

SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND RESIDENTIAL SPACE: CONTEXTUALIZING NEW URBANISM WITHIN A BROADER THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This study engages the planning and urban design literature as well as social theory to develop a nuanced understanding of issues related to neighborhood form and sense of community. The study analyzes the meaning of community from economic, social, and cultural perspectives. It contextualizes the New Urbanism use of physical design as a subtext for community within a broader theoretical context. The study revisits the New Urbanism design principle regarding the interface between the private and public realm and its relationship to the idea of place and social attachment. While questioning the relevance of the New Urbanism planning agenda to U.S. metropolitan formations, the study discusses underline the value of its design formula for the social life of residential neighborhoods. The multidisciplinary approach of this study unravels some of the confusion over sociospatial dialectics in general, and community and built environment in particular. It opens the door for further cross-disciplinary research aimed at understanding and potentially optimizing the relationship between people and their built environments.

Keywords

Sense of community, place attachment, neighborhood design, new Urbanism

Introduction

Sense of community is an intriguing construct that has been extensively debated in the social science, planning and design literature. Social scientists are generally interested in examining the interactions among individuals living in a particular locality and whether such interactions enhance social bonding and engender a commitment to the group and the place. Planners and designers, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with exploring and in a sense prescribing the spatial configurations and built forms that stimulate community sentiment and place attachment. Both approaches share interest in the interdependent dynamics of place and social practices. From a social science perspective, the physical space in and of itself cannot shape social action. The configuration of physical spaces follows a logic generated by social and economic practices and not vice versa (Bulmer, 1984; Flanagan, 1993). While not diametrically opposed to the latter perspective, designers more so than planners conceive space as a more dynamic entity and not simply a by-product of social relations (Lynch, 1960, 1981; Rapoport, 1977,

1990; Barnette, 1995). Designers especially ascribe to the notion that built forms can affect function and may actually generate a range of social practices and cultural attitudes based on their geometry and disposition in space. Features such as connected street grids, physically defined public spaces, mixed uses and forms, and a host of visual stimuli that include landmarks, vistas, details, etc. are cited as conducive to lingering in the public realm and hence a heightened sense of community and sociability (Trancik, 1985; Bentley et al, 1985; Dutton, 2000; Carmona et al, 2003). The design approach is engrained in the Urban Villages and the New Urbanism movements (Aldous, 1992; Krier, 1998; Duany et al, 1991, 2000; Calthorpe, 1993, 2001). It is dubbed by social theorists as physical determinism reminiscent of the 1960s failed urban renewal policies albeit with a different lexicon and imagery (Harvey, 1997, 2000).

Various studies refer to non-spatial dynamics that affect social practices and cultural attitudes. They describe the urban experience as a result of economic, social, and environmental factors that may include form as a dependent variable rather than being the generator of cultural attitudes. 'Communities' in the traditional and physical sense have consistently declined over the last fifty years. They gave way to a much more sophisticated system of social networks that are no longer bound by geography (Webber, 1963; Wellman et al, 1979; Flanagan, 1993). High levels of physical mobility and advances in communication technologies have rendered space irrelevant. People's social circles in the modern city reach out and connect to regional and global structures that dilute the degree to which physical space represents

the culmination of local territorial cultures (Soja, 2000). Communities have become more 'personalized and portable' confusing physical with virtual contexts (Kingston et al, 1999).

This paper is mainly divided into three parts. The first part (form versus function/behavior) underlines the common thread between social theory debates and the design/planning approach. The second part (community of tradition versus community of interest) discusses the meaning of community and how it evolved over the last century. The third part provides an analytical review of the urban design literature regarding the dialectics of form and behavior. The study concludes with a discussion that draws from macro – and micro social science studies to contextualize the New Urbanism within a larger body of knowledge that provides support for its design agenda.

Form versus Function/ Behavior

Function and behavior are paired here because the study takes the position that social and economic functions of human settlements are expressed through human behaviors and relations in private and public environments. The form versus function debates are complicated by current epistemological dichotomies and geopolitical discussions related to modernism/postmodernism, structuralism/post structuralism, realism/constructivism, etc. These debates are outside the scope of the current study. The objective here is to discuss dialectics of form and function within the design and planning literature as well as critical social theory. The following discussion emphasizes areas of agreement rather than disagreement between the planning and design literature.

