

A Primer on the Proposal of Social Connectedness through New Urbanism

By
Christopher Alexander Yutaka Molnar

Supervised by
Laura E. Taylor

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ABSTRACT

Humans are social beings that are driven to communicate and interact with one another. This fact is made evident in the countless apps and media outlets dedicated to increasing social connectedness or the internal sense of belonging and subjective sense of connection with the social world (Lee & Robbins, 1995, 1998). Yet social connectedness has generally been absent from core considerations within land-use development regulations. For New Urbanists, this lack of attention given to social connectedness by planners is a major problem given the rise in asocial behaviours and the ubiquity of suburban sprawl. In consideration of the debates surrounding community and society, I have within this research navigated the solutions New Urbanism posit and question how plausible they are.

Based on my readings of the literature, New Urbanist planning has always been concerned with issues around the intersection between built form and social-connectedness. This led me to question whether the social conclusions associated with New Urbanism can be substantiated. New Urbanism advocates for a process of land-use planning that is socially inclusive, equitable, and communitarian, yet I demonstrate that the notion of physically building social connectedness through planning remains problematic. While land-use planning regulations cannot explicitly regulate places for who can use them, professionals can design, market, and price places to control who may generally inhabit these spaces. Nonetheless, proponents of New Urbanism and those more skeptical of its physical determinist views are addressed to weigh the merits of their arguments and their value in furthering the understanding of the social jurisdiction of New Urbanist planning. In the last chapter I present four fundamental reasons why New Urbanism fails to live up to its social conclusions: a romanticized past, the non-deterministic socio-spatial relationship, limitations of empirical research, and the complications of reality.

FOREWORD

My area of concentration is focused on the proposal of social connectedness through design alterations to the physical environment, which hinges on the New Urbanist planning theory. My subsequent analysis is comprised of two main components, the first being planning theory and the second, addresses politics and policy. Through my research, literature describing my area of concentration was used to test whether New Urbanist principles, designs and methods can in fact influence social connectedness. In my opinion, planners must continue to question the assumptions laid out in planning theories and address the political agenda laid out in policies. This paper is directly related to my area of concentration, its components, and their respective learning objectives as set out below:

Planning Theory

My research deals directly with planning theory in questioning the epistemological approaches that frame New Urbanist planning theory. Furthermore, and among other things, planning theory can act as a buttress, upholding and providing legitimacy to the status quo. My analysis, then, brings rise to the concern of under what conditions spatial development can be understood outside of normative frames of reference. Planning theory can then help one to focus on the nature of procedures within planning practice, which mobilize and/or hinder democratic participation and pressure. Planning theory is to be used as a tool: for problem setting, to address biases in judgement, and consider the limitations of planning practice.

Politics and Policy

Throughout this research I demonstrate the significance of actors, structures, and ideas in understanding planning as a process of matching policy goals with policy means. New Urbanist planning is analyzed from two fundamental dimensions, substantive and procedural, in order to demonstrate the prescriptive nature of politics and policy. The procedural dimension seeks to identify the optimal relationship between social connectedness and physical design with regards to addressing asocial behaviours. The substantive, on the other hand, address the complications of finding a balance between subjectivities, where the analysis of problems and solutions are constrained by the existing domains of knowledge. New Urbanist planning principles often describe how best to plan, which becomes suspect when analyzing them from a Foucauldian perspective. Thus, while the government makes authoritative decisions on behalf of its citizens, planners and citizens alike must critically question their own roles within development processes. This in turn leads to a more substantive understanding of the assumptions within New Urbanist planning which often go unquestioned: its romanticized past, non-determinist socio-spatial relationship, limitations of empirical research, and the complications of reality.

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Introduction

Loneliness and social isolation have been identified as causes of asocial behaviour. Asocial behaviour is generally defined as avoiding social interaction and choosing to withdraw from society for various reasons (Merriam-Webster, 2019). In October 2018, Policy Horizons Canada, part of the Canadian Federal Government, published *The Next Generation of Emerging Global Challenges* in which various challenges and emerging problems were identified that have “the potential to shape society in profound ways” (Policy Horizons Canada, 2018, p. 15). These challenges and problems are discussed in five broad categories: economy, society, technology, environment, governance and arts/culture, each with their own subset of emerging global challenges. The government through this publicly funded research initiative has the goal to raise awareness of these growing issues in order to guide research and to inform policy development. I am particularly interested in the challenge they describe as *The Emerging Asocial Society*.

According to Policy Horizons Canada (2018, p. 17), “despite hopes that technology would enhance our social connectedness, more people feel lonely and disconnected, suggesting continued social challenges in the future where asocial behaviour could grow in unexpected ways”. Policy Horizons Canada (2018) states that asocial behaviour can often lead to negative outcomes for both physical and mental well-being. While the report outlines several reasons for the current “socially disconnected way of life”— mainly the rise in living alone, nature of work, technology, and the individualism milieu — my emphasis is be on the form and function of the built environment as having significant implications on this way of life.

As a land-use planner, I question the notion that some patterns of social life are more desirable than others and should, be sought as planning goals. New Urbanists have and remain

committed to the belief that built form affects behaviour and in turn human interaction. My focus here is to question whether New Urbanism influences — and whether New Urbanists should even try to influence — a socially connected physical world. New Urbanism is a planning reform movement that is concerned with transforming development processes through urban designs and participatory methods that lead to socially connectedness. Therefore, does New Urbanism provide the public with spaces that they can identify with and participate in, which some argue positively influences future feelings, thoughts and behaviours (Kohut, 1984; Baker & Baker, 1987). Based on my analysis of New Urbanism from a social connectedness lens, which emphasizes an individual's subjective view of the social world, I believe planners should focus on addressing how the public *wants* to be social and provide spaces that help to develop a social lens.

What is needed as a starting point is a powerful and apposite definition of social connectedness by which I can start to discern New Urbanist forms and methods that may influence the social connectedness of those living in New Urbanist developments. I am talking about social connectedness as the concept is understood and used in *sociology* and *environmental psychology*, that is, as something that directly relates to human experience and interaction in space (Lee & Robbins, 1995, 1998). This use of social connectedness means that I am not looking for the more abstract concepts, such as “sense-of-community” which are often used to measure the social conclusions of New Urbanism (Talen, 2000a; Talen, 2000b). This is not to say that sense of community is an inadequate measure of New Urbanism but rather, given the goal of this research the word community does pose a few challenges not easily overcome.

Sense of community asks questions regarding the perception of community and people's relationship to it and to the maintenance of the norms held by the community. McMillan and

Chavis (1986, p. 9) describe Sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs are be met through their commitment to be together”. In terms of my current research, this definition is challenging to defend. First, community conveys multiple meanings which are often not fully digested in the literature. Many areas can be seen as a community in a physical or geographic sense while community is also metaphysical and relational, from a local sports team to a political party. Second, sense of community is characterized by the relationship between individuals and social systems that influence the development of social, cultural, and economic resources (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). This means that the stronger the sense of community, the more influence the members feel they have on their environment (McMillian & Chavis, 1986). While this may be true, the opposite is questioned here: whether New Urbanist environments lead to a stronger sense of social connectedness within their developments’ residents.

Interaction between people, which is argued by New Urbanists as something that can be achieved by the design of the urban form of streets, buildings, and open space (Talen, 2000a) becomes imperative within this definition of social connectedness. Urban form can either promote or hinder opportunities for people to gather and interact with one another and their surrounding environment. Furthermore, tied to this definition of social connectedness is a subjective sense of belonging influenced by urban form. Many areas have a subjective meaning to individuals and groups which can individually or collectively bind people to a particular place. These areas may influence and/or be based on homogeneity with respect to a variety of characteristics. This implies that land-use planners affect social connectedness through decisions about the inclusion of certain facilities that help to encourage, directly or indirectly, participation and the formation of social relationships.

