



URBAN POLICY, PRESS, AND PLACE: CITY-MAKING IN FLORIDA'S MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

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ABSTRACT: *This article enhances the notion of city-making by explicating its communicative processes and functions within the press. Through a quantitative content analysis and qualitative textual analysis of Miami Herald news coverage related to incorporation and annexation policies and practices over a period of 3 years, we argue for a stronger implication of the press in coverage of local policy- and place-making. Through a quantitative content analysis of 437 articles from the Miami Herald about communities affected by incorporation and annexation and a qualitative textual analysis of 51 articles related to general coverage of geographic policy-making in Miami-Dade County over a 3-year period, we argue that this coverage reveals the press as being a central feature and function of policy-making through the lens of city-making.*

Today's place-making of—and in—Miami is as complex as the history that led to it becoming a culturally diverse and contested part of the world (Croucher, 1997; Grunwald, 2006; Nijman, 2011; Portes & Stepick, 1993). Unique among Florida's 67 counties, Miami-Dade County—which includes the City of Miami, 33 other municipalities, and densely populated unincorporated communities—has the power to make or break its cities. For 50 years, the county has applied its state-sponsored Home Rule Charter policy to grant or deny cityhood to a community wishing to incorporate and thus gain control over their local tax base. Implemented during rapid urbanization in the postwar economic boom of the late 1940s, the policy has created public concerns about inequalities across the county. Members of wealthier communities, for instance, have said that they resent what they consider the subsidizing of poorer areas in the county, peeling away to form their own governments and thereby decreasing tax revenue available to the entire county and limiting available resources to narrow geographies. Meanwhile, established cities expand their tax bases by annexing desirable adjacent land, a process often contested by residents and businesses in unincorporated areas that are then forced to pay added fees and taxes.

Debate about incorporation policies in Miami-Dade County has emerged as an important topic of public dialogue amid immense development in Miami's downtown, the county's coastal communities, and the western suburbs (Bandell, 2013). Such city-making (Frug, 2001)—the policies, processes, and rhetoric applied to shape dominant public understandings of geography—intersects with press coverage of public policy in a region of 2.5 million people, as news narratives over the past 60 years have been an integral part of how those in power position themselves in the debate. Amid rapid population growth and changes in land use in Miami-Dade County, county officials began in 2011 to examine long-standing rules about incorporation and annexation; in 2012, officials created a task

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force charged with evaluating a number of incorporation and annexation proposals that had been brought before the County Commission in the previous year.

These moments of policy-making in Miami-Dade County provide an opportunity to examine how a dominant voice of the mainstream press in Miami—the *Miami Herald*—communicates issues related to governance of geography. As public policy research indicates, policy-making revolves around interactions and rhetoric among key players in governance and is rooted in institutional relationships, including with the press. In this article, therefore, we examine elements of journalism that focus on environmental and civic characteristics of a narrowly defined geography.¹ Therefore, through a quantitative content analysis of 437 articles from the *Miami Herald* about communities affected by incorporation and annexation and a qualitative textual analysis of 51 articles related to general coverage of geographic policy-making in Miami-Dade County over a 3-year period, we argue that this coverage reveals the press as being a central feature and function of city-making—at least in the case of local discussions in and around Miami.

The article begins with a discussion of policy- and place-making in the press. We then outline our application of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer specific research questions related to city-making in Miami-Dade County. Following the results, we conclude with an interpretation of the possible implications for understanding the role of the press in narrating public policy. While this article is based upon issues of growth and development within one metropolitan region in the United States, it argues for an expanded understanding of communicative functions of policy-making in the press and provides potential frameworks for future research on city-making.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section conceptualizes the communicative elements of place-making and the role of the press in communicating issues related to public policy and in influencing policy—social and cultural elements central to examining policy-making in an urban environment (Burd, 1977, 2008; Gumpert & Drucker, 2008). The section also presents recent policy-making surrounding annexation and incorporation in Miami-Dade County as proving an opportunity to examine a key moment in the communication of policy-making in an urban environment.

Functions of Place and Policy-Making

Geography is frequently discussed through the notions of *space* and *place* (Adams & Jansson, 2012; Gutsche, 2014a). Though often used interchangeably, space is largely viewed as a physical location with demarcated boundaries and social purpose, such as a police station or a city park. As spaces become imbued with shared cultural meaning—a police station may represent safety or oppression, a park a sense of community or possibly danger—these locations emerge as places (Gould & White, 1974). As Entrikin (1991) writes, “we see place not only as the context for our actions, but also as an important component of our sense of identity” (p. 14). Dominant meanings of place exist within particular collectives and are reified through narratives awarding place purpose and personality. In the United States, for instance, cities have long held dominant meanings associated with industrialization, “the future,” masculinity, and coming-of-age adventure that have been spread through literature, popular culture, and the press (Lefebvre, 1991; Lule, 2001; Parisi, 1998).

Public Storytelling About Place

Storytelling about geography also occurs at a local level in terms of political and legal rhetoric that shapes the boundaries and public definitions of geographic areas. In Florida, citizens have the means to determine their form of local governance through incorporation, a process of applying for a charter to be considered a city. Cities also “have rights under the law” to annex neighboring geographies, thereby expanding their footprint and tax base. The desire to incorporate or to annex space is rooted in storytelling about a geography’s inherent or potential social and economic value.

Throughout his work on such city-making, Frug (2001) identifies dominant characteristics of cities that public officials and policy-makers highlight in legal, public, and planning rhetoric that shape dominant identities of community values and meanings. In moments of publicly visible planning and policy-making, local governmental leaders (1) highlight characteristics and meanings of city space by emphasizing a space's financial and social potential in terms of economics, its types of citizens, and its potential for development; (2) present individual officials as representatives of local/regional power relations who publicly are often cast in press and official discourses as being in either some form of conflict or collaboration; and (3) place built environment in the limelight, focusing on infrastructure (i.e., streets, buildings, zoned city blocks) as a means to showcase such spaces as local landmarks to be enhanced by future development and expansion.