There has been a growing conversation between planning and design debates over the last decade due in part to the unifying influence of the New Urbanism movement. The latter catalyzed broad interdisciplinary efforts focused on creating a smart growth agenda and sustainable development practices. When designers and planners are faced with the question "Do you believe that purposefully designed built environments can shape social action and relations?" the response in most cases has been "No...But..." The crux of their argument is that as much as social relations presuppose urban space, they are also conditioned by its physical form. By ignoring this dialectic between space and social action, designers/planners argue, many opportunities for enlightened redirection of space conception are missed with the consequence of entrenching inefficient spatial relations and social inequalities (Kashef, 2008). In "The City and the Grass Roots," Castells maintains that spatial forms are produced by human action expressing the interest of the dominant classes and in support of a given mode of production. He argues that spatial forms are often earmarked by the resistance from exploited classes and the work of such a contradictory historical process on the space is accomplished on an already inherited spatial form, the product of former history and the support of specific interests, projects, and dreams. From time to time, social movements arise and "challenge the meaning of spatial structure and therefore attempt new functions and new forms" (Castells, 1983: 4). Though dominated by a social-to-spatial influence, Castells' assessment implicates social and spatial relations in a dialectical dynamic in which form outlives and impacts social relations; form occasionally undergoes various transformations to accommodate evolving social practices.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) revolutionized our thinking about sociospatial relations. According to Edward Soja, Lefebvre's work inspired an uprising in urban sociology; his calls for politicizing the social production of space formed the backbone for most recent developments in critical social theory (Soja, 2000: 102). Lefebvre perceives space as a process, as produced in inseparable, yet shifting physical and social contexts; space is an active component of constructing, maintaining, and challenging social order. In Lefebvre's thinking, the notion of space involves social realms, spatial relations, and physical components such as buildings, neighborhoods, cities and regions. He singled out spatial design as one of the important modifiers of social relations. The state and socioeconomic class dynamics effect a spatial organization (abstract space) that ensures political and administrative control of places, strict hierarchy, and homogeneity of the whole and the segregation of the parts (Lefebvre, 1991). Finally, Lefebvre calls for the need for a revolutionary science of design that can preserve urbanity, modify property relations, and end the domination of everyday social space by a state-sanctioned abstract space (Gottdiener, 1994: 131). Regardless of Lefebvre's Marxian and radical intonations, he articulates a form/function dialectic within which space literally saturates society at every level; space is not only a means of consumption but also an object of consumption. Thus, spatial design can be converted into a commodity along with land to create places that support different modes of production and social practices.

The underlying common theme in Castells and Lefebvre's arguments is that space is not just an epiphenomenon, an inert social

ingredient, or simply a backdrop for social relations. Society and space are interlinked by conjoined dialectical dynamics; social relations presuppose abstract spaces which in turn constrain modes of production; over time, societies may adopt new spatial design logic to effect a change in social relations. This logic, which forms the basis of critical social theory (Soja, 2000), is not fundamentally different from the design/planning perspective. Planners and designers use similar sociospatial logic as a framework to shape and reshape the environments that we inhabit. For example, the practice of segregating contiguous subdivisions with limited access points along collector or arterial roads has been institutionalized in conventional subdivision practice in the U.S. over the last several decades. The result has been not only decreased car travel along subdivision streets, but also diminished walking and biking opportunities among neighboring residential areas. Pedestrians or cyclists have to maneuver their way along high traffic roads before getting into neighboring areas. In the designer or planner's mind, this practice entrenches sociospatial segregation among neighboring subdivisions. As a response, designers and planners would recommend adding local access connectors among neighboring subdivisions to enhance inter-subdivision connectivity. Another example, a sitting bench placed along a street curbside in response to a perceived need for resting may or may not create an opportunity for social encounter. Placing the bench away from the street activity responds only to its initial programmatic requirement for 'resting.' However, locating the bench in a way that satisfies the 'resting' function but engages the street space may contribute to a different social dynamic. This

is not to be equated with what Harvey and Gottdiener call "the physicalist fallacy of the modernist project" which relied on the belief that living and working arrangements can be easily manipulated through architectural practice (Harvey, 1997; Gottdiener, 1994: Preface). It is more about effectuating deliberate, incremental, and sustained changes in the way we do things (whether planning subdivisions, downtowns, or landscaping streets). The objective is to moderate the negative social impacts of commercially-driven and profit-seeking practices within capitalist economic systems.

