

"The Neighborhood, the District, and the Corridor"

from Peter Katz and Vincent Scully, Jr. (eds), *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (1993)

Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk

Editors' Introduction

The husband and wife team of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk are leaders in a current intellectual movement in architecture and urban planning called *the New Urbanism*. They are interested in urban space because they want to reshape urban and suburban patterns to create places where people can interact with their neighbors, enjoy public space, and get from home to work, school, and stores by foot and bicycle as well as by car. Duany and Plater-Zyberk are notable not only for their theorizing about better urban spaces, but also because they have designed and built successful new communities such as Seaside, Florida that actually implement their ideas.

Duany and Plater-Zyberk are neo-traditionalists. They find much of value in the traditional vernacular architecture and people-oriented layout of the kind of small American towns J.B. Jackson lovingly describes (p. 164). Like Jane Jacobs (p. 114) they feel that promoting human interaction and community are as important values as designing for efficiency and are skeptical of the way in which urban planners have segregated land uses and imposed artificial and de-humanizing order on urban spaces. Duany and Plater-Zyberk are often described as postmodernists. They reject the emphasis on machine-age efficiency, large scale, and speed that dominated the thinking of modernist architects and planners like Le Corbusier (p. 317) in the middle of the twentieth century.

In this essay Duany and Plater-Zyberk describe how architects and planners can design three urban elements to create urban spaces much better than the isolating, auto-dependent suburbs common today. Their approach of breaking down urban space into distinct elements – neighborhoods, districts, edges, and corridors – is influenced by Kevin Lynch (p. 424) who identified key "elements" that make up the image of the city and urged design professionals to follow principles of good design for each element.

Duany and Plater-Zyberk are particularly interested in *neighborhoods* – urbanized areas with a balanced mix of uses. Their ideas about the ideal neighborhood are very concrete and elements of their ideal model fit together into a unified vision for an alternative to the pattern of development that evolved after World War II. The ideal neighborhood they envisage is *small* – a five-minute walk from center to edge. It is *diverse*, containing a balanced mix of dwellings, workplaces, shops, parks, and civic institutions such as schools and churches. Their ideal neighborhood has a *center* dominated by civic buildings and public space, and an *edge* of some kind (perhaps defined by fields and forest; perhaps by a highway or rail line). Land use in their ideal neighborhood articulates with a system of pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented transportation corridors that offer residents opportunities to walk, bicycle, drive, or take public transit to work, school, shopping, and entertainment. This vision stands in sharp contrast to the predominant suburban pattern today: sprawling, auto-dependent, homogenous areas lacking in public space and without clear centers or edges.

New Urbanists like Duany and Plater-Zyberk believe the modernist values that produced modern suburbia are no longer relevant. While the segregation of housing from the smoke and stench of nineteenth-century factories

may have been an improvement over the conditions which Friedrich Engels described in nineteenth-century Manchester (p. 58), they argue that such a segregation of land uses is no longer necessary in the post-industrial information age. While the street pattern built to accommodate mass auto use allowed people to move efficiently from suburban homes to city-centered work locations, this is no longer the pattern in the technoburba Fishman (p. 77) describes. Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and other New Urbanists feel the auto-oriented corridor system has had a devastating impact on community and the quality of life in suburbia that needs to be changed.

Duany and Plater-Zyberk have a private architectural/urban planning practice in Florida specializing in developments consistent with the design principles in this selection. They are founders of the Congress for New Urbanism – a loose association of like-minded architects, planners, and other professionals. Their most notable accomplishment is the design of Seaside, Florida, an entire new town built on New Urbanist principles that have attracted worldwide attention.

This reading is from Peter Katz and Vincent Scully, Jr. (eds), *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), a collection of essays and illustrations of New Urbanist developments. Duany and Plater-Zyberk's most recent statement of their critique of suburbia and alternative vision is *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2001) co-authored with Jeff Speck. Duany co-authored *The Smart Growth Manual* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002) with Jeff Speck and edited *New Civic Art: Elements of Town Planning* (London: Rizzoli, 2002).