Through these rhetorical means, Frug (2001) writes, city governance fixated on physical development and economic growth appears as a natural and authoritative aim to benefit local citizens. Despite the fact that cities are home to multiple and heterogeneous communities, dominant interpretations of city spaces and places that are constructed by governmental leaders operate as a primary goal of city-making itself—to present citizens a single front, a single community informed by a collective identity and social expectations. In this sense, then, city-making provides legal and social processes and consequences that form parameters of social living and maintain powerful rationales for turning an unincorporated space into a city (Soja, 2010). Communities tend to seek cityhood believing that, with more control over the local tax base, they will be able to obtain the autonomy to govern (Lazega & Fletcher, 1997). This often translates into the provision of public services, such as fire protection, police, and waste disposal. At the same time as incorporation drives can represent preemptive efforts against potential annexation by surrounding communities or attempts to exclude less desirable areas from a community's perceived boundaries, they also serve to further fragment already complex metropolitan regions (Smith, 2011; Stephens & Wikstrom, 1999).

Yet central to the discussion of cities or regions-as-communities is the challenge of the terms applied to these geographies—particularly the term *community* (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015). Whereas a city may be defined in technical terms by its political boundaries, terms such as *region* and *community* represent ideological constructs that are built around particular geographic landmarks that depend, to a large degree, on the subjectivity of the one discussing the geography. The term *community*, in that respect, signifies a single collective identity that may not be recognized or accepted across any one geographic location. The notion of community, then, becomes particularly complicated when dealing with unincorporated areas that do not have clear political boundaries like a city, but that may hold place-names and shared meanings in a space that are identified with names but that can be reappropriated in times of annexation and incorporation (Anderson, 1983; Kaniss, 1997; Kumar, 2012; Robinson & DeShano, 2011). Therefore, this article will discuss geography through the term *named spaces*, those geographic locations that may have multiple shared meanings among various communities but that have been assigned names by local governments and media outlets.

Public Policy-Making in the United States

Annexation and incorporation are important processes that have been well addressed in urban planning and legal literature and fit within the category of governance that is heavily covered by the local press (Baumle, Fossett, & Warren, 2008; Kaniss, 1991). The ability of U.S. cities to define and to redefine their boundaries has a history rooted in the growth of metropolitan regions in the mid-1950s, particularly as burgeoning bedroom communities sought to expand tax-supported city services and tap into growing tax bases (Heim, 2012; Rusk, 2003). Such growth continues across the country: between 2001 and 2010, cities annexed more than 6.4 million acres of land to expand suburbs and to bolster cities' tax bases (Wilson & Edwards, 2013).

In her study of urban spaces in Texas, California, Florida, and North Carolina, Anderson (2008), for instance, explores racial and economic disparities of urban spaces that exist outside of cities, as well as landlocked unincorporated urban areas that often appear within the borders of a city or on its edges. "Material conditions in many of these neighborhoods are reminiscent of early twentieth-century urbanity," Anderson writes, "with clusters of housing tucked between landfills,

industrial plants, and freeways” (p. 55).² Such complications of city-making contribute to the stories told about spaces and places and influence how geographies are valued in terms of investment by private business, how public resources are distributed among a geography’s communities, and how particular spaces are communicated in the press as being either prosperous, problematic, dangerous, or desirable (Burd, 2008; Gumpert & Drucker, 2008; Soja, 2010). The explanations of assigning such values often appear in the press, a function we discuss below.

News as Power and Public Place-Making

The press in the United States is said to relay the practices and policies of government to constituents and to maintain a “watchdog” function of overseeing the actions of governmental institutions and actors (Gans, 2004).³ Local news media—which this article defines as metropolitan mainstream news outlets that cover a number of named spaces within an urban area—are often associated with covering governmental business in their respective geographies, cities in particular (Kennamer, 1992). Scholarship on local news has also long focused on the role of the press in building a sense of “community” by covering local personalities, issues, and events (Hindman, 1998; Kurpius, 2000). Local opinion pages—peppered with the authoritative voice of newspaper editors and letters to the editor—are said to provide a space for local public debate (Nielsen, 2010). Business news, advertisements, and “boosteristic” editorials related to places and people capture the economic interests of local employers, tourism officials, and residents interested in bolstering a geography’s economic viability (Burd, 2008).

McCombs and Funk (2011), for instance, write that these social relationships and outcomes amid the press and the power elite operate within larger national political discourses. Local community social and cultural values are then set within local agendas for public discussion and influence the shaping and implementation of public policy. Other recent scholarship challenges the boundaries of these relationships, suggesting that sources operate within the journalistic community in terms of shaping journalists’ shared interpretations of news events (Kioussis, Park, Kim, & Go, 2013; Moon & Hyun, 2009; Munshi, Kurian, Fraser, & Rupar, 2013). In turn, the press informs the public about geographic areas within news that privileges certain sources, topics, and issues over others (Hindman, 1998; Moon & Hyun, 2009).