If interaction and sense of belonging are factors in determining how urban forms can influence social connectedness then propinquity may also play a role. As a result, social connectedness would be influenced by the land-use planner through determining how near people live from one another and from neighbourhood facilities. As Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950, p.160) have suggested “the architect who builds a house or designs a site plan, who decides where the roads go and not go, and who decides which direction the houses face and how close together houses are, also is, to a large extent, deciding the pattern of social life among the people who will live in these houses”. The caveat to this is that while propinquity may initiate social connectedness in order to maintain social connectedness, interactions and a sense of belonging must be based on a homogeneous desire for social relationships.

In terms of New Urbanist designs, the short generic definition of social connectedness proposed here is: a subjective sense of belonging which influences desires to interact with people and physical space. This definition does not take into account the income level, culture, history, social status, and political affiliation of people in a given area, which is addressed in Chapter 5. This discussion uses the proposed definition as a benchmark to analyze the current literature on the subject to test whether New Urbanist designs and methods do in fact influence social connectedness. This definition acts as a spring board to dive into more meaningful conversations about subjectivity, placeless communities, and the non-determinist effect of interaction. Planners must continue to question the assumptions about how New Urbanist designs may impact social behaviour and whether creating a shared sense of belonging is an appropriate goal.

This research furthers discussions regarding the intersections between built form and social connectedness. Following, a brief illustration of how sociologists, psychologists, and planners have addressed social connectedness in their work, I question the capacity of New

Urbanism to address asocial behaviours and whether the principles, designs and methods lead to socially-connected ways of life. New Urbanists advocate for a process of land-use planning that is socially-inclusive, equitable, and communitarian. Instead, I demonstrate the notion of building community through planning remains problematic. The camps with diametrically opposing views of New Urbanism are addressed to weigh the merits of the arguments' value in furthering the understanding of the relationship between social connectedness and New Urbanist planning. Nevertheless, this leads to the four fundamental reasons why New Urbanism, in my opinion, struggles to live up to its social conclusions: a romanticized past, the non-deterministic socio-spatial relationship, limitations of empirical research, and the complications of reality. The purpose of this review is to critically evaluate the idea of using social connectedness within a central role in the planning of New Urbanist environments.

Approach to Research

To achieve my research goals, I chose to use an in depth theoretical analysis. The discussions within the material on New Urbanist approach addressed gaps in the literature and provided justification for the present research. Furthermore, this theoretical analysis identified contrasting approaches to tackling social connectedness and provided a framework to critically analyze New Urbanisms role in contemporary land-use planning.

In order to demonstrate this view, New Urbanism is analyzed to include perspectives from its core theoretical contributors (i.e. Congress for the New Urbanism, 1999; Duany and Zyberk, 1990; Calthorpe, 1993; Katz, 1994; Steuteville & Langdon, 2009) to those more critical of the theory (i.e. Harvey, 1997; Hall, 1996, Audirac, 1999; Soule, 2006; Lehrer and Milgrom, 1996; Ross, 1999). Analyzing the conclusions of many social thinkers (i.e. sociologists, psychologists, and planners) on the issues of lacking social connectedness demonstrates the

foundations of communitarian thought. Following this line of thought, I dive into more meaningful conversations about the precedents that lead to the social conclusions of New Urbanism, among others, Urban Sprawl (e.g. Patricios, 2002; Paris, 1982; Fulton, 1996; Hayden, 2003; Soule, 2006), notions of community and social connectedness (e.g. Chivas & Wandersman, 1990; Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002; McKeever, 1968, Frazer, 1999; Putman, 2000; O'Brien & Ayidiya, 1991), the social divide within empirical research on community planning (e.g. Hodge & Gordon, 2014; Talen, 2000a; Talen 2000b; Rohe, 1985; Grant; 2006), and the realities of applying New Urbanist principles (e.g. Haas, 2008, Soule, 2006, Grant, 2009). This framework with its four fundamental components, addressed above forms a useful conceptual structure to examine the application of New Urbanism in relation to social connectedness. In the end, I picked up on the "Dark Side of Planning Theory" (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002), to demonstrate the realities of New Urbanism's disciplinary discourse (Foucault, 1971).

Chapter 1: Lacking Social Connectedness?

Social connectedness is defined by sociologists Lee and Robbins (1995, 1998) as: an internal sense of belonging and subjective sense of connection with the social world. While this definition is not directly related to physical space, I do subscribe to the argument that the environment does in some way influence behaviour and in turn the norms society subscribe to. Throughout land-use planning's history, planners have often devoted themselves to utilitarian master plans which attempt to organize the physical environment by separating uses to what is seen as the most beneficial to the greatest number of people (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1861). The result in the eyes of the planner may be efficient, attractive and vital places that respect and balance the various needs of the public, the planner's clients, and their profession (Ontario Professional Planners Institute, 2012). Sociologists and psychologists on the other hand, study people in terms of social structures, behaviour patterns, and the values people subscribe to. There is one assumption that underlies all three disciplines' epistemologies: that the physical environment in some way influences values, behaviours, and social structures.

A central question in sociology has been: what are the effects of urbanization on the sense of belonging and interaction with the social world (Lin and Mele, 2013, p.13)? There has been a myriad of thinkers on this topic but I focus on Ferdinand Tonnies, Georg Simmel, Louis Wirth, and Jane Jacobs for their analysis on the social influence of environmental factors which influenced the communitarian view of New Urbanism. While everyone lives in collective environments (i.e. households, neighbourhoods, nations), inclusion in these environments create benefits and challenges that affect perspectives, personalities and behaviours. Challenges which are not easily overcome through changing people's physical environments alone. This is by no means an exhaustive summary of all the ideas put forth by sociological

scholars but instead highlights some useful themes and lays the groundwork for analyzing the New Urbanist social connectedness conclusions.

Social connectedness is described by Ferdinand Tonnies as a tension between social and individual behaviours. Tonnies (1887) understood the urban development process as a major driving force in the decline of community life. As described in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society) are two ideal types of social formations that denote a rural-urban shift. According to Tonnies, Gemeinschaft is comprised of groupings based on a cooperative social structure that emphasize social connectedness. Gemeinschaft is regulated by norms or collective beliefs that characterize personal relationships and responsibilities of members to each other and the larger association. Tonnies (1887) believed that these types of relationships were driven by an Essential Will (Wesenwille), where people are emotionally tied and is a means to serve the goals of a larger social grouping. On the other hand, Gesellschaft is composed of groupings based on some instrumental goal guided by formal values and individual self-interests. Gesellschaft is directed by rationality and an Arbitrary Will (Kurwille) that sees the group as a means to further individual goals based on social contracts. While Tonnies found major differences between the kinds of rural societies that were being replaced by industrial societies, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft were intended as conceptual tools useful for understanding how the social world works. For my understanding of social connectedness, Tonnies (1887) presents a compelling argument in relation to the change of social relations from communality derived from the land to the pursuit of self-interest in capitalist society.