It seems that the social doctrine and the rhetoric associated with planning movements, such as the Urban Villages and especially the New Urbanism, provoked an outright intellectual skepticism about the reciprocal relationship between physical forms and social practices. The praxes of the New Urbanism and the Urban Villages produced a wealth of information and design standards of tremendous benefit to planning and design education and practice. They have energized the planning and design fields with their imaginative visions and innovative methods that challenge conventional practice. Alas, their design and planning schemas are typically permeated with such lofty societal objectives as creating communities and/or villages; reviving traditional urbanity, reducing social inequalities, achieving sustainability, etc. The rest of the story is well known, little or none of these declared ideals have been realized in practice (Fulton, 1996; Southworth, 1997; Gordon et al, 1997; Harvey, 1997, 2000; Krieger, 1998; Talen, 1999; Biddulph, 2000; Tait, 2003; Brindley, 2003; Thompson, 2003; Neuman, 2005).

The following part of the paper analyzes the meaning of community and the evolution of the term and related practices over the last century. It is argued that traditional communities gave way to communities of interest that transcended previous geographic limitations. By failing to internalize the modern social and economic restructuring forces, the New Urbanism movement had a marginal impact on the development industry in the U.S. The 'transect' approach, the most recent and probably the most important theoretical framework advanced by the New Urbanism, was case in point (Duany, 2002). It showed coherent urban and suburban developments struck neatly along transit corridors with varying density gradients (low-density suburbs on one end to high-density town centers on the other). The transect stands as a utopian vision detached from the capitalist market machinations with little or no hope for implementation.

Community of Tradition Versus Community of Interest

'Community' in the historical or traditional sense invokes economic, social, and cultural connotations. It refers to an enclosed system that can be typified as stable and self-sufficient social organization unit; a microcosm of a larger social order. Self-sufficiency meant that people live, work, and play within the geographic limits of their community. A traditional or historical community is characterized by a heightened awareness of belonging, close-knit social groupings, and a well-defined sense of identity and place attachment (Dickens, 2000). Capitalist economic systems militated against the mix of uses and led to irrevocable geographic fragmentation of residential,

commercial, industrial, and civic as well as recreational activities. The central idea of Capitalist economics is one of specialization and trade by a variety of different size 'open' economies. William Bogart (1998: 4) defines open economy as a market that is not self-sufficient, preferring instead to trade goods and services with other open economies. Another important attribute of capitalist regimes is economies of scale which happens due to the increase of labor productivity in repetitive tasks and proximity of other production and 'one-stop' consumption facilities (O'Sullivan, 1996: 32). For example, residential suburbs export jobs and related services to office and industrial parks, shopping malls, and big box outlet venues in exchange for housing. The regulation theory articulated a transition from 'fordism' (equilibrium between consumption and production) which sustained the suburban movement over the 1940s-1970s to what is currently described as 'postfordism' (unstable market economy). The postfordist condition is attributed to higher energy expenditures due to the first oil crisis (1973), increased automation, and relocation of production facilities overseas (Filion, 1996). Predictions of metropolitan system failures were rampant; city governments in the United States have been facing ever-increasing difficulties in providing infrastructure and services needed to support low-density fordist-type developments.

Despite all that, there is an undeniable preference among U.S. consumers for single-family detached housing which continues to fuel the development of low-density mono-zoned suburbs (Fannie Mae, 1996). Statistical evidence of a change in housing preferences or purchasing decisions due to the 2007/08

housing crisis (failure in the sub-prime mortgage market) is not yet available. Media reports refer to an attitude of substituting bigger cars with smaller ones or reducing car travel trips but not a change in housing choices or relocation closer to work. Fannie Mae surveys indicate that single-family detached housing was more popular during the mid-1990s than it was a decade earlier. In the Washington Post, November 10, 2000, it was reported that anti-sprawl measures in Arizona and Colorado were opposed by 70 percent of voters (Heimlich et al, 2001).