For a description of how Seaside, Florida was designed and built see David Mohoney and Keasterling Keller (eds), *Seaside: Making a Town in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991). Critiques of Seaside – both positive and negative – are contained in Tod Bressi (ed.), *The Seaside Debates: A Critique of the New Urbanism* (London: Rizzoli, 2002).

Other writings on the New Urbanism include Michael Lescesse and Kathleen McCormick (eds), *Charter of the New Urbanism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), John A. Dutton, *New American Urbanism: Re-forming the Suburban Metropolis* (New York: Skira, 2001), Peter Calthorpe, *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), and Philip Langdon, *A Better Place to Live: Reshaping the American Suburb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). James Howard Kunstler has popularized critiques of suburbia and New Urbanist ideas in *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1994) and *Home from Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1998).

The fundamental organizing elements of the New Urbanism are the neighborhood, the district and the corridor. Neighborhoods are urbanized areas with a balanced mix of human activity; districts are areas dominated by a single activity; corridors are connectors and separators of neighborhoods and districts. A single neighborhood standing free in the landscape is a village. Clites and towns are made up of multiple neighborhoods and districts, organized by corridors of transportation or open space. Neighborhoods, districts and corridors are urban elements. By contrast, suburbia, which is the result of zoning laws that separate uses, is composed of pods, highways and interstitial spaces.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The nomenclature may vary, but there is general agreement regarding the physical composition of the neighborhood. The "neighborhood unit" of the 1929 New York Regional Plan, the "quarter" identified by Leon Krier, the "traditional neighborhood development" (TND) and "transit-oriented development" (TOD) share similar attributes. They all propose a model of urbanism that is limited in area and structured around a defined center. While the population density may vary, depending on its context, each model offers a balanced mix of dwellings, workplaces, shops, civic buildings and parks.

Like the habitat of any species, the neighborhood possesses a natural logic that can be described in

physical terms. The following are the principles of an ideal neighborhood design: (1) the neighborhood has a center and an edge; (2) the optimal size of a neighborhood is a quarter mile from center to edge; (3) the neighborhood has a balanced mix of activities – dwelling, shopping, working, schooling, worshipping and recreating; (4) the neighborhood structures building sites and traffic on a fine network of inter-connecting streets; (5) the neighborhood gives priority to public space and to the appropriate location of civic buildings.

The neighborhood has a center and an edge

The combination of a focus and a limit contribute to the social identity of the community. The center is a necessity, the edge not always so. The center is always a public space, which may be a square, a green or an important street intersection. It is near the center of the urban area unless compelled by some geographic circumstance to be elsewhere. Eccentric locations are justified if there is a shoreline, a transportation corridor or a place with an engaging view.

The center is the locus of the neighborhood's public buildings, ideally a post office, a meeting hall, a day-care center, and sometimes religious and cultural institutions. Shops and workplaces are usually associated with the center, especially in a village. In the aggregations of multiple neighborhoods which occur in a town or city, retail buildings and workplaces may be at the edge of the neighborhood, where they can combine with others and intensify commercial and community activity.

Neighborhood edges may vary in character: they can be natural, such as a forest, or man-made, such as infrastructure. In villages, the edge is usually defined by land designated for cultivation such as farms, orchards and nurseries or for conservation in a natural state as woodland, desert, wetland or escarpment. The edge may also be assigned to very low-density residential use with lots of at least 10 acres. When a community cannot afford to sustain large tracts of public open land, such large private ownerships are a way to maintain a green edge.

In cities and towns, edges can be formed by the systematic accretion between the neighborhoods of recreational open spaces, such as parks, schoolyards and golf courses. It is important that golf courses

be confined to the edge of neighborhoods, because fairways obstruct direct pedestrian ways to the neighborhood center. These continuous green edges can be part of a larger network of corridors, connecting urban open space with rural surroundings, as described in the 1920s by Benton McKaye.