Contrasting Tonnies (1887) societal level analysis of urban society, Georg Simmel (1903) considered the urban from a social psychological perspective. An urban dwellers' life is said to be characterized by an individuality aimed at shielding the urban dweller from the over

stimulation of the metropolitan setting. Simmel (1903, p. 24) asserts that “the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces”. The individual must then adjust their personality to cope with the metropolitan setting, resulting in an extreme subjectivism and a struggle for self-assertion. Social interaction between individuals becomes passive and is used as a means to an end, which is in part due to lacking emotional ties. Rational intellect among individuals is then prized, preserving identities against the backdrop of psychological chaos of the metropolis. The communitarian way of rural life is lost in modern urban life, which Simmel (1903) argues is based on this notion of coping with the chaos of the metropolis. Simmel (1903) provided an interesting example, that if all the clocks in Berlin malfunctioned, chaos would ensue. With this example, Simmel demonstrates the necessity of metropolitan life to be precisely defined and regimentally maintained. Buying into this way of life requires the adherence to man-made values of punctuality and calculability, with each individual playing their role to maintain society. Unlike rural settings which favour a communitarian approach, metropolitan settings lead to a higher prevalence of asocial ways of life.

In *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, Louis Wirth (1938) criticizes Tonnies’ pessimistic perspective of urban society arguing that a socially-connected-way-of-life does exist in highly urbanized areas. Cities are more than a mere aggregate of people and rather should be seen as a product of human nature. Wirth (1938) demonstrates how the social characteristics of urbanism are transformed by and evolve from quantitative characteristics such as density and heterogeneity of places. Being raised in an urban as opposed to a rural area leads to an *urban personality*, which is simply not characterized by prosocial behaviour (Wirth, 1938). In this regard, social contact is maintained through environmental factors. For example, characteristics such as housing type, density and land-use mix, are shown to play a role in creating desired social outcomes. For Wirth (1938), the lack of physical distance within the city resulted in social

contact and encouraged acculturation. Physical interventions in space become a positive and enabling force which affect not only well-being but also each individual's outlook on life.

The extent to which physical environments affect or have the potential to affect individual behaviours has been the subject of an increasing number of studies. Jane Jacobs, in the *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) notes the impact that urban planning has had on the quality of life especially after World War II with the rise of mass produced suburban development. Of particular interest is the idea of street life which was beginning to diminish due to the lack of mixed land-use, population diversity, quality designs and destinations within suburban sprawl. For Jacobs (1961), "these suburban arrangements [...] will not generate city liveliness or public life – their populations are too thin – nor will they help maintain city sidewalk safety" (p. 209). This loss of the street resulted in a loss of connectedness and perceived safety within the neighbourhoods. No longer were there eyes on the street to watch over the collective interests of the neighbourhood. Jacobs' (1961) arguments hinge on the notion that a moral identity evolves through shared non-committal, day to day interactions within "living neighbourhoods [which learn] to wrestle consciously with their experiences of difference and Otherness and, paradoxically, at the same time came to value the Eros that unified them with an emerging sense of a vital group" (Stephenson, 2010, p. 390). For Jacobs architects, planners, and policy makers must realize that physical space is a vital component in defining social connectedness.

It is this importance of physical design that New Urbanists are responding to. While authors, such as William Whyte (1980), have advocated strongly for the connection between design and social behaviours, others are strongly opposed to this deterministic view of behaviour. Audirac and Shermyn (1994) argue that the isolated and automobile-dependent nature of contemporary life is the result of a shift in lifestyle and individual preference, rather

than the design of neighbourhoods. Conversely, Langdon (1994) concludes, people are more likely to walk in New Urbanist developments and that there are higher levels of interaction among neighbours on account of the physical layout of the neighbourhoods, particularly the accessibility of retail, open space, and access to amenities. As Hollie Lund (2003) demonstrates, neighbouring behaviours are positively and significantly related to physical factors. The perception of local environments was positively related to the likelihood of walking which leads to further opportunities of increasing social connectedness within neighbourhoods. Lund (2003) concludes that two social conclusions of New Urbanism were found to be corroborated (1) pedestrian friendly streetscapes increase neighbour interaction and (2) people who walk are more likely to interact and form relationship with their neighbours. The question remains as to how a lack of social connectedness affects well-being.

It is normatively thought that people achieve social connectedness through living within a family structure and/or tied to other social structure through civic engagement. A lack of social connectedness, then, can lead to feelings of loneliness, which has become a growing problem that is finally beginning to be addressed from a regulatory angle. In 2018 British Prime Minister Theresa May, for the first time ever named a Minister-of-Loneliness to establish policies to fight loneliness (Walker, 2018). According to the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness (2017), more than 9 million people in Britain (14% of the population) feel lonely, costing the country upwards of \$3.5 billion. While Canadians have not gone as far as to appoint a new minister, Canadian experts from the medical field and social science circles are beginning to express the need to address asocial behaviour (Policy Horizon Canada, 2018). According to gerontologist Andrew Wister (2018), approximately 20 percent of Canadian adults experience loneliness. Furthermore, through current living arrangements and the fragmentation of traditional families, the problem of loneliness will only get worse (Star Editorial Board, 2018). Illustrating this point is Canada's 2016 census, which found that 28 per cent out all households consisted of people living alone, the highest it's

ever been, which coincides with the rise in single occupancy apartment housing typologies. While living arrangements may not directly translate into a lack of social connectedness, I endeavour to demonstrate how declines in civic engagement affects people.

Social connectedness is said to be waning at an alarming rate through a drastic decline in civic engagement (Putman, 2000). This decline creates a negative feedback loop where loss in trust and social capital leads to further civic disengagement and isolation. Empirical research suggests that civic disengagement is associated with poorer health behaviours including smoking, physical inactivity, and poorer sleep (Cacioppo et al., 2002; Hawkey, Thisted, & Cacioppo, 2009; Theeke, 2010) with some going as far to argue loneliness being worse for your health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2015). Baumeister and Leary (1995) have shown that low levels of social connectedness are associated with declines in physical and psychological health, leading people to be more asocial which in turn leads to further civic disengagement. Conversely, high levels of civic engagement strengthens the immune system, lengthens lives, lowers rates of anxiety, increases self-esteem, and creates more open, trusting and cooperative relationships (see: Brown, 1987; Cacioppo et al., 2002; Lee Robbins, 1998). Why then is civic engagement in decline?

According to psychologist Stanley Milgram's (1970) social overload concept, overstimulation leads individuals to filter out less important stimuli such as a needy stranger in order to cope with the surrounding environment. For Milgram (1977), people living in small towns are more likely to offer help to strangers than people living in densely populated cities which he attributed to the overstimulation experienced in a city. This nonurban-urban difference is supported by psychologist Nancy Steblay (1987), who argues that significant decreases in helping are found in communities with a population of 300,000 people or more. Levine, Martinez, Brase, and Sorenseon (1994) demonstrate that population density is more likely to be related to unhelpful behaviour than population size. Levine et al., (1994) analyze thirty-six cities throughout the United

States, comparing population size and population density against six helping behaviours. Population density is negatively correlated with helping, meaning that as population density increased helpfulness decreased (Levine et al., 1994). There, however, continues to be debates over possible explanations for the lower helpfulness of urbanites such as: the behaviour characteristics of others (Fischer, 1976), an urban personality (Wirth, 1938), and the loss of the street (Jacobs, 1961). In my opinion, the social overload concept stands out due to its contradiction to New Urbanist views of social connectedness. This is addressed in detail below, but for now I unpack a few historical design interventions aimed at moderating asocial behaviour.

A major research trend within psychology has been to study how emotional connections between people and their surroundings can act as a way of increasing social connectedness (Altman & Low, 1992; Mesch & Manor, 1998). This trend has led some to research how *neighbourhood social networks* can be fostered or inhibited through environmental means (see, for example, Moorer & Suurmeijer, 2001). Neighbourhood social networks have been described as a way to help foster experiences of social connectedness. Oscar Newman (1972, 1975) demonstrates how *defensible space* as a sociophysical phenomenon works to facilitate local social network formation. Hence, designing small localized spaces where people can meet and socialize informally helps to increase a sense of belonging and promotes a shared emotional connection to a place (Kweon, Sullivan, & Wiley, 1998). This approach from psychology has in turn given many New Urbanists the scientific backing to promote the notion of architectural determinism, which generally holds that the built environment directly shapes the behaviour of the people within it.