The social structure of metropolitan areas in the U.S. is characterized by the proliferation of complex networks of non-place based affiliations that do not conform to the traditional definition of communities. Some studies dismiss the idea of 'architecting community' as a legitimate planning objective. They refer to recent social and technological transformations that negate the need for physical communities or villages in the traditional sense (Harvey, 1997; Tait, 2003). Sociological research referred to a consistent decline of 'community' as a sociospatial phenomenon from the 1950s onwards (Agnew et al, 1989; Brindely, 2003).

Modern economic and communication advances increased individual mobility and reduced the impact of geography in defining people's social circles and spheres of interaction. Over the last century, people escaped the confines of close knit rural and small town communities to cities. The new urban residents favored the mobility and anonymity of the cities over long-term associations and self-containment typical of traditional villages (Biddulph, 2000). The meaning of community has changed from an integrated self-sufficient

social organization (a microcosm of a larger social order), to a fragment of a geographically diffused and socially segregated system with a web of local, regional, and global connections. Titles and approaches such as "Eclipse of Community" (Stein, 1964), "Community without Propinquity" (Webber, 1963), and "Community Liberated" (Wellman et al, 1979) epitomize the changes documented in social studies. Non-place based affiliations with like-minded social groups figure prominently in various social studies as the new form of community (Giddens, 1990; Campbell et al, 1992). Gender, age, stage in the life-cycle, homogeneity, social and demographic characteristics, commonality of values, employment and career patterns, etc. are emphasized as the basis of social relations and the new placeless communities. Emily Talen (1999) referenced a number of empirical social studies maintaining that neighborhood environmental features have no direct or invariant consequence for residents' social ties and way of life. Non-territorial factors that affect localized social networking have been linked to length of residence, presence or absence of young children, home ownership, and threats to property values (Skjaeveland et al, 1996). The role of place changed from being an incubator of social relations to one that expresses social class and status (Plas et al, 1996; Talen, 1999).

Reid Ewing (1997), on the other hand, referred to surveys that indicate a growing preference for place-based New Urbanist mixed-use developments. The central theme in the new urbanism vision is that 'good' cities are generally composed of clusters of mixed-use neighborhoods that give residents quick access to their daily needs within a maximum five-minute walking distance (Box, 2007). A

neighborhood should be designed with a fine-grain urban grid and well-defined and visually stimulating streets and public spaces. Physical elements such as building mass, building lines, streetscapes, vistas, porches, ornaments, and the street grid, contribute to the livability and vitality of neighborhoods. Such elements are frequently cited in the New Urbanism literature as the building blocks of communities. They have the potential of enhancing social interaction and hence igniting the culture of community. The New Urbanists generally contend that reinstating the traditional morphology of street and civic architecture can contribute to restoring the lost sense of place and reviving many long-gone communal practices. At present, suburban patterns are completely dependent on the private automobile and lack the basic ingredients conducive to collective social and cultural dynamics (Duany, 1991; Kunstler, 1993; Katz, 1994; Calthorpe 1994, 2001; Kelbaugh, 1997; Gratz, 1998).

However, as discussed earlier, peripheral suburbs in American metropolitan regions have grown so large and specialized in providing housing, employment, and other services that cannot be replaced by or metamorphosed into a regional system of New Urbanism mixed-use nodes. The geography of work, residence, and shopping linkages in the American decentralized metropolis has changed from being nested within the commuter sheds of city centers (high density mixed-use urban nodes) to an increasingly diverse and highly fragmented structure. It is inconceivable that such a fragmented metropolitan structure can be reconstituted to fit neatly into a regional system of mixed-use nodes or the transect formations proposed by Duany (2002). Rotated

360 degrees, the transect scheme creates a somewhat mono-centered conglomerate with a density and land-use gradient reminiscent of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City vision (Hall, 1996; Hall et al, 1998). The latter did not survive the Capitalist machine; it was instead transmogrified to serve as an instrument in creating and sustaining the suburban exodus and metropolitan fragmentation. The nexus of consumer preferences and the Keynesian economic logic in which mono-zoned suburbs function as an engine of consumption continues to sustain the dispersed low-density metropolitan system.