In high-density urban areas, the neighborhood edge is often defined by infrastructure, such as rail lines and high traffic thoroughfares that best remain outside the neighborhood. The latter, if generously lined with trees, become pathways that reinforce the legibility of the edge and, over a long distance, form the corridors connecting urban neighborhoods.

The optimal size of a neighborhood is a quarter mile from center to edge

This distance is the equivalent of a five-minute walk at an easy pace. The area thus circumscribed is the neighborhood proper, to differentiate it from the green edge, which extends beyond the discipline of the quarter mile. The limited area gathers the population of a neighborhood within walking distance of many of their daily needs, such as a convenience store, post office, community police post, automatic bank teller, school, daycare center and transit stop.

The stop's location among other neighborhood services and within walking distance of home or work makes the transit system convenient. When an automobile trip is necessary to arrive at a transit stop, most potential users will simply continue driving to their destinations. But the neighborhood, which focuses the required user population within walking distance of the stop, makes transit viable at densities that a suburban pattern cannot sustain.

Pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented neighborhoods permit a region of cities, towns and villages to be accessible without singular reliance on cars. Such a system gives access to the major cultural and social institutions, the variety of shopping and the broad job base that can only be supported by the larger population of an aggregation of neighborhoods.

The neighborhood has a balanced mix of activities – dwelling, shopping, working, schooling, worshipping and recreating

This is particularly important for those who are unable to drive and thus depend on others for mobility. For

instance, the young are able to walk or bicycle to school and other activities, freeing their parents from the responsibility and tedium of chauffeuring. The size of a school should be determined by the number of children who can walk or bicycle to it from adjacent neighborhoods.

And the elderly, who relinquish their willingness to drive before they lose their ability to walk, can age in place with dignity rather than being forced into specialized retirement communities, which are the attendant creations of the suburban pattern.

Even those for whom driving may not be a burden enjoy secondary advantages. The proximity of daily destinations and the convenience of transit reduces the number and length of trips, decreases the private stress of time in traffic and minimizes the public-borne expenses of road construction and atmospheric pollution.

The neighborhood's fine-grained mix of activities includes a range of housing types for a variety of incomes, from the wealthy business owner to the school teacher and the gardener. Suburban areas, which are most commonly segregated by income, do not provide for the full range of society. The true neighborhood, however, offers a variety of affordable housing choices: garage apartments in conjunction with single-family houses, apartments above shops and apartment buildings adjacent to shopping and workplaces. The latter's transitional sites are not provided within the suburban pattern whose rigorous, sanitized segregation of uses precludes them.

But the greatest contribution to affordable housing may be realized by the neighborhood's ability to reduce multiple automobile ownership and many of its associated costs. By enabling households to own one less vehicle, the average annual operating cost of \$5,000 can be applied toward an additional \$50,000 increment of mortgage financing at 10 percent. No other action of the designer can achieve an improvement in the availability of housing for the middle class comparable to the sensible organization of a good neighborhood plan.

The neighborhood structures building sites and traffic on a fine network of interconnecting streets

Neighborhood streets are configured to create blocks of appropriate building sites and to shorten pedestrian

routes. They are designed to keep local traffic off regional roads and to keep through traffic off local streets. An interconnecting pattern of streets provides multiple routes that diffuse traffic congestion.

This contrasts to the easily congested single trajectories standard to the suburban pattern: cul-de-sac spill onto collector streets, which connect at single points to arterials, which in turn supply the highways. The suburban traffic model is more concerned with speeding traffic through a place than with the quality of the place itself; the pedestrian is assumed to be elsewhere on separate "walkways" or nonexistent.

Neighborhood streets of varying types are detailed to provide equitably for pedestrian comfort and for automobile movement. Slowing the automobile and increasing pedestrian activity encourages the casual meetings that form the bonds of community.