A pattern emerges which demonstrates an empirical link between physicality (i.e. rural vs. urban space) and behavioural change (i.e. prosocial behaviour). This link, as far as I can tell, has been the justification for planning reform movements to apply new design and planning principles to improve what they see as the problems of contemporary society. As architectural

historian, Nancy Stieber (1995, p. 7) argues, “the desire to fashion a retreat from the unruly world of power and gain has existed for as long as the proceeds from that world made it possible”. Considering Nietzsche’s notion of inherent meaning I question if/ how reform movements like New Urbanism are morally oblique (i.e. do they intend physical environments held to an inherent moral standard for everyone? Can there even be such a thing as an inherently moral standard?). Nietzsche (1989) argues that things have had different meanings at different times and cannot have inherent meaning: what was morally altruistic from one perspective may be seen as an immoral act of control from another perspective at a different time. Meaning denotes the domination of a particular will bending one toward a certain interpretation (Nietzsche, 1989). For New Urbanism, believing in the inherent meaning of architectural determinism is to give into one specific interpretation of the physical environment and thus to be dominated by a particular will. To break from this morally oblique tradition one must question the assumptions held throughout time and trace ruptures to this domineering will. To what extent, then, are these supposed problems of contemporary society inherent or products of a dysfunctional design philosophy?

Consider the history of planning reform movements. As the industrial revolution made cities larger, more dense, unhealthy, and unsafe and at the same time nurturing a growing middle class, a desire to reshape or leave the older urban neighbourhoods was beginning to take root in many places. First the City Beautiful Movement sought to “impose a sense of order, civility and purpose on chaotic industrial cities” (Bressi, 1994) which emphasized public spaces and a more human scale. Frank Lloyd Wright (Curtis, 1982) dreamed up the Broadacre City with its huge scale and extreme decentralization; families would primarily be self-sufficient on their homestead farms. While Wright thought existing cities were far too dense, Le Corbusier thought they were not dense enough. Le Corbusier’s Radiant City favoured a glass and steel clad centralized city. With residents and business centres housed in high-rise tower blocks,

separated pedestrian and car traffic, and tightly organized by a central planning hierarchy, the Radiant City became a high-density social condenser (Le Corbusier, 1986). Alternatively, Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities promoted the benefit of human connections with nature and each other. The Garden Cities emphasized moderate density, each encircled by a greenbelt, and a balancing of individuality and community through restoring the notion of a communitarian way of life. Lastly, Clarence Perry's Neighbourhood Unit which was a concept based on a large self-contained block that prevented through traffic. The Neighbourhood Unit incorporated internal streets that defined a sense of place and oriented itself around green space and schools at the centre (Brownlow, 1929). In their purest forms, all these approaches were overshadowed by the seductive power of suburbanization with its marketing of open space, fresh air, friendly neighbours, freedom of mobility and abundant home ownership options.

Elements of each reform movement and design concept have influenced development processes of suburban sprawl. For instance the suburbs would not be the same without Perry's promotion of the Neighbourhood Unit concept which translated into the proliferation of the suburban cul-de-sac. While this may be true, I am more interested in the framing of moral arguments to subjugate development processes. As Rose (1980) demonstrates, suburban developers based their environmental reforms on the moral foundation of eradicating the crowding, poverty, disease, and congestion that threatened to overwhelm industrial cities, through a strictly design oriented approach. According to New Urbanist Todd Bressi (1994), in order to fulfill these goals twentieth century planners needed to reject traditional patterns of development in favour of more modern techniques. This only lead to a new set of problems, namely, traffic congestion, poor air quality, social segregation and a lack of social connectedness within neighbourhoods (Duany, Zyberk, and Speck, 2010). Planning has a preoccupation with notions of community through design, whereby planning documents prescribe physical interventions as a means of strengthening community associations within a

neighbourhood which no one makes this argument more fervently than New Urbanists (Talen, 2000a). I wonder how different New Urbanist interventions are from previous reform movements, with their moral conclusions merely acting as a mask and tool within real estate marketing strategies.

According to sociologist Herbert Gans (1968) land-use planners are occupied with the notion that only an environment based on professional planning principles can, for example, aid in the avoidance of social isolation, raise social capital and increase a sense of belonging. Gans (1968) goes on to argue that “if the environment matters at all in ways of living, it is only as that environment is defined by the people who live in it” (p. 2). This points to a social system and/or cultural norms that structure the way people use the physical environment. Gans, in the end, provides arguments against the belief of environmental determinism that hinge on the argument that planners dismiss “the social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to vitality or dullness” (Gans, 1991, p. 36). If causal relationships between the environment and behaviour can be verified, it must be shown that society is not isolated from the influence of development processes within the context of systemic structures. I demonstrate that while the environment plays a major role in defining social identities, land-use planners must strive to understand how people use space and how space in turn provide *opportunities* for building social connectedness.

Chapter 2: The New Urbanist Process

Planners often speak of working within the frame of given policies but if a proposed development does not conform to the policies, an argument can be tabled for why the development meets the *intent* of the policy. Given that policies are often vague, much is open to interpretation. Take for example the Town of Oakville's (a suburb west of the City of Toronto) Official Plan, Section 6.7.3, which is a policy about the urban design of squares: "Large development proposals are encouraged to include a single, large urban square or a series of smaller urban squares." (Town of Oakville, 2018, p. C-16). There is little by way of what constitutes a large development proposal nor is there any means of justification for how a square enhances the public realm or how the intended use of a square contributes to increasing sociability of a space. Arguably, this is laid out in the development proposal on a case of case basis, but in my opinion given the Neoliberal ideology which surrounds land-use planning, social concerns are secondary to economic ones. Neoliberalism in fact tends to favour a free-market economy, where selling what the consumer will buy ends up ipso facto producing the best possible developments. While Official Plans generally encourage social connectedness, this in my opinion becomes secondary to market oriented mass-produced, low-density, greenfield, car oriented growth, sprawling further and further from a metropolitan core. So what can be done?

New Urbanism by way of addressing this policy focused profession and neoliberally driven development process has attempted to transform the regulations and practices that currently reproduce urban sprawl into a socially connected, people-first vision of land-use planning. While New Urbanists define several key principles, the social benefits of designing neighbourhoods to encourage social connectedness is addressed later on. For now, I unpack New Urbanism's participatory method, the design charrette, to demonstrate how New Urbanism

sees social connectedness as a process and opportunity to strengthen collective social identities.

The Congress for the New Urbanism explicitly endorse a participatory approach to urban design and planning. One of their main methods of soliciting community input, educating residents of design alternatives, and encouraging social connectedness is the design charrette. With the proper balance of professional expertise and community local knowledge, the design charrette allows both the planner and resident to voice their concerns in a collaborative manner. The design charrette process has become so ubiquitous within New Urbanist spheres that it spurred the National Charrette Institute (NCI). The NCI is the governing body on design charrettes and offers academic resources, training, membership and accreditation to perform design charrettes.