Actually, New Urbanist developments fit comfortably as a niche product in that system. Their success is attributed to evolving marginal preference for suburbs with relatively higher densities and a very limited mix of uses and home tenures. It also corresponds to some demographic shifts in the U.S family or social composition that included later marriages, fewer or no children, and dual-career households with urban cultural aspirations. Various studies have shown that New Urbanist communities attract a homogeneous group of mostly affluent and like-minded people who place a premium on such aspects as walkability, open spaces, public facilities, etc. (Talen, 1999; Lund, 2002; Morrow-Jones et al, 2004). Hollie Lund (2003) argues that pedestrianism and neighboring behavior observed in New Urbanism developments could be the result of the market process of self-selection and not necessarily a consequence of design factors. In the self-selection process, people choose neighborhoods that enable them to continue their existing behavior or support their lifestyle (Boarnet et al, 2001).

Like their suburban counterparts, the New Urbanist developments attract a coalition of interest rather than tradition. Traditional communities that previously functioned as socioeconomic incubators and repositories for a range of cultural sentiments gave way to communities of interest. The role of place in communities of interest is still significant but in a very different capacity than traditional communities. It expresses social class and status and is used as a spring board for establishing an array of social affiliations that cover a large yet fragmented geographic region. This is not detracting from the rich and extensive planning and design literature associated with the New Urbanism. The planning and design possibilities discussed and implemented in New Urbanist developments represent a rich resource of ideas for professionals, cities, and regions. They may not revive traditional urbanity, or reconstitute metropolitan areas into transects with walking and transit friendly environments. However, as discussed below, good design can be used to bolster the experiential quality of built environments and provide possibilities for social interactions that enrich people's lives and enhance their sense of place.

Design and the Socio-Experiential Quality of Built Environments

The most significant design theme arising from the design/planning literature and potentially affecting the socio-experiential quality of built environments is the interface between the private and public realms (Kelbaugh, 1997; Jacobs, 1961; Alexander, 1965, 1977; Duany et al, 1992). It is essentially about the articulation of the outer skin of buildings or homes and disposition of buildings in space. Various studies

indicate that increasing the interface between private and public realms tends to heighten the level of activity around the edges of buildings (Newman, 1972; Whyte, 1980; Rossi, 1982; Bentley et al, 1985; Bentley 1999; Moughtin et al, 2003; Duany et al, 2003; Neal, 2003).

From a residential design perspective, elements that contribute to increased private/public interface include windows of active living spaces, transitional spaces such as entryways or porches as well as the availability and distribution of common spaces. As long as home privacy is maintained, the presence of such elements creates opportunities for social interaction among inhabitants (Duany et al, 1992). The interaction referenced here can be characterized as passive or active. The passive social interaction falls under a category that Bill Hillier calls 'social or spatial co-presence.' Hillier contends that co-presence and therefore co-awareness amongst the individuals living in and passing by an area can be considered a raw material for social interaction. Whilst co-present individuals are not a community and may not know or acknowledge each other, they in fact form a social resource for communal behavior. Co-presence is a very important psychological resource in and of itself and can be brought about by design (Hillier, 1996: 129-214). Jane Jacobs' 'eyes on the street' and Newman's 'defensible space' have earlier noted the significance of home windows and visible entrance doors in providing surveillance and self-policing of public spaces (Jacobs, 1961; Newman, 1972). Active interaction is commonly perceived as a by-product of increasing the pattern of 'probabilistic interfaces,' a heightened sense of co-awareness or co-presence, leading to overt social acknowledgment (Hillier, 1996: 129-214).

Transitional spaces such as home porches provide a setting for conversation, a kind of 'Shakespearean' theatrical platform for social 'play.' Porches project the human presence within the house to passersby creating a sense of 'plot'; a voluntary and potentially entertaining social exchange. The availability of the home porch is significant whether a conversational exchange takes place or not. The porch acts as a precondition or a 'stage' for a social play that otherwise would not have been possible. It "creates the illusion of a whole already in place but which becomes real only as individuals act on their perceptions of it" (Hastrup, 2004). Two comparable homes (similar size and price bracket) from New Bern, North Carolina are juxtaposed below showing the contrasting possibilities offered by each alternative, with or without a porch addressing the street space (Figs. 1, 2). Inactive spaces such as garages or outside storage rooms do not generally contribute to the private/public interface. To accommodate one or two cars, the garage typically occupies a larger space than any other active home function. The garage dominates the building mass and deprives other important active functions from being projected onto the public space. Based on local statistics in New Bern, North Carolina (80 household surveys), the garage value for small to average size (1200-2200 sq. ft.) single family homes is compromised by its small dimensions and the need for extra storage. Garages are used as storage rooms and cars are often parked on driveways.