The neighborhood gives priority to public space and to the appropriate location of civic buildings

Public spaces and buildings represent community identity and foster civic pride. The neighborhood plan structures its streets and blocks to create a hierarchy of public spaces and locations for public buildings. Squares and streets have their size and geometry defined by the intention to create special places. Public buildings occupy important sites, overlooking a square or terminating a street vista.

The suburban practice of locating government buildings, places of worship, schools and even public art according to the expediencies of land cost is ineffective. The importance of these civic and community structures is enhanced by their suitable siting, without incurring additional costs to the infrastructure.

THE DISTRICT

The district is an urbanized area that is functionally specialized. Although districts preclude the full range of activities necessary for a complete neighborhood, they are not the rigorously single activity zones of suburbia: the office parks, housing subdivisions or shopping centers. The specialization of a district still allows multiple activities to support its primary identity. Typical are theater districts, which have restaurants

and bars to support and intensify their nightlife; tourist districts, which concentrate hotels, retail activity and entertainment; and the capitol area and the college campus, which are dominated by a large institution. Others accommodate large-scale transportation or manufacturing, such as airports, container terminals and refineries.

Although a degree of specialization for certain urban areas enhances their character and efficiency, in reality, few pure districts are really justified. Thanks to industrial evolution and environmental regulation, the reasons for segregating uses recede with time. The modern North American workplace is no longer a bad neighbor to dwellings and shops.

The organizational structure of the district parallels that of the neighborhood and similarly, for a good fit within the greater region, relies on its relationship to transit. An identifiable focus encourages the formation of special communities: a park for workers at lunch, a square for theater-goers to meet, a mall for civic gatherings. Clear boundaries and dimensions facilitate the formation of special taxing or management organizations. Interconnected circulation supports the pedestrian, enhances transit viability and ensures security. And like the neighborhood, attention to the character of the public spaces creates a sense of place for its users, even if their home is elsewhere.

THE CORRIDOR

The corridor is at once the connector and the separator of neighborhoods and districts. Corridors include natural and man-made elements, ranging from wildlife trails to rail lines. The corridor is not the haphazardly residual space that remains outside subdivisions and shopping centers in suburbia. Rather, it is an urban element characterized by its visible continuity. It is defined by its adjacent districts and neighborhoods and provides entry to them.

The corridor's location and type is determined by its technological intensity and nearby densities. Heavy rail corridors are tangent to towns and traverse the industrial districts of cities. Light rail and trolleys may occur within a boulevard at the neighborhood edge. As such, they are detailed for pedestrian use and to accommodate the frontages of buildings. Bus corridors

can pass through neighborhood centers on conventional streets. All of these should be landscaped to reinforce their continuity.

In low-density areas, the corridor may be the continuous green edge between neighborhoods, providing long-distance walking and bicycle trails, other recreational amenities and a continuous natural habitat.

The corridor is a significant element of the New Urbanism because of its inherently civic nature. In the age of the metropolis, with villages, towns, neighborhoods and districts aggregated in unprecedented quantity, the most universally used public spaces are the corridors that serve connection and mobility. Of the three elements — the neighborhood, the district and the corridor — the latter, in its optimum form, is the most difficult to implement because it requires regional coordination.

CONCLUSION

The conventional suburban practice of segregating uses by zones is the legacy of the "dark satanic mills," which were once genuine hazards to public welfare. The separation of dwelling from workplace in the course of the last century was the great achievement of the nascent planning profession and remains institutionalized in zoning ordinances. The suburbs and cities of today continue to separate the naturally integrated human activities of dwelling, working, shopping, schooling, worshipping and recreating.

The hardship caused by this separation has been mitigated by widespread automobile ownership and use, which in turn has increased the demand for vehicular mobility. The priority given to road building at the expense of other civic programs during the last four decades has brought our country to the multiple crises of environmental degradation, economic bankruptcy and social disintegration.

The New Urbanism offers an alternative future for the building and re-building of regions. Neighborhoods that are compact, mixed-use and pedestrian friendly; districts of appropriate location and character; and corridors that are functional and beautiful can integrate natural environments and man-made communities into a sustainable whole.