The underlying philosophy of the design charrette process is an interdisciplinary, collaborative and community-based event that enables all stakeholders to participate in the creation and management of their built environment (Wates, 2008, p. 2). Through the experience of local residents and a wide range of specialists, the belief is that places can be designed that enhance social connectedness. As Andres Duany argues,

“A proper charrette brings into being a collective intelligence ... and it does this with stunning efficiency. No one should waste time. No one should feel stymied. The negotiations should take place not during the adversarial circumstances of the municipal hearing when the plan is already fixed but during the ongoing creation of the plan, when most plan components are at the maximum pitch of flexibility” (National Charrette Institute, 2006, p. ix).

If done correctly, following the NCI system, the design charrette is an intense, collaborative and feasible design and planning workshop. Over the course of several days, specialists, local residents, store owners and critical decision makers all convene to holistically address development issues. For instance, public space issues are considered in conjunction with economic and market feasibility issues along with ownership and servicing issues, to name a few. However, the design charrette is only one phase within a dynamic planning system and cannot be used for every development.

The charrette process is broken down into seven key stages: charrette preparation, vision statement, concept development, plan synthesis, plan development, presentation and plan implementation. Intermixed throughout this process are several feedback loops which provide stakeholders with a chance to review the progress and comment. According to NCI, this process allows stakeholders to participate in the creation and management of their built environment while encouraging residents to share their local knowledge. The design charrette is a positive and enabling force, bringing people together working towards a singular goal. New Urbanists and NCI proponents believe that the sense of empowerment and control afforded to the residents by the charrette can lead to a greater sense of social connectedness (Wates, 2008).

Studying adults in the United States of America, Chavis and Wandersman (1990) found that perception of the environment, social relations, and perceived control over the environment, all lead to a sense of empowerment and influence future participation with neighbourhood organizations. A strong sense of connectedness stimulates the development of the environment and the people who inhabit it. The stronger the sense of social connectedness, the more influence the members feel they have on their environment (McMillian & Chavis, 1986). The charrette would then appear to be a good thing and a vital component of New Urbanism's

arsenal in regards to social connectedness. This participatory method arguably builds social networks and in turn helps to regulate social behaviours in the planning process.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, New Urbanists began to rewrite policies as a way to reform suburban sprawl away from isolating, single use, car-dependent subdivisions and towards people-friendly streets, with multi-use buildings that include a variety of places for people to gather. New Urbanism advocates for specific design elements that work to build a sense of social connection, delineated by Duany and Plater Zyberk (1991), Calthorpe (1993), and Langdon (1994). While there is some variance between writers, the core elements used to promote social connectedness are remarkably similar. These core elements include: well-defined neighbourhoods, high-quality public spaces integrated within each neighbourhood, safe streets that engender walking, higher density, walkable developments near transit stations, and mixed land-uses.

These elements led to innovative concepts such as: transit-oriented-developments, form-based-codes, and the Transect, to name a few. Steuteville and Langdon's (2009) book *New Urbanism: Best Practices Guide*, labours over defining these concepts and offers a more robust account of New Urbanism's concepts than I am able to do here. These concepts have markedly influenced the Canadian planning landscape, leading many municipalities to designate special policy areas around major transit stations and including regulatory design codes within their municipal design processes. As of 2006, according to Director of Urban Pattern Associates, Fanis Grammenos, in Canada there were about forty-two New Urbanist developments under construction and/or completed which equates to roughly 110,000 new dwelling units built in a ten year period. During this same ten year period, 1.5 million dwellings were added to the Canadian housing stock, which means that New Urbanist dwellings equated

to a little over 7% of all dwellings produced in Canada between 1996 and 2006 (Grammenos, 2019). The question remains as to what constitutes a New Urbanist development.

First known as “neo-traditional development,” New Urbanism is in essence “a systematic assembly of a variety of planning and architectural tools” (Marcuse, 2000, p. 4). It is a way of thinking about architecture, planning and urban design as a means of creating more socially connected developments. As an ideology, New Urbanism seeks to redefine development processes through a specific set of physical design and place-making standards. New Urbanist designs are based on the principle of if you build it they will socialize. New Urbanism is committed to designing walkable neighbourhoods, favouring public transit systems over the private automobile, greater integration of mixed land-uses, strong citizen participation, and social and economic diversity. In its rhetoric, New Urbanists believe that “community design can create or influence particular social patterns” (Fulton, 1996, p.5) in hopes of eliciting a stronger sense of social connectedness.

In 1991, California’s Local Government Commission invited Peter Calthorpe, Michael Corbett, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Moule, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stefanos Polyzoides and Daniel Solomon to develop a set of principles to guide future land-use planning, which would later become known as the Ahwahnee Principles. Many of those who attended the Commission went on to found the Congress for the New Urbanism in 1993 and wrote the Charter of the New Urbanism. The Charter outlines principles of design and urban planning that challenged conventional development processes and strengthened social bonds at all scales of development.

One of the main selling points of New Urbanism remains how their built environments promote a shared sense of social connectedness while encouraging social interactions and

feelings of belonging. New Urbanist Douglas Morris (2005) argues that societal distress (i.e. loneliness) can be traced, in part, to the physical design of neighbourhoods. Morris (2005, p. 20) states, “the way we live our lives is determined by the physical landscape in which we reside” which has negatively affected health, especially with the explosion of sprawling developments. As planner Lee Haggerty (1982, p. 359), contends “physical and demographic features of the neighbourhood operate as environmental contingencies which may constrain, foster, cause or eliminate certain types of social behaviour.” In order to limit asocial behaviour and increase social connectedness, New Urbanists argue that people need to be put closer together, be encouraged to walk in the streets and mingle while shopping close to their place of residence (Duany and Zyberk, 1990).

Taking this to heart, New Urbanists have focused on creating places capable of alleviating asocial behaviour through an emphasis on the organizing power of space. As Steuteville and Langdon (2009, p. 352) argue “where houses are closer to the street, front porches overlook the sidewalks, small parks as well as schools, libraries, churches, and other civic or religious buildings are integrated into the neighbourhood, people are generally more satisfied with life”. Sociologist Bruce Podobnik’s (2002) study of Orenco Station, a New Urbanist development in Hillsboro, Oregon, compared the new development with an older inner city neighbourhood and a suburban neighbourhood and found that the New Urbanist neighbourhood was fostering social cohesion and a high level of interaction. As urban-studies professor Andrew Ross states (1999, p. 85) after living in Celebration, Florida, another New Urbanist development, for one year “it’s pretty undeniable that social relationships are built on proximity and do arise from the physical design of the town”. Celebration residents went as far to refer to a “porch culture”, where people sit on their porch and actually socialize with passersby and neighbours (Salant, 1995, p. G5). The New Urbanist development, Kentlands, in Gaithersburg, Maryland was studied by Kim and Kaplan (1999) for the physical design’s ability to garner

community attachment, social interaction and community identity, all of which aid in the development of social connectedness. Kim and Kaplan (1999, p. 332) found that when compared to a conventional suburban development of similar size, housing typology, and price, the Kentlands development significantly increased “residents’ emotional bonding or ties to their community through a sense of ownership, community satisfaction, and feelings of connectedness”.

As an ideological movement, New Urbanism according to urban design professor Tigran Hass (2008) is a pragmatic planning system that champions a people first vision focused on how the power of physical design can contribute to the social connectedness of places. New Urbanists acknowledge the social challenges of “a deterioration in the quality of urban life” (Hass, 2008, p. 10). Adopting the principles of New Urbanism such as providing mixed-use developments, higher densities, safe people-friendly streets and squares, Hass (2008) argues, results in neighbours being able to know each other and watch over their collective security. But is mixing uses or redesigning the streets and adding more squares enough to improve the quality of the social life within suburban sprawl?