Various strategies for reducing the impact of garages or inactive functions on home architecture and public space have been successfully deployed in traditional, conventional, and New Urbanist developments.

Rear, side, or alleyway garages as well as carports have provided viable alternatives to reduce the visual and potentially negative social implications of front open garages (Figs. 3, 4).

Another important dimension of the socio-experiential quality of built environments and a factor in the private/public interface is the idea of closeness (a better expression than high density, which provokes negative connotations and confuses cluster and compact development with crowdedness). Two distinct (somewhat competing) planning paradigms champion the cause of closeness as a better alternative to conventional sprawl. Ian McHarg articulated the 'design with nature' approach which is premised on identifying the ecological characteristic of urban growth regions and 'concentrating' development in the least environmentally sensitive tracts (McHarg, 1969). Randall Arendt (1996) subsequently developed McHarg's approach into a theory of conservation design, sometimes called 'cluster development.' He called for conserving the ecological attributes of development sites by clustering buildings and reducing lot sizes, while maintaining the overall density specified by local ordinances. The overarching objective of clustering homes is to reduce the ecological footprint of the human habitat and provide a breathing space for other species, thus enriching biodiversity (Figs. 5, 6). Cluster development does not call for restructuring the modern city or its exclusionary zoning practices. It is typically listed in cities' official plans and zoning ordinances as an alternative to conventional subdivision practice.



Figure 1: A single family home in New Bern Northwest suburbs (Source: Author).



Figure 2: A single family home in New Bern's inner suburbs (Source: Author).



Figure 3: Garage concealment alternative – detached backyard location (Source: Author).



Figure 4: Garage concealment alternative – carport and detached backyard storage (Source: Author).

The New Urbanism, on the other hand, advances a much more ambitious program aimed at restructuring suburbia into interconnected compact settlements with mixed uses and relatively higher densities. The resulting spatial

and built configurations would consume less land and natural resources, hence preserve the environment, reduce dependence on the automobile, encourage walking and biking, and support public transit (Duany et al, 1991;

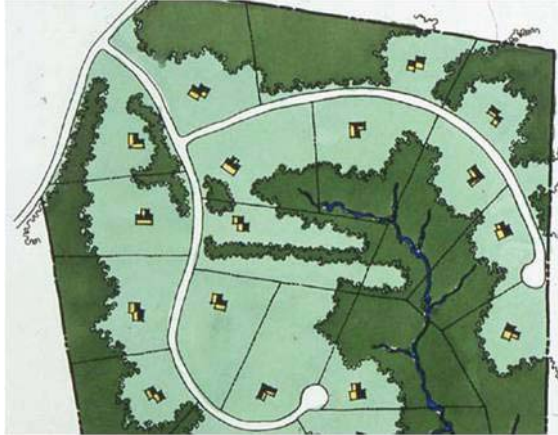


Figure 5: Conventional Subdivision Development - the entire tract is divided into private lots regardless of the environmental characteristics of the area (Source: Author).



Figure 6: Cluster Development alternative - same tract with smaller lots leaving environmentally sensitive areas undeveloped (Source: Author).

