the personal importance of the station's programming.

Just a few examples of such microformatic decisions are news judgment, story selection, scripting, talent coaching, word choice, editing and the use of sound.

The microformatic level is where the work gets really difficult, as explained in the following observations.

A Sense of Place

PD Observations

The focus groups were observed by program directors who also received transcripts of everything written by respondents, plus video tapes. What follows are some of their own observations, in their own words:

Newspapers and TV

No media, including us, were mentioned in their sense of place.

I was stunned by what they said about the newspaper and it makes me think we need to figure out how we fit in the picture perhaps with a potentially greater role than before, because of the paper's slow demise.

They have little respect or use for competing local media.

Many saw our station as an important source for local content.

We really need to do more to develop our reporting staff so that they are considered experts in the beats they cover. We have put increased emphasis on using our own reporters within our show rather than going to newspaper reporters.

Reduce reports attributed to local newspaper.

Quality Control

Filling time is no longer a worthy goal.

The main point made over and over was that our news needs to be straightforward. Get to the point quickly. Don't back into a story with a convoluted lead.

Focus groups had only moderate tolerance for lengthy introductions from hosts and reporters.

Remember that listeners are always smarter than we are and that their time is valuable. Get to the point.

Use facts to back up your story line—not conjecture.

A Sense of Place

Talk Shows

On talk shows, throw-away topics are not valued.

We are going to start having our call screeners ask callers about their credentials on a topic before they get to air, so we can frame them from the get-go.

Poor story selection, unprepared hosts, bad writing . . . programming reflecting the local community often fails to live up to its promise.

Network Standards

It's clear that when you produce something local it better sound similar or better than stuff NPR produces. We need to sound good!

If your locally produced programming is done well, it is held in high regard. The customers appreciate the effort made to bring the same kind of NPR quality and style to issues close to home.

The locally produced show must sharpen its focus to better reflect the desires of the audience. That includes better collaboration with the newsroom, making sure topics are of interest and tightening pieces to a closer NPR standard.

Depth in Newscasts

Each of the cutaways now contains a produced piece. The staff no longer chases news conferences, rather they work on in depth pieces

We found that traditional newscasts don't mean diddley. One complete, balanced, multiple source story is more important than six or seven spot news stories.

A Sense of Place

Localism

The value of local programming increases if it is done well. There is lots of room for improvement of local programming.

The challenge is to do a better job in this kind of programming.

We are relevant in their lives and we need to make sure we stay that way and build on it.

Listeners like it when national stories are told through a local lens—for instance a story about a national health issue told from local researchers at our Medical Center.

We have adopted the phrase “Sense of Place” into our everyday discussions on how to localize a national issue for a segment of our daily program.

Programming that resonates the Sense of Place expressed by our listeners will be valued only if it is done well and has all of the other Core Values.

The report underscores our value to our listeners as a resource that connects people to each other and to the larger world. We need to keep this more in mind with all our local content.

Increase focus on helping listeners make connections to larger stories and issues. Go wider and deeper more often.

We have to be our best in everything we do; there's no forgiveness just because it's from "here."

Interpretation

Program directors in this project received actionable information about how public radio listeners evaluate the personal importance of local programming.

Going forward, the PRPD and other organizations will be working with NPR's LNI to help stations improve the microformatics of their local production.

A Sense of Place

Method

We conducted 36 focus groups, four in each of nine markets. All respondents were qualified as primary or secondary listeners for news and information. In each market we did two groups of women and two groups of men.

Respondents were not informed as to the sponsor of the research.

Recruitment

We asked each station to supply lists of residential telephone numbers from their files of current, lapsed and potential givers. We randomized those lists before delivering samples to the field services in each market.

Ideally, in each market we required the field service to recruit no more than 50 percent of respondents from our list. The other 50 percent would be recruited from the field service's database or from a purchased high education sample.

In practice, there were no field services on the ground in Flagstaff or Canton, so we had to rely more heavily on membership lists for KNAU and WSLU.

Another specification was length of residence. We wanted to factor the groups between long and short term residents of the state, because we were going to investigate the concept of place.

In practice, we found that it was extremely difficult for the field service to find long term residents in Las Vegas. The market is booming with new arrivals.

Green Bay was the other extreme. The field service could not find new arrivals. Nearly all of our respondents had grown up and stayed there.

In markets like Seattle and Minneapolis we were able to recruit both short and long term residents. However, since those markets are attractive to young, mobile professionals, we found that the short term residents were distinctly younger.

After screening, we interviewed a total of 375 respondents across 36 groups.

A Sense of Place

Agenda

We adjusted the agenda somewhat based on our experience as we proceeded from market to market. A typical agenda is shown below:

I.	Respondent introductions [15 minutes]
	How long have you lived in this place? Why are you living in this place? How did you get here? Would you consider this place to be <u>home</u> ?
II.	The identity of this place [5 minutes]
	Top five list – <u>written on form</u>
III.	Mental map of this place [10 minutes]
	Display two <u>New Yorker</u> covers – View from 9 th Ave and New Yorkistan Distribute <u>large size paper</u> and color markers Each draw their own map of this place For a few, discuss the boundaries, key objects, meaning
IV.	Mass media uses and gratifications – [10 minutes]
	A. When you need to find out what is going on in this place, which media do you use? Is the content valuable? What is missing? 1-newspaper 2-television 3-radio PROBE: How have things changed since the introduction of new media like computer, cell phones, Internet, podcasting – for place, nation, world
V.	Let's focus on (the client station) [10 minutes]
	What is the value of the programming on that station to you? What are the programs produced by that station? What is the particular value of that programming? What do you think of the mix of station-produced vs network?
VI.	Let's listen to programming from public radio around the country [40 minutes]
	Airchecks from all 9 stations (see next page) <u>Written verbatims</u> about each aircheck

A Sense of Place

Aircheck Rotation

Each station had supplied airchecks of their local news and information programming, according to our specifications.

We rotated the airchecks across markets so that respondents would be evaluating both familiar and unfamiliar examples of local programming.

For example, in Minneapolis the first group of women heard three familiar examples from KNOW along with two unfamiliar examples from WSLU and WUWM.

The table below shows the rotation of airchecks during all four Minneapolis groups.

	First Evening		Second Evening	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Newscast	KNOW 1-28	KNOW 1-28	KNOW 1-28	KNOW 1-28
Program	KNOW 1-29	KNOW 1-30	KNOW 1-30	KNOW 1-29
	WSLU 1-12	KNPR 4-7	KNAU 1-2	WUNC 3-10
Sense of Place	KNOW 1-31	KNOW 1-32	KNOW 1-33	KNOW 1-34
	WUWM 1-27	WHID 2-23	KUOW 4-13	WBUR 2-5