One of the most prominent thinkers on the relationship between New Urbanism and social concerns is planning Professor Emily Talen, which most importantly to the present study is her work on community building techniques. While community and social connectedness are two separate concepts there is significant overlap which makes addressing Talen’s conclusions worthwhile. The emphasis on community, for Talen (2002) is largely a product of popular literature that mourns the loss of the communitarian way of life (i.e. Putnam, 2000). The obvious response to this loss of community is to seek ways of re-establishing civic life using planning tools, which undoubtedly is motivated by empirical research studying the effects of the environment on human behaviour (O’Brien & Ayidiya, 1991; Hull, 1995; Tuan, 1974; Chavis &

Wandersman, 1990). Talen (2002) goes on to demonstrate through her review of planning documents that “(1) community is a pervasive concept in physically oriented planning activities and (2) it is common for the notion of community to be tied to physical design” (p.174). Talen (2002) concludes that building a sense of community through physical means remains problematic. Rather than focusing on community building as an end result, planners should instead focus on community as a process which is in constant flux.

What can be done at a municipal level? Do suburban municipalities just transition to regulatory design codes? Is this even possible given the political and financial ramifications of land-use planning? I would argue not, given what sociologist Harvey Molotch (1976) describes as, the *city as a growth machine*, which analyzes how local elites see land as a market commodity providing wealth and power. This is something that is further developed in Chapter 5. Growth in this sense is seen as a by-product of land speculation and real estate development. The reality is that planning is normatively seen as being contingent on new development. So long as land owners want to develop their greenfield sites with single detached car-oriented tract homes, legally, not much can stand in their way. But are the suburbs as bad as everyone makes them out to seem, so devoid of social opportunities that no sense of social connection could ever exist?

Chapter 3: The New Urbanist Judgement

While there are remarkably varied and contradictory accounts of the formation of suburbanization (see: Bruegmann, 2005), my goal here is to demonstrate a few key contributing factors that led to suburbanization. My point is not to argue that these are the most important reasons for suburban developments. Rather, I acknowledge there are innumerable forces, always acting on each other in complex and unpredictable ways. This section demonstrates that while New Urbanists describe all the destructive qualities of suburban sprawl, I believe encouraging a sense of social connectedness is not as easy as just redesigning and changing the regulations governing suburban sprawl.

By the early twentieth century the suburbs were no longer viewed as “limbo places” or where the “riffraff” collected (Chaucer, 1476). Rather, if you could scrape together the down payment on a car and a house you could escape the congested, unsanitary conditions of cities and move to the “borderlands” (Stilgoe, 1988). That is if you were not a visible minority (Soule, 2006). According to Stilgoe (1988), the suburbs were advertised in magazines as bucolic settings with abundant fresh air, green space, healthy living conditions and wonderfully designed places to raise a family. This perspective is furthered by Dolores Hayden’s (2003) contention that family has a central role in the formation of social connectedness. As Zieleniec (2007) argues, design is framed as a way to internalize ‘normalizing values’ (p. 142). Thus, the design of suburban neighbourhoods with their commitment to low-density and an abundance of green space, grew from social scientists who argue green space, cleanliness, and ‘fresh air’ would in turn produce a more sanitary neighbourhood. This is evident in empirical studies that show poor environmental conditions in central cities have negative consequences on physical and mental health (see: Jackson & Roberts, 2001; Bryesse et al., 2004; Kearns & Smith, 1993). The use of empirical studies then informs physical alterations to the environment in order to

control the most effective and beneficial use of space. This control creates “a reflective subject who internalized the knowledge and values of bourgeois society in order to create more civilized productive individuals” (Zieleniec, 2007, p. 143). Although social reform is a contributing factor, the suburban development process is firmly rooted in governmental policy.

While transportation expenditures, technological innovations, and environmental policies were all contributing factors to the formation of the suburbs, high demand for housing undoubtedly exacerbated the demand for suburban development patterns (Willmer, 2006). In Canada, during the Second World War new homes were not being produced and following the end of the war, increased immigration, the increasing costs of construction, and the relative shortage of serviced land, a dramatic influx of people needed a place to live (Rose, 1980). A construction surge followed, pushed along by the *National Housing Act's* (NHA) 1944 initiative for the Canadian Federal Government to grant citizens “25 per cent of the capital amount of an approved NHA mortgage loan at relatively low interest, namely 3 percent” (Rose, 1980, p. 19). However, the NHA only approved mortgages on newly constructed homes, meaning that “housing policy in effect took over the responsibility of urban planning” (Rose, 1980, p. 20). This period demonstrates that policy dictated what was built, and who it was built for. With the advent of government housing policies, attention began to shift away from the cities and towards ways of growth focused on sprawling greenfield development.

While this may be true it is not the full story. Pressures from real estate interests, property tax, social dynamics, and economic factors all played a key role in suburban formations. There is little doubt that government subsidized mortgages fueled a great deal of suburban residential construction, but this does not mean that that government inherently favours the suburbs or lower density greenfield developments. The subsidized mortgage could have been used for any new house, whether in the city or suburbs. If demand had existed,

construction in cities could have outpaced construction in the suburbs. The reason that they did not is perhaps also due to a lifestyle change which most of the middle-class in the middle of the twentieth century having little interest in staying in the city if they could buy a larger and less expensive home in the suburbs.

New Urbanists argue that sprawl is due to local governments with their subdivision ordinances and municipal rivalries but most importantly their zoning regulations. Zoning provisions inevitably segregate land-uses, restrict densities, and impose minimum lot coverages. As a planning tool, zoning deals with the uses and the physical form of development on individual parcels of land (Hodge and Gordon, 2014). The history of zoning revolves around separating uses that were seen as a nuisance to other higher value uses in hopes of producing more sanitary and safe districts. With the advent of comprehensive zoning by-laws an entire city-wide view of development was made to be consistent with a city-wide plan for growth which stabilized and protected existing land values. This provides certainty to “landowners about what they can expect to be built in their area and for municipal governments about what expenditures they would have to make for services, as well as the tax revenues they might receive” (Hodge & Gordon, 2014, p. 100).

One of the most potent attacks on zoning regulations has been by the New Urbanists. In particular, they are strikingly against zoning as being one of the principal causes of suburban development and in turn a drastic lack of social connectedness. In the late 1980s, following zoning ordinances, conventional suburban developments continued to discourage compact development which only intensified the ever increasing congestion on arterial roads, lack of meaningful civic life, loss of open space, limited opportunities for children and others without cars, and a general discontent among suburbanites (Morris, 2005). This discontent led to the New Urbanist belief that “economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health

cannot be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1999). This physical framework became not only the principal means of reforming development processes but also social behaviours.

Arguing that zoning is the primary cause of suburbanization leading to the shape of the suburbs is a rather flimsy argument. First, suburbanization was occurring long before zoning became common in cities. In ancient Rome living outside city walls meant living in *suburbium* (Bruegmann, 2005, p.23). Second, zoning did not try to foster a specific pattern of development. Rather, zoning followed historical patterns, where early zoning ordinances merely attempted to regulate the future development of non-residential uses within residential areas (Hodge and Gordon, 2013). This meant that non-conforming uses persisted so long as they were built prior to the enactment of the zoning. As those who could afford to do so, left these area with incompatible land-uses at the city centre to settle in neighbourhoods at the edges where residential land did not have the history of noxious uses. This was compounded by the ability in the United States of “wealthy individuals [to] protect their single-family neighbourhoods by going to courts at the first sign of what they considered an undesirable land-use” (Bruegmann, 2005, p 106). Finally, when there is a conflict between market demand and zoning ordinances, market demand often wins out. This has been documented in the countless Committee of Adjustment hearings in Toronto allowing higher densities or Zoning By-law Amendments awarding changes to land-use. It is difficult to say whether rising densities and amendments in land-use have changed to accommodate market realities or whether zoning is what caused such low densities in earlier decades.