Katz, 1994; Langdon, 1994; Duany et al, 2000; Dutton, 2000). Of particular significance to the notion of socio-experiential quality and private/public interface is the New Urbanism call for shrinking private space and positioning homes closer to the curbside. As shown in Figure 2, reducing the distance between home porches and sidewalks contributes to the 'Shakespearean' plot and may enhance passive (co-awareness) and potentially active social exchanges between residents and passersby. New Urbanism codes typically prescribe a 15-20 feet optimum distance between sidewalks and porches to facilitate social encounters (Duany, 1992). Reducing the physical footprint of buildings within a given development would also free more space for public activities. Public places in the form of parks and/or civic facilities such as picnic shelters, park gazebos, playgrounds, sports fields, etc. provide venues

for chance encounters and serve as symbols of places (Langdon, 1994). The urban design literature in general, and the New Urbanism praxes in particular, recognize sense of place as a function of sense of space which requires heightened attention to spatial configurations, design details, and disposition of public functions (Lang, 1994; Duany et al, 1992). The designers, planners, and the New Urbanists' case regarding the impact of spatial form and design details on the socio-experiential quality of built environments is further theoretically supported by environmental psychology and environmental sociology studies. The latter fields of research draw on knowledge in a number of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, geography, architecture, engineering, as well as others. Individuals associated with this strand of research are interested in better understanding the relationships between people and their

environments. They aim to develop a body of knowledge that would enable designers, engineers, and other professionals to envision optimum physical environments that enhance human functions and social relations. Some environmental sociology studies showed statistical evidence that design and spatial allocation of homes within residential blocks can have an impact on residents' social relations and interactions (Gans, 1962; Rapoport, 1980). They asserted that facilitating people closeness by proper arrangement of private and shared public spaces enhances social contact and group/place attachment (Moustafa, 2009; Williams, 2005; Talen, 1999; Fleming et al, 1985). Newman indicated that sense of safety in residential areas can be improved by properly locating doors, windows, and common spaces. He associated the heightened sense of safety with the economic and social viability of residential space and communal practices contributing to individuals' well-being (Newman, 1972).

Other researchers have found a direct correlation between home design and family interaction. Strategically located kitchens and living spaces tend to foster interaction and provide more opportunities for socialization among family members (Miller et al, 2003). John Peponis et al (2007) have also pointed to direct and statistically supported evidence that office layout can contribute to the density of different network interaction and productivity. Integrated office layouts establish patterns of informal co-awareness and interaction, thus facilitating communication, sharing of ideas, and the joint exploration of possibilities in the non-routine phases of knowledge work. The New Urbanism's sociospatial claims are also

supported by empirical investigations of the notion of 'place attachment' and/or 'place identity.' Place attachment is often described as a "positive affective relationship between people and place" that occurs because of people's satisfaction and identification with a specific place (Bonnes et al, 1995). Identification with a place results in emotional connections with its physical attributes that people often associate with social events. Place and associated emotions and events become inseparable or interchangeable in people's minds (Giuliani et al, 1993). The meaning of place here encompasses built environments as well as natural and cultural landscapes (Hidalgo et al, 2001; Herzog et al, 2003).

Summary of Theoretical Investigation

This study investigated three related theoretical domains, mainly: critical social theory of space, mainstream urban studies, as well as the design and planning literature (emphasis on the New Urbanism). The purpose was to develop a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between people and their physical environments with an emphasis on residential space. Critical social theory generally provided credence for the designers and planners' claims pertaining to the interconnected dynamics between form and function. Castells and Lefebvre emphatically indicated that the form of urban space cannot be perceived as a static entity or a neutral container for social relations. There are dialectics between function and form that negate the possibility of relating them in a linear model of social reason and physical outcome. As much as social relations presuppose urban space, they are also conditioned by its physical characteristics.

Castells and Lefebvre called for innovative design approaches that challenge existing spatial structures and property relationships and preserve urban life.

Though embracing a position similar to critical social theorists, designers and planners do not stop at the point of asking 'what,' 'how,' and 'why,' but they go on to explore 'what ought to be.' The fundamental premise of the design and planning professions is one of intervention and management of future developments. The confidence in technological advancements during the mid-twentieth century blurred the lines between form and social action, design, and evolving built environments. Urban renewal schemes during that time overreached and advanced design and planning projects as solutions to entrenched social problems. They generally failed to deliver on their promise of improving people's social conditions by design. Urban renewal projects brought to light the notion of physical or architectural determinism, an idea that was subsequently discredited by planning, design, and other related disciplines. Implicating design in social issues became somewhat of an intellectual taboo. Most planning programs in the U.S. over the 1960s and 1970s neglected urban design education. Alan Kretzler (1990) argued that such neglect even persisted throughout the 1980s. The emergence of the New Urbanism movement and its British counterpart (Urban Villages) over the last two decades created an intellectual euphoria and brought back design to the forefront of community and urban development discussions. 'Design' rather than 'plan' was emphasized as a way to regenerate and enhance quality of life in cities. Successful urban spaces were featured as properly defined and historically