Press Place-Making

The press also have a purpose in communicating meanings associated with geography. News rhetoric associated with a geography’s value—including of its “newsworthiness,” its built and natural environments, its people, and interpretations of its social conditions—result in what scholars refer to as dominant *narratives* or *characterizations* of place. Parisi, for instance, writes that coverage in *The New York Times* of “One Block in Harlem” through particular characterizations of sources and environments cast the space as a black ghetto—its storytelling of drama, language, and personification supported dominant racial stereotypes rather than complicating local social policies that contributed to disorder (Parisi, 1998). Fry (2003) suggests that national TV news that turned to nostalgia and collective memory in coverage of massive flooding in Midwestern states of the U.S. in the 1990s contributed to calls for public funding to save “The Heartland.” These efforts can also contribute to a form of humanization of geography, which contributes to public and press rhetoric about a geography’s meanings to a community as though it provides a sense of life and well-being (Bird, 2002; Bird & Dardenne, 1997; Gutsche, 2014b)

Lastly, scholars write that news sources, tone, article topics, and characterizations of locations where news occurs influence public discourse and policy, particularly in terms of land use, crime control, and press coverage of issues and events, by shaping conversations about particular geographies and the people living in them (Hallin, 1986; Lule, 2001; Sillars, 1991; Yanich, 2005). In this sense, then, news contributes to dominant notions of place—geographies that imbue cultural meaning (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991)—and dominant interpretations of the economic and civic value of

such locations (Kaniss, 1991; Schlesinger, 2000). Exploring the city-making functions of the press by highlighting communicative themes in news coverage of public policies is key to this study. Below, we discuss the role of place policies and press coverage of development in Miami-Dade County.

MAKING MIAMI: PLACE-MAKING AND THE PRESS

The modern development of Miami and the growth of its economy are rooted in a media-rich history related to discourses of tourism and private investment that resemble major efforts in other parts of the country during times of expansion (Burd, 1977; Cronon, 1991). South Florida's early development relied on storytelling within the press that strengthened the connection between boosteristic "business-speak" and policy place-making: newspapers presented Key West as being the next national cultural capital; Miami was heralded as a burgeoning first-tier global city; the Everglades were cast as grand space for agriculture and housing, with shorelines and beaches for tourism (Croucher, 1997; Grunwald, 2006; Nijman, 2011). In these early days of development, local newspapers—in their news content as much as in their advertising copy—called for seemingly endless amounts of development in which newspapers (some having been created by developers themselves) used news coverage to promote tourism (Bush, 1999).

Into the mid-20th century, such place-making appeared as a purposeful mission of the press, accepted by readers. Portes and Stepick, for instance, write that the 1950s provided no one "power elite" within Miami, and that "the newspaper assumed this role by default, becoming a power broker in its own right" (Portes & Stepick, 1993, p. 85). The *Herald* exercised this power during debates over local governance in what was then called Dade County, focusing solely on the conflict over control of local resources set up by the Home Charter Rule in 1957 that granted Dade County the ability to operate with the same powers and responsibilities as cities. The constitutional amendment, endorsed by the *Herald's* editorial board, was approved in a state-wide vote.

Such regional forms of governance followed a national trend of experiments with metropolitan governance during the 1950s and 1960s. Efforts to consolidate city-county governments have occurred in Nashville, Tennessee; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Jacksonville, Florida; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Local media outlets often take sides in these debates, at times arguing for the city-county mergers to provide better services for citizens. In other instances, local editorial boards take stands against proposed consolidation, viewing the efforts as a power grab by local politicians and business leaders (Stephens & Wikstrom, 1999).⁴

Quick growth in and around Miami in the 1960s and 1970s led to an immense moment of prosperity for the press in Miami and throughout the state, which benefited from increased advertising and political ties to developers and officials (for history, see Allman, 2013; Standiford, 2002). In the second half of the 20th century, the mainstream Miami press, particularly *The Miami Herald*, held a contentious position in explaining emerging land use and development policies connected to an influx of immigrants from Cuba, the Caribbean, and Latin America (Lohmeier, 2014; Soruco, 1996). Today, the Miami media ecosystem continues to be dominated by *The Miami Herald* as the primary agenda-setting outlet for local politics and discussion about the regional economy and development (Posner, 2009). Demographic shifts have also bolstered local Spanish-language broadcasting and dozens of immigrant media outlets (Shumow, 2010, 2012), though the *Herald* continues to be a local force that covers Miami-Dade County, including recent debates surrounding incorporation. Such coverage presents an opportunity to investigate city-making and to articulate its communicative functions that appear in local news media (Gutsche, 2011).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To build upon literature related to journalistic storytelling and the communicative characteristics of both policy-making and news coverage of the cities discussed above, this project surrounds a period of debate in Miami-Dade County between 2011 and 2014 related to annexation and incorporation, two types of policy-making that contain dominant processes of assigning meaning to geography. This article, therefore, is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What story topics, types, and sources did local press use in the coverage and characterizations of geographies involved in discussions of incorporation?

RQ2: How did local press characterize the people and environments in coverage of incorporation policies and potential outcomes in Miami-Dade County as a means of relating policy to place-making?

RQ3: How may an analysis of relationships between press coverage of urban policy- and place-making contribute to understandings of city-making as a communicative process?

METHOD

To explicate the communicative functions of city-making in the press, this article applies an inductive, quantitative content analysis of 437 news texts and a qualitative textual analysis of 51 of those texts, all of which appeared in *Miami Herald* coverage of incorporation and annexation in Miami-Dade County, Florida, from 2011 to 2014. This time period was selected because in 2011 Miami-Dade County officials began to re-examine incorporation and annexation policies following a decade-long moratorium on all city-making efforts in the county. The study's end date of 2014 thus offered three years of continued coverage surrounding the work of the county around these policies and provided a sufficient number of articles for an exploratory examination of patterns of news coverage related to the article's core topic. Such a mixed approach provides an opportunity to examine layered cultural and social phenomena through methods that can address particular forms of data and interpretations (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2013; Scheufele, 2006).