Land-use planning exists to help society manage the built environment while attempting to improve the economic stability, public health and social connection of spaces. But does land-use planning necessarily ensure all of society’s health and social well-being? As shown above

in the plans of Le Corbusier and City Beautiful Movement, the conventional view was that whole neighbourhoods should be demolished to the ground and redeveloped using modern building techniques and designs or to leave it behind and start over somewhere else. While the economy might have flourished, many contend that a sense of social connection and personal health have been severely compromised (Morris, 2005; Soule, 2006; Hayden, 2003). As David Ward (1984, p. 304) argues, urban reformers saw inner-city slums as expressing “the presumed casual links between social isolation, and adverse environment and deviant behaviour”. But as James Kunstler (1993, p. 15) described, suburban sprawl is “a landscape of scary places, the geography of nowhere, that has simply ceased to be a credible human habitat”. As land-use planning literature demonstrates, sprawl, in its lack of attention to social well-being, can be regarded as a problem in need of fixing.

Suburban sprawl is also concluded to be where no one walks anymore (Morris, 2005). Yet walking is considered a vital component within maintaining social well-being. According to sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989), the number of amenities located within walking distance (20 minutes) is a good measure of the health and social well-being of an area. This concept is contingent on people choosing to walk. Places where suburbanites can walk, such as the big box shopping centre, in fact discourage walking. Seas of surface parking isolate buildings making it dangerous and highly improbable that people are willing to walk from store to store. It's no secret that modern suburbs were built to accommodate cars and commerce, not social connectedness. According to Morris (2005), as a result, people no longer walk, casual social interaction is virtually non-existent, and consequently, physical environments rarely offer residents with a sense of social connectedness. Carter Wilkie and Richard Moe (1997) extends this criticism and argue that suburban sprawl robs the public of neighbourliness, civic beauty, a sense of belonging, and a shared desire to interact in a physical environment. For Morris (2005, p.20) the physical environment is “literally and figuratively the foundation upon which society is

built". As Morris (2005, p. 20) contends, "the way a society evolves is determined by the places where its people live ... by creating sprawl, we have ignored this most basic understanding of how to keep a society stable, safe, and healthy".

Growing up in Whitby Ontario, a suburb outside Toronto, I would agree that the physical environment plays a major role in the social connectedness of an area but I unequivocally disagree that sprawl inhibits neighbourliness and a sense of belonging. While it is true that, as adults more and more of society connect through formalized gatherings (i.e. sports teams, volunteer activities, and other organized activities) even meeting with friends has become a formalized affair. As a child I remember walking down the street and meeting up with all the neighbourhood kids for a game of capture the flag at the storm water management pond or going over to the neighbour's house for summer Bar-B-Qs, and when I fell off my bike and tore up my knee, Lucas from four doors down pushed my bike and supported my weight as I hobbled home. If that is not what neighbourliness is, I do not know what is.

Granted, people do not all stay kids forever, nor do they all stay in the same neighbourhood their entire lives. So what happens? Do children all grow up and forget how to connect with their surrounding environment? Or is work to blame? For Putman (2000) pressures from work reduce social engagement and in turn social capital. Work has always to a large extent satisfied yearnings for a sense of belonging. It is where people spend the majority of the day especially considering commute times. Individuals form bonds with their co-workers, they even form friendships which can be dramatically affected by the design of the physical environment. Take for example working in a cubicle versus working in an open-plan office with four to five coworkers. Studies on open-plan offices have shown evidence of social facilitation, where the presence of others working next to one another as opposed to working in cubicles

improves social well-being and in some cases, performance (Block & Stokes, 1989). So if it is not work then what?

According to Ray Oldenburg (1989) people need a “third-place,” apart from the home and work place, where they can connect with others. (Cue the *Cheers* theme). With home being the first place and work being the second, then an informal meeting place near the home is the third place. The third place is where people can gather unannounced and share each other’s company on a consistent basis, which leads to a shared sense of connection to each other and to a place. Oldenburg (1989) argues that developments in suburban sprawl rarely include third places where people can mingle, hang out, and establish social bonds. A sense of loneliness and increased tendencies toward asocial behaviour are always close at hand in suburban sprawl. But why is this so, given as Amitai Etzioni (1991) points out, sociology and psychology have long demonstrated that individuals are not able to cope effectively with their surroundings without deep links to others in a neighbourhood?

In an attempt to address this loneliness and proclivity toward asocial behaviour, New Urbanists have advocated for a people first vision based on physical design interventions. Yet suburban sprawl continues to consume more greenfield land and many continue to experience a lack of social connectedness. While the New Urbanists’ argue they have the solution, perhaps planners need to accept that personal values, attitudes, and lifestyles need to be considered more carefully in planning efforts. Perhaps easier said than done.

Chapter 4: Alternative Perspectives on New Urbanism

While I find little in the Charter of the New Urbanism to disagree with, New Urbanism cannot be evaluated on the basis of its stated conclusions. The success of the New Urbanism is measured by comparing its achievements against its conclusions. To date, however, subdivisions continue to be built, albeit innovative ones based on New Urbanist design principles. This has led to a new wave of form-follows-function determinism, implying that social connectedness can be assured through design. What continues, is a romanticization of a golden age of small-town-dominated urbanism and a new legitimizing of low-density, peripherally located, single-family-home-dominated real-estate developments. In this section, the critiques of New Urbanism are analyzed to address what I believe to be its defining question: What is the possibility - through planning and design - of consciously achieving widespread improvement in the quality of human life within the context of social connectedness?

Among other things, New Urbanism refers to a design oriented approach to planning which uses spatial relations to create interaction between diverse elements and a sense of belonging to something greater than one's self. The fear is that New Urbanists oversells their products and promotes an idealized version of architectural determinism. David Harvey (1997) praised New Urbanism for illuminating the relationships between work and living while emphasizing environmental quality. Harvey (1997, p. 2) goes on to state that: "Put simply, does [New Urbanism] not perpetuate the idea that the shaping of spatial order is or can be the foundation for a new moral and aesthetic order? ... The movement does not recognize that the fundamental difficulty with modernism was its persistent habit of privileging spatial forms over social processes". Harvey (1997) also criticizes New Urbanism for its approach to social injustice, questioning the assumption that changing the physical environment somehow alters

the social inequities faced by lower-income families. This is due to New Urbanism's lack of concern toward *the darker side of planning*. As Harvey (1997, p. 3) concludes, "community has ever been one of the key sites of social control and surveillance bordering on overt social repression ... As a consequence, community has often been a barrier to rather than facilitator of progressive social change". In my opinion, these concerns undoubtedly raise questions as to the inherent meaning of building social connectedness implied by New Urbanism.

Evident here is what Foucault labeled as 'disciplinary discourses' which "illuminate the dispersed practices of power operative and inherent representations of forms of space ... [that] are created through the application of knowledge/power for the cultivation, instillation and propagation of 'civilised', bourgeois values" (Zieleniec, 2007, p. 125). For Foucault, space was conceptualized through the practices and procedures of the state's disciplinary discourse. As stated:

[Government] did not cover only the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered, which were designed to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.

(Foucault, 1982, p. 221)

Thus, building social connectedness becomes managed through processes of disciplinary discourse and packaged within empirical research, to control space for particular functions (e.g. eliminating asocial behaviour).