proven urban rooms suited to preconceived communal and cultural exchange patterns. The New Urbanists generally echoed much of the emotional and intellectual disposition of postmodernists by calling for more diversity, more emphasis on local context and mixed land uses, urban regeneration, and building aesthetics (Ellin, 1995; Taylor, 1998; Venturi, 1966; Rowe, 1978). Their objective has been to moderate the negative social impacts of commercially-driven and profit-seeking practices within capitalist economic systems.

The praxes of the New Urbanism have energized the planning and design fields with their imaginative visions and innovative methods that challenge conventional practice. They also brought back in full swing and, in a sense, revived urban renewal philosophies, albeit with a traditional urban vocabulary. The movement produced an extensive social and environmental agenda that provoked skepticism from a number of intellectuals who associated the movement with the physicalist fallacy of the modern project (Harvey, 1997; Gottdiener, 1994; Gordon et al, 1997). The movement design and planning literature is riddled with exaggerated and unfounded claims. It generally looked at pre-industrial civic typology as a viable urban design lexicon that is still valid and capable of accommodating the social and economic institutions of post-industrial cities. The New Urbanists perceived the city as potentially deconstructable into smaller quarters, neighborhoods, or smaller cities within bigger cities. They tended to disentangle land use controls and their attendant bureaucratic apparatuses from individual preferences, lifestyle choices, and market dynamics. Neighborhoods are commonly envisioned as

mixed-use, self-sufficient, and physically as well as socially integrated traditional communities. Though generally supported by environmental psychology research, the New Urbanism arguments were discredited by a range of economic and social studies that pointed to the transformation in the social and economic structures of the modern city and particularly the meaning of community. The latter studies in general referred to the role of capitalist economic and social institutions, as well as technological advances, in redefining the urban pattern and diffusing the social structure of traditional neighborhoods. The physically and socially bound traditional communities gave way to communities of interest with regional and global connections. The lines between physical and virtual were blurred. The role of place as a delimiter of social relations was transformed to a somewhat transient or disposable commodity that expresses status and class at certain stages in the life of residents.

Conclusion

By examining the design, planning, and critical social theory, this study laid a foundation for informed debate over the relationship between physical forms and social relations. This study advocated an interdisciplinary perspective to understanding the dynamics of form and function. In that sense, built forms are both the incubator of social processes and also the product of these processes. Built forms act as a provisory platform that facilitates/allows or hinders/forbids participation in urban action. At the same time, built forms are dialectically related to urban functions that consume and transfigure them to accommodate evolving

social and cultural exchange patterns.

This study generally agreed with the consensus of social and urban studies that the meaning of community has changed over the last century. Metropolitan transformations have dictated a new urban economy in which local areas have become more specialized and dependent on other parts of the metropolitan system. It is clear that urban design theory must relate to the new urban logic and establish innovative approaches to deal with the modern urban form. Understanding metropolitan regions and current market dynamics is inevitable for effective and potentially realizable urban design plans. That said, it is important to avoid the indifferent approach by a variety of social and urban studies to local or neighborhood design concerns. Urban design strategies should be capable of relating local areas to their regional structures without sacrificing the local context. Urban and suburban neighborhoods or local areas are deeply involved with daily lives, histories, and memories. The spatial and physical configurations of local areas contribute to the quality of urban experience. Of particular significance to this study is the notion of sense of community as a by-product of increasing the probabilistic interfaces among residents of modern subdivisions. The planning and design possibilities discussed and implemented in New Urbanist developments represent a rich resource of ideas for professionals, cities, and regions. They may not revive traditional urbanity or reconstitute metropolitan areas into transects with walking and transit friendly environments. As evidenced by various empirical and statistically supported investigations within environmental psychology and sociology, architecture, landscape ecology, and other social science

studies, good design can be used to bolster the experiential quality of built environments. Design provides possibilities for social interaction, however transient, that enriches people's lives and enhances their sense of place.

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