The value of mixing quantitative and qualitative methods has been debated, however (Mason, 2006; Trumbo, 2004). Bryman, for instance, writes that there is a "tendency for the rationales for using multi-strategy research not to be thought through sufficiently" and that combined studies should align particular methods with answering specific research questions (Bryman, 2006, p. 110). We appreciate such criticisms and suggestions. Therefore, in the subsection below, we explain how we selected six named spaces at the center of this study that provided cases of news coverage of incorporation and annexation and discuss our applications of quantitative content analysis and qualitative textual analysis to related research questions.

Identifying Named Spaces Involved in Policy Debate

Our mixed approach to examining news texts served two purposes. First, these texts provide us with a background and an understanding of annexation and incorporation in Miami-Dade County as discussed in the press. Second, we used these texts to select named spaces involved in policy debates around which this study would revolve, based upon the frequencies of the named spaces discussed in the news.

Using the Access World News database, we searched *The Miami Herald* between January 1, 2011, and January 1, 2014 for the terms *annexation* and *incorporation*. These searches resulted in 232 texts, including letters to the editor, columns, and editorials. We then read each article to select those related to the process of incorporation and annexation and to remove those that merely used those terms.⁵ This reading yielded 51 articles from which we identified six named spaces that appeared most frequently in coverage of city-making in Miami-Dade County (see Figure 1).⁶ These named spaces include:

Medley: Incorporated after World War II, this geography of 838 people has a thriving business community, a result of its close proximity to an international airport, expressways, and railways. In the 2000s, it tried, unsuccessfully, to annex nearby industrial space for business expansion.

Miami Springs: According to the city website, this geography of 13,809 prides itself on being "family-oriented" with a "small town" feel. City officials have attempted in recent years to annex

Geography	Incorporation Status	Land Area (sq. miles)	Population	Income (per capita)	Poverty by %	Race by %	# Articles Analyzed
Medley	Incorporated 1949	4.73	838	\$16,178	35.5	Black .95 Hispanic 92.24 White (Non-Hispanic) .84 Other 5.96	36
Miami Springs	Incorporated 1926	2.88	13,809	\$29,401	11.67	Black 1.59 Hispanic 71.16 White (Non-Hispanic) 22.22 Other 5.03	148
Sweetwater	Incorporated 1941	.79	13,499	\$13,561	32.63	Black .3 Hispanic 95.5 White (Non-Hispanic) 3.5 Other .7	118
Redland/Redland Edge	Unincorporated	29.22	5,986	\$24,131	15.13	Black 3.11 Hispanic 47.18 White (Non-Hispanic) 42.36 Other 7.35	42
Sky Lake/Highland Lake	Unincorporated	2.87	18,000	\$28,000	12.63	Black 11.02 Hispanic 34.64 White (Non-Hispanic) 45.57 Other 8.77	14
West Kendall	Unincorporated	4.98	36,401	\$27,021	13.64	Black 3.83 Hispanic 71.48 White (Non-Hispanic) 17.31 Other 7.38	52
Miami-Dade County	Formed 1957	1,897.72	2,496,435	\$22,957	23.35	Black 18.95 White 65.05 Hispanic (Non-Hispanic) 8.73 Other 7.28	27

FIGURE 1

Community Information and Article Counts

neighboring space; however, business owners there fought annexation, saying it would increase property taxes.

Sky Lake/Highland Lakes: These unincorporated geographies include approximately 18,000 residents. A local homeowner’s association has sought to incorporate nearby space in both geographies. The neighboring city of Aventura has also sought to annex adjacent space in Sky Lake and Highland Lakes.

Sweetwater: Densely populated with 13,499 residents, the city’s poverty rate (32.63%) is greater than the countywide average (23.35%). City officials have successfully annexed a nearby mall and have sought to annex areas of incorporated Miami-Dade west of the city.

Redland/Redland Edge: With a combined population of 5,986, these unincorporated spaces are sandwiched between the cities of Homestead, Florida City, and the Everglades. Both Homestead and Florida City have expressed interest in annexing these areas to increase tax revenue.

West Kendall: With more than 36,401 residents, this suburb considered incorporation as recently as 2005. In 2013, Miami-Dade County officials began a process to once again incorporate the geography.

By identifying these named spaces, we created a second set of texts to explore news coverage related to the named spaces most often mentioned as being involved in efforts at incorporation and annexation.

Article Selection

Using the named spaces listed above as keywords, we searched Access World News for *Miami Herald* coverage during the same time frame (January 1, 2011, to January 1, 2014), which resulted in 709 texts. After reading for redundancies and articles that used the name of the spaces but not as reference to the actual geography, we identified a total of 437 relevant texts. This number included

the initial 51 articles we collected about incorporation in the county generally, 41 of which related specifically to the named spaces examined for this article.

Content Analysis

In order to answer our first research question, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the 437 articles to examine the types of stories, sources, tones, and topics associated with specific spaces (see Kioussis et al., 2013). Two coders used an inductive approach to identify article types (i.e., general news, op-ed, editorial, letter to editor), article topics (i.e., city and/or county administration, education, annexation/incorporation), article sources (i.e., city and/or county officials, business owners, residents, police officials), and the named spaces (i.e., incorporated and unincorporated areas) identified in the articles. Next, we coded 44 texts (10% of all texts collected) based upon the characteristics listed above for intercoder reliability. Scott's pi coefficient for the entire data set was .93; scores on individual items ranged from .7 to 1.0.⁷

Textual Analysis

Informed by previous work (Jensen, 2012; Kurpius, 2000; Rakow, 2011), we used NVivo software to identify and code themes of explanation related to policy- and place-making in order to answer our second research question. In order to identify themes of journalistic place-making (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008), we read 51 news articles that focused on issues of annexation and incorporation in Miami-Dade County. In this reading, we employed a grounded theory approach (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) to uncover major themes of journalistic storytelling in press communication of policy-making. In so doing, we identified what we considered to be major thrusts of each story, focusing particularly on (1) the language used to discuss the named spaces' natural and built environments, (2) social and economic values ascribed to those spaces, (3) characterizations of people within the spaces, and (4) rhetoric related to the potential influence on a geography from possible annexation or incorporation. Based on standards suggested for appropriate rigor in mass communications research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010), we conducted multiple readings of the texts together, discussing our findings and returning to the texts to come to consensus about our interpretations.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Below, data related to our first two research questions are presented in terms of coverage in both incorporated and unincorporated areas. We further explicate these data in the subsequent discussion and do so with the understanding that these results are informed by a conceptual framework that influences our interpretations. Therefore, the specifics of our readings of text should not be considered generalizable to other named spaces, but as a contribution to a conceptual examination of how journalistic storytelling influences press rhetoric of public policy.

