



Sustainable Urbanity in a Powerful but Fragile Landscape

The problem defined

Introduction

Mention of the Rocky Mountain region of the American and Canadian West hardly conjures up images of ‘urbanity’, especially in comparison to densely populated urban regions of Europe and Asia. A vision of cowboys against a background of monumental but empty natural landscape is more likely to come to mind. Western cities of any size and density are, in fact, few and far between, but there is another type of unexpectedly sophisticated urbanity, perhaps more fundamentally American at its heart, to be found throughout the Rocky Mountain region (Figure 13.1), the Great Plains and south-western desert states. It is the unpretentious small-scale urbanity of former railroad towns, centres for commerce and culture, planned as completely as any Greek or Roman colony ever was, ready to offer every urbane amenity attributed to the currently fashionable ‘New (sub-) Urbanism’. Some of these towns, which are located away from the stylish active recreational attractions, are dying of neglect, but elsewhere a phenomenal population explosion in the Western states is scattering sprawl around those with easy access to an airport. These towns, including Bozeman, Montana,