Topics and Sources Related to Named Spaces

In this subsection, we address our first research question, which seeks to identify story topics and sources that appeared in news coverage of named spaces involved in discussions of incorporation (Figure 2). Answers to this question rely on data gathered from our content analysis, which consisted of news stories (92%), opinion columns and op/eds (3%), letters to the editor (3%), and *Herald* editorials (2%).

Topical Explorations of Named Spaces

The most prominent story topics were related to public life, governmental administration, built environment, and official misconduct. In this study, public life (Ryfe, 2006)—which we consider to include events and experiences surrounding entertainment, sports, and public information—represented

Primary Topic	Articles Related to Incorporated Areas					Articles Related to Unincorporated Areas				Other	
	No. Articles	%	Miami Springs	Medley	Sweetwater	Total	Sky Lake/ Highland Lakes	Redland/ Redland Edge	West Kendall		Total
County admin	2	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	1
City admin	61	14%	32	22%	6	18%	21	18%	59	20%	0
Law enforcement admin	11	3%	2	1%	2	6%	7	6%	11	4%	0
Built environment	35	8%	17	12%	1	3%	5	4%	23	8%	0
Elections	22	5%	10	7%	1	3%	9	8%	20	7%	0
Official misconduct	25	6%	1	1%	5	15%	17	14%	23	8%	0
Violent crime	18	4%	4	3%	0	0%	4	3%	8	3%	0
Nonviolent crime	16	4%	1	1%	0	0%	10	8%	11	4%	0
Police/fire activity	21	5%	3	2%	4	12%	6	5%	13	4%	0
Private business/industry	8	2%	0	0%	2	6%	5	4%	7	2%	0
Litigation	6	1%	1	1%	5	15%	0	0%	6	2%	0
Education	9	2%	5	3%	0	0%	1	1%	6	2%	1
Quality of life	133	30%	62	42%	6	18%	21	18%	89	30%	1
Personal profiles	20	5%	7	5%	1	3%	5	4%	13	4%	0
Incorporation	21	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7	78%	0
Annexation	25	6%	2	1%	0	0%	7	6%	9	3%	0
Annexation and incorporation	4	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Total	437	100%	147	100%	33	100%	118	100%	298	100%	9
*Other articles did not specify or focus on occurrences in either incorporated or unincorporated spaces											

FIGURE 2

Story Topics

30% of overall coverage, 30% of incorporated areas and 43% of unincorporated space.⁸ News texts related to the administration of incorporated areas by incorporated governments made up 20% of stories; no articles about incorporated spaces discussed issues related to county governance, even though the county oversees the maintenance of streets, sewers, and fire and rescue services in some cities. Issues of administration by county government in unincorporated areas equaled 1% of the coverage, even though unincorporated spaces rely solely on county governance for all services. Coverage of the built environment—which we defined as infrastructure, facilities, zoning, and development—equaled 8% of all articles, 8% of coverage in incorporated spaces, and 10% of coverage in unincorporated spaces. Coverage of official misconduct appeared in 8% of coverage in incorporated spaces and 1% in unincorporated areas (1%).⁹

Storytelling of Named Spaces Through Sources

Five prominent source groups emerged in our analysis, which included politicians, government officials, residents, business owners, and corporate executives (Figure 3). Politicians, those elected to their positions by citizens, made up 19% of sources in coverage of both incorporated and unincorporated areas. Political candidates equaled 8% of the sources used in coverage of incorporated spaces and 1% of sources used in coverage of unincorporated spaces. Twice as many politicians in incorporated areas (24%) were quoted than in unincorporated spaces (12%). Officials, those who are hired or appointed to their positions made up an overall 13% of sources used in coverage of both types of areas, which included 12% of sources used in incorporated areas and 1% in unincorporated areas. Residents (11% of sources overall) made up 16% of sources used in coverage of unincorporated areas and 10% in incorporated spaces. Business owners (6% overall) and managers and executives (7% overall) represented the business communities, with business owners making up 10% of sources used in unincorporated spaces and 3% in incorporated spaces. Managers and executives accounted for 12% of the sources used in the coverage of the unincorporated spaces and 6% in incorporated spaces.

Types of People and Places in Coverage of Named Spaces

This section addresses our second research question, which asked how local press characterized the people, environments, and social value assigned to named spaces in coverage of incorporation policies. Our readings revealed a characterization of people in these spaces in terms of the degree

Primary Source*	No. Articles		Articles Related to Incorporated Areas				Articles Related to Unincorporated Areas				Other				
	No. Articles	%	Miami Springs	Medley	Sweetwater	Total	Sky Lake/Highland Lakes	Redland/Redland Edge	West Kendall	Total					
City police	35	5%	9	4%	9	11%	16	8%	34	6%	0	0%	0	0%	1
County police	12	2%	0	0%	3	4%	2	1%	5	1%	0	0%	2	3%	0
City politician	143	19%	51	20%	14	18%	62	31%	127	24%	1	4%	2	3%	12
County politician	39	5%	0	0%	0	0%	7	3%	7	1%	7	28%	4	7%	13
City official	73	10%	53	21%	3	4%	10	5%	66	12%	1	4%	0	0%	6
County official	26	3%	6	2%	6	8%	3	1%	15	3%	2	8%	5	8%	3
Resident	85	11%	28	11%	7	9%	18	9%	53	10%	2	8%	13	22%	6
Eyewitness	41	5%	12	5%	1	1%	10	5%	23	4%	0	0%	5	8%	0
Person on the street	5	1%	2	1%	0	0%	3	1%	5	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Lawyer (county)	10	1%	4	2%	0	0%	4	2%	8	1%	1	4%	0	0%	0
Lawyer (city)	24	3%	8	3%	11	14%	2	1%	21	4%	0	0%	0	0%	3
Lawyer (unincorporated)	4	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	5%	0
Lawyer (Unaffiliated)	23	3%	1	0%	8	10%	8	4%	17	3%	0	0%	0	0%	1
Educator	19	3%	6	2%	0	0%	4	2%	10	2%	2	8%	2	3%	0
Entertainer/artist	9	1%	4	2%	2	3%	2	1%	8	1%	1	4%	0	0%	0
Business owner (city)	20	3%	4	2%	6	8%	5	2%	15	3%	0	0%	4	7%	1
Business owner (unincorporated)	24	3%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%	1	4%	12	20%	5
Student	9	1%	1	0%	0	0%	1	0%	2	0%	4	16%	0	0%	0
Athlete (professional)	7	1%	5	2%	0	0%	0	0%	5	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Athlete (amateur)	25	3%	19	7%	0	0%	2	1%	21	4%	0	0%	4	7%	0
Employee/laborer	3	0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%	0	0%	2	3%	0
Manager/executive	54	7%	15	6%	8	10%	9	4%	32	6%	3	12%	4	7%	3
First responder	2	0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Religious actor	5	1%	2	1%	0	0%	1	0%	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1
Political candidate	42	6%	21	8%	0	0%	20	10%	41	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Criminal justice	18	2%	1	0%	1	1%	14	7%	16	3%	0	0%	0	0%	1
Total	757	100%	256	100%	79	100%	203	100%	538	100%	25	100%	59	100%	56

*Analysis of 287 articles; 150 articles from data set did not cite a primary source; ** These articles focused neither on unincorporated nor incorporated spaces

FIGURE 3

Story Sources

to which they will be affected by potential change, whether or not they will have control over those decisions, and their perceptions of how possible change will impact their space’s social and economic value. Answers to this question rely on interpretations drawn from our qualitative textual analysis of 51 texts that discussed the spaces undergoing the process of city-making through either incorporation or annexation. Here, we examine the characterizations of the people and environments reported about in these geographies, as actors and settings are often prominent elements of place-making, which was discussed above.

Two sets of people factored predominantly in these characterizations, business owners and residents. To a large degree, businesses owners were cast as community members who wanted to protect their properties from annexation, and, therefore, potentially higher taxes. As two *Herald* articles stated (Karantsalis, 2013c; Gazitua, 2013), these business owners represent “voiceless property owners” who are fighting annexation, which would, as one guest columnist argues, “fatten bureaucrats, feed lobbyists, and grow government” (Gazitua, 2013). One letter to the editor, which appeared in the midst of debate about the fate of residents in unincorporated areas, says business owners and residents should be “screaming long and loud” to stop annexation, which would lead to what the writer suggests as being a “theft of our tax dollars” (Zanger, 2013). Instances of citizens speaking out against annexation in news articles and in opinion pieces characterized those within unincorporated spaces as being pitted against threats of an encroaching government.

As reporters covering the business perspective on annexation in Medley (for example) wrote in separate stories, those in unincorporated Miami-Dade are facing “taxation without representation” (Mazzei, 2013; Karantsalis, 2013b), an application of rhetoric that positioned those in unincorporated areas as being one group of stakeholders that could easily be down and out if their spaces are taken away from their hyper-local control. Said one business owner in a *Herald* article, “[Annexation is] going to lead to struggling tenants. In turn, it’s going to lead to increased vacancies. Empty storefronts” (Mazzei, 2013). In coverage that focused on citizens who were portrayed as fighting an

epic battle against incorporation in Redlands, one news article states that residents were fighting in order to “protect their way of life from the creep of subdivisions” (Borns, 2013).

In coverage that characterized citizens throughout the county who were open to incorporation, residents were portrayed as seeing city-making as an opportunity to expand local “diversity” (Greer, 2012) and as a means to gain “control of local tax revenue and control of land-use decisions” that would make their communities “work” (Mazzei, 2012). Yet the *Herald*, through its own editorials, more often than not presented a bleak future post-incorporation, painting residents of newly incorporated spaces as potentially “fleeing the county (government) in droves,” taking “revenue” with them as their unincorporated space becomes incorporated, and transforming “low-income and minority areas” into “a money drain, leaving the county to take up the slack” (“Looking to leave,” 2012). In this scenario, the *Herald* presents citizens as being either winners or losers—those with the necessary resources to take control of their own fate by incorporating and those who are left behind.

Normalizing Expansionism

Storytelling about incorporated and unincorporated spaces relinquished responsibility for problematic policies of development from officials through the humanization of geography and rhetoric of expansionism as a natural and inevitable endeavor. The press in the United States has long heralded governmental involvement in city-making and the growth of local “community” and geographies as primary functions of democracy (Bass & Cherwitz, 1978; Kaniss, 1997; Tuchman, 1973). The *Herald* described a clear divide among local leaders as to how to approach incorporation issues in Miami-Dade. Press coverage presented notions of “local control,” “growth,” and “development” as key rhetorical devices to explain the seemingly inherent potential of city-making (see Flechas, 2013; Mazzei, 2012, 2013; Veiga, 2012). Language employed by opponents of incorporation and annexation, for instance, relied on rhetoric of “taxation without representation” (Borns, 2013; Karantsalis, 2013b). Some columnists and sources voiced fears that the inevitable growth they wished to endorse would further governmental corruption and inefficiency (Gazitua, 2013). In this way, then, the alterations to geography—both the physicality of space and the ideologies of space—were connected to the values of the space that were assigned at the moments when space was presented as holding human characterizations and immediate influences on the lives of people within the spaces, which is discussed below.

Within such press discourse emerged the metaphor of manifest destiny, the notion that presents expansionism as integral to the American spirit and purpose (Merk, 1963). A news article about potential incorporation in Highland Lakes, for example, quoted one resident as likening city-making in his neighborhood to “controlling your own destiny” (Mazzei, 2012, emphasis added). By and large, news articles about city-making throughout Miami-Dade positioned citizens as making decisions about development from a position of individual empowerment that was rooted in democratic causes to maintain a solid community front and identity during a time of inevitable growth. In another news article about possible incorporation in Highland Lakes, for instance, another reporter quoted a resident in favor of city-making as stating that “I think it’s time to *let the people decide*” (Rabin, 2012, emphasis added) whether a particular space should be incorporated.

Our readings of these texts also revealed distinct characterizations of the environments within the spaces of potential incorporation and annexation, which contributed to the *Herald*’s overarching narratives about the *who*, *what*, and *where* under debate. In this reading, we categorized environments as being of two types. We identified built environment as being that which is “man-made,” including buildings, streets, and other physical infrastructure (Entrikin, 1991). News reporting about built environments in unincorporated space tended to list the assets of the targeted land as highlighting the potential of a financial windfall if annexed. For example, one *Herald* news article described the qualities of “one-square-mile parcel of unincorporated property” as being “warehouses, a bus and train maintenance center, a jail, and a new mega adult strip club” (Karantsalis, 2013).

Commercial property in unincorporated spaces was cast as being a source of potential revenue streams that could come from commercial property taxes; cities interested in annexing these spaces were described as seeking to “divvy up” such geographies (Mazzei, 2012). In coverage of

unincorporated spaces that were more heavily populated and held less potential for commercial development, spaces were depicted as being underdeveloped, in dire need of better services, and as a drain on county government and for any city that might annex the space.

In unincorporated space just south of El Portal, for instance, the *Herald* described one neighborhood as home to “a once-thriving Chevy dealership [that] rests almost still, only the tall uncut grass outside lightly blowing in the breeze” (Rabin & Mazzei, 2012). Nearby, the reporters write, “rusted iron gates guard nothing but rotting wood and broken concrete.” The second type of environment that was identified in our readings of these texts was that of the natural environment, which is “untouched” or has been “returned” to be green space, such as a park or boulevard (Entrikin, 1991). And as the example of the Chevy dealership above best represents, little news coverage of natural environment in spaces of incorporated and unincorporated areas appeared far from that of the built environment.

That “tall uncut grass” was “blowing in the breeze” alongside rusted gates and “nothing but rotting wood and broken concrete” reveals a focus on traditional characteristics of urban environments as being rough and tumble, ripe for “investment” and “development” that will turn the space into something economically worthwhile. Annexation and incorporation, then, were presented in *Herald* coverage as a savior of the environment, turning something otherwise worthless into land of great potential. In fact, in the same article that described the Chevy dealership’s neighborhood as blighted, a wealthy adjacent community was cast as being a perfect place for residents to rest “under enormous shady oaks” and to fish from their backyards in a nearby river (Rabin & Mazzei, 2012). Together, the placement of people within their environments and characterizations of the environments themselves cast the spaces at the center of potential incorporation and annexation as being polar opposites of each other—either unremarkable space to be bettered or valuable land that, once taxed, could make cities richer.

Humanizing Geography to Assign Added Meaning

Throughout their coverage of incorporation and annexation, voices in the *Miami Herald*—including those of reporters, the editorial board, columnists, and official and business sources—routinely used active, humanizing language to describe the communities at the heart of these debates. In turn, coverage of Miami-Dade geographies were presented not merely as inactive landscapes, but as social actors that could “shape,” “create,” or “destroy” local communities through efforts of incorporation and annexation, as has been suggested in previous research about local geographies (Bird, 2002; Gutsche, 2014b). These Miami-Dade spaces, then, were cast as having their own agency to make changes absent of city leaders and select citizens. It is in these moments that a named space was transformed in press rhetoric to notions of place that held particular meanings in terms of ideological and physical influences upon the lives of people within the particular geography.

In previous work, the humanization of geography in the news has been shown to “cast city spaces as living beings that serve as lifeblood for their respective communities, allowing journalists to relay meanings of community identity and values through personification embedded in reporting” (Gutsche, 2014b, p. 6) related to local issues and public policies. *Miami Herald* coverage held similar characteristics and outcomes in press coverage of city-making. In one *Herald* news article, for example, the reporter stated that “Miami Springs, Medley and Virginia Gardens are *moving fast* to annex land” (Karantsalis, 2013c, emphasis added). Yet another article, written by a news reporter, argues that these spaces can “*boost* their coffers” (Mazzei, 2013, emphasis added), while one news article one about a battle between the cities of Doral and Sweetwater to annex a multi-million-dollar mall was presented as one city beating the other “to the punch” (Karantsalis, 2013b). An article about Miami-Dade officials calling off a hearing about proposed annexation by Miami Springs presented the city as “grappling” with lawsuits aimed at keeping annexation efforts from “scooping up land” from under the feet of local business owners (Karantsalis, 2013a).

In other coverage about county spaces, geographies were said to be “eager to break away from the county” (Mazzei, 2012), that spaces themselves could face “death-by-a-thousand-cuts” (“Looking to leave,” 2012), that some spaces have “emerged from hibernation” after the lifting of a county-wide moratorium on incorporation (Rabin, 2012), and that spaces that are incorporated are “birthed”

(Carter, 2013) and are able to “gobble up money” from the county through annexation (Christofis, 2012). Additionally, sources made claims and characterizations about geographies in ways that reinforced their authority to shape dominant community and spatial meanings. In news coverage of Sweetwater, for example, 44% of sources were politicians, officials, or members of law enforcement.

The findings presented above reveal deeper cultural meanings associated with interactions of policy-making and place-making in the news. The data produced through our analysis speak to unobserved functions of the press related to geography and the ways in which urban spaces are both identified and characterized. Below, we discuss how this study may influence future work.

CONCLUSION

As a way of concluding, we address our third research question, which asks in what ways analysis of press coverage of urban policy- and place-making can complicate understandings of city-making. We argue for two key implications for future work in this area.

First, we have identified clear reasons to examine the banality of daily news as it applies to daily life in geographic spaces, as such coverage made up 30% of all articles examined. However, the coverage was unbalanced in terms of incorporated spaces, where public life accounted for 43% of the articles, while the total of such coverage in unincorporated spaces equaled 30%. Such differences in how even the most mundane of news, such as sports scores and public notices, appears in news coverage raises important questions about the role of the news in the narration of daily life in urban spaces. We are intrigued by the way this coverage acknowledges the existence of a public and of daily life in those spaces, but does not seem to play a role in more overt coverage of public policies related to that geography.

Second, we argue for a greater application of spatial humanization as a place-making function within processes of communicative city-making. More specifically, in news coverage examined for this article the humanization of geography that appeared in press rationalization of development operated as a key function of city-making. Through humanization, spaces were shown to be dominant actors of change and development, while limiting the role and responsibility of officials, politicians, business leaders, and average citizens in city-making. In the end, our analysis suggests that such humanization of space operates amid a deeper ideological and rhetorical foundation to legitimize the very need for development.

Although this article is a reading of one newspaper’s coverage of a narrow geographic space, the processes of incorporation and development discussed in relationship to spaces in Miami-Dade County are not unique. We argue that our examination of spaces in this case reveals the need for future scholarship to articulate elements of communication surrounding city-making, particularly as revealed in the press. As urban spaces continue to be sites of contested meanings, understanding the role of mediatized explanations of space and how spaces are defined becomes increasingly vital.

ENDNOTES

- 1 It is important for us to distinguish that we are not interested in what are sometimes referred to as *community newspapers* (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). While much research articulates the sociological function of mainstream and community news outlets within and for particular geographies in terms of democratic involvement and community building (i.e., Ryfe, 2012), we wish to supplement that conversation by examining the cultural meanings of news messaging to notions of geographic meaning-making (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999; Shumow, 2012).
- 2 For this article, we borrow from Michelle Wilde Anderson’s (2008) definition of “unincorporated urban areas,” in which these spaces (1) exist outside the borders of incorporated cities; (2) are “contiguous on one or more sides with a municipal border”; (3) are “primarily residential, with densities greater than or similar to adjacent incorporated land”; and (4) tend to be “low-income, as defined by census tract data” (p. 1101). Anderson is clear that her definition “is notably race-neutral.” We acknowledge in our definition, however, a possible income–race correlation, yet allow the degree to which this characteristic is applied is not the focus of this study.

- 3 For this study we focus on language and reporting that appeared in *The Miami Herald*, which has historically been a metropolitan newspaper that includes in its regular coverage events and issues of a geography's communities and is considered to hold significant authority and legitimacy among policy-makers in South Florida. Furthermore, the *Herald's* history of covering city politics, as well as growth and development, provides a source that has undergone significant previous research, which is not the case for many other Miami-area media outlets
- 4 Outcomes from such mergers have been mixed, in some cases providing services where none had existed, while in other cases further complicating what are already considered complex and "fragmented" forms of local governance.
- 5 Articles were removed from the analysis, for example, if the search terms were briefly mentioned among other items of a county commissioner's political agenda, or if they appeared in phrases such as "since the city's incorporation in 1996..." but did not relate to an active and ongoing discussion or debate regarding the status and future of such policies countywide. To view a map of these locations within Florida's Miami-Dade County, please see <http://www.shatterbe.lt/urbanaffairslocations>.
- 6 Data drawn from the 2010 U.S. Census Data and 2009 American Community Survey, as displayed by the Transportation Outreach Planner website (<http://mpotransportationoutreachplanner.org>) and the U.S. Census Bureau Fact Finder (<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>). The Transportation Outreach Planner website did not include the unincorporated area of Highland Lakes, which investigators in this project included as a key word along with Sky Lake when gathering articles from the archives of *The Miami Herald*. Additional data were derived from Census tracts included in the Planner and studies by Miami-Dade County's Task Force on annexation and incorporation and articles from *The Miami Herald*. This number excludes the remaining 24 articles related to incorporation and annexation in Miami-Dade County that were location-specific and were included in the respective tallies listed.
- 7 To view intercoder reliability, please see <http://www.shatterbe.lt/urbanaffairsreliability>.
- 8 Much scholarship on the characteristics and functions of the press include the publishing of what local journalists consider newsworthy notices. Such items include those about public events, high school sports scores, government meetings and outreach campaigns, and local community groups as a means of engaging with the audience and covering daily life (Franklin, 2008; Kaniss, 1997; Pettegree, 2014; Shah, 1998).
- 9 This finding reflects a major corruption scandal that erupted during the time period analyzed in two of the cities under investigation, Medley and Sweetwater.

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