One such discourse is the New Urbanist belief that higher densities increase social interaction and in turn social connectedness. Psychologists argue the opposite, in that, one of the main culprits of the decline in civic engagement is higher density. Higher density generally

causes too much stimulation, over arousal, creates too many constraints on behaviour, inadequate privacy, unwanted social contact and resource inadequacy (Baum & Paulus, 1987). It should be noted these negative effects of high density depend on (1) individual differences between people (personality, age); (2) situational conditions (what the person is doing, time in the setting); and (3) social conditions (relationships between people). Baum and Paulus (1987) argue that people often withdraw into themselves as a coping mechanism when experiencing high levels of unwanted social contact. High density can lead to withdraw responses such as lower levels of eye contact, maintenance of greater interpersonal distance (Baum & Greenberg, 1975), to people being less likely to discuss intimate topics under high density conditions (Sundstrom, 1975). Worse still, high density may disrupt social support networks that are relied on to cope with negative life events (Evans, Lepore & Schroeder, 1996; Lepore, Evans, & Schneider, 1991). Furthermore, as Bickman et al. (1973) demonstrate, higher density also leads to lower levels of prosocial behaviour (i.e. helping) which negatively affects the sense of social connection to one another.

New Urbanism also attempts to address the lack of social connected within sprawling development patterns by returning to a “cherished American icon: that of a compact, close-knit community” (Katz, 1994, p. ix). This speaks of a time when neighbours supposedly banded together for mutual security and to be close to critical resources. Then along came the rise in suburban sprawl which fragmented society and broke down the bonds holding communities together (Katz, 1994). New Urbanism speaks of reinforcing design approaches that have been “virtually ignored for half a century: public spaces like streets, squares and parks should be a setting for the conduct of daily life” (Bressi, 1994, p. xxv). While the hope of New Urbanism is to encourage an increase in the practice of mixed-use and higher density urban forms, given the market driven approach to development, what is often chosen are the proven successful development patterns. On the ground New Urbanism has primarily been concerned with

evolving new patterns for greenfield sites at the region's edge, and in doing so I fear it has only fostered sprawl and promoted the inequalities of sprawl.

While New Urbanists contend that architecture and planning need to be married through design in order to drive a policy agenda that highlight the positive social consequences of physical design, many obstacles still hinder this goal. For starters Stefanos Polyzoides (2002) points to an educational deficit. Architectural and planning schools continue to promote modernist ideals of single building monuments, the primacy of cars, and the gospel of perpetual progress. This process leads to a bias toward designing physical settings where people can associate by choice, which Polyzoides (2002) argues requires making places where people can freely generate a community of neighbourly interests, not the deterministic framing of humanity in a particular architecture. Yet is this not what the internet allows?

When the Charter of the New Urbanism describe that within shaping the public realm, supporting human interaction, and the encouragement of a shared sense of belong, there is an assumption that the desire for communal life can be satisfied through physical means. Whether or not this communal way of life is desired, Alex Krieger (2002) argues, New Urbanism has exposed the suburban malaise which complicates a communitarian way of life. Krieger (2002, p. 52) goes on to commend New Urbanism for “establishing that conventional suburban development can make it harder, not easier, to foster community”. Providing a better alternative to conventional suburban development, armed with a higher design quality may not alone lead to greater social connectedness among the public. The search for a sense of connection to place both as a reaction to suburban alienation and as a need address isolation caused by the ubiquity of electronic communication and entertainment, remains problematic.

In discussing the neighbourhood, the Charter for the New Urbanism describes how a “broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1999). While many planners and municipalities have adopted New Urbanist ideology, when projects are built they often lack the social diversity projected by the movement (Grant, 2006). Grant (2008) outlines the challenges in achieving the social objectives of New Urbanism, such as the supposed benefits of mixed-use. As Grant (2008) explains mixed-use buildings do not guarantee that the mix works and that people are inclined to interact with one another, especially with commercial alternatives in the area. The New Urbanist neighbourhood, Cornell, in Markham, a municipality north of Toronto, serves as a good example, where stores along its contemporary main street continue to have a high turnover rate years after its construction (Grant, 2008). Based on my visit, nearby are big box stores and commercial supermarkets with an abundance of parking, vast selection of goods, and generally lower prices on products. While mixing uses has been cited as a good way of creating opportunities for social interaction (Duany, Zyberk and Speck, 2010; Steuteville and Langdon, 2009; Talen, 2008) this interaction does not lead to social connectedness if for starters, businesses cannot stay in the area long enough to encourage loyalty and in turn a shared sense of belonging.

New Urbanist developments such as Cornell are not perfect, partially because they are privately developed and controlled. This privatization has the potential to reduce diversity, increase segregation, and lead to exclusion. New Urbanist developments are often in new locations without the historical roots binding neighbours to a sense of place or densities to justify mass transit services that reduce isolating commutes. Some New Urbanists developments to cut costs avoid having to get zoning by-laws changed to allow for mixed-use building that offer a main street feel and offer people a destination that encourages people to walk within their

neighbourhood. While most developments include the front porches, the “porch culture” of Celebration is often nonexistent if neighbours are not out walking. As John Freie (1998) comments, New Urbanist developments are marketed as “communities” playing on desires to connect and belong, but offer little to fulfill needs for social connectedness. This indicates the commercial rather than communitarian purposes of most developments.

Ute Lehrer and Richard Milgrom (1996) question the New Urbanist belief of urban design as a means to transform social life. Lehrer and Milgrom (1996) question the approach of copying elements in one plan and replicating them in another, which imposes and controls a style of physical determinism. As Thomas Dulton contends “architecture becomes the content of the architecture” (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996, p. 40) demonstrate that for New Urbanists, the idea of physical determinism takes precedence over the relational makeup of the residents. Lehrer and Milgrom’s (1996) argue that the aesthetic codes of New Urbanism are:

“Derived from a segregated, racist city form, are culturally biased in favour of the dominant classes and races of the model period, and, therefore, constitute a “formal control mechanism” in determining the communities that will populate the developments” (p.61)

This criticism is not exclusive to New Urbanism, much can be said about racial and cultural segregation in land-use planning in general. The difference being is that New Urbanism has a charter that speaks directly to incorporating a broad range of housing prices that can “bring people of various races, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds” (Congress of New Urbanism, 1996), which to this date it has largely failed to live up to.

New Urban design principles dictated by social connectedness, often become secondary to market success, as Emily Talen (2008) contends. The social concerns of incorporating various socioeconomic groups within one development, Talen (2008, p. 77) states, become “mere rhetoric”. Given the marketability of New Urbanist developments, neighbourhoods are created for those who least need the help. Talen (2008) argues that residents need to be more engaged and civically minded. But does not go on to explain how to attain this. For Robert Putman (2000) diversity generates *bridging social capital* between people of different socioeconomic groups, which leads to *active neighbouring*, where neighbours interact and watch out for their collective interests. This has led many to ambivalently deploy the mantra of ‘unity in diversity’ to address and avoid the increasing number of *Others*.

I fear as Walter Michaels (2006) suggests that emphasizing this difference as a sort of mantra, allows the persistence of inequality. Michaels describes the goal of social diversity as a social construct with no inherent meaningful legitimacy. Society’s preoccupation with this characterization prevents a holistic view, and a discourse that goes beyond diversity’s superficial rhetoric and associated policies (Pitter, 2016, p. 8). This concern over diversity overlooks the systemic explanations for the social problems of asocial behaviours where policies that aim to fix the *Other* only seem to reinforce and keep people outside the accepted norms of suitable social life.

Throughout this chapter I demonstrated a few compelling arguments against the New Urbanist conclusions of social connectedness through environmental design alterations. These arguments ranged from attacks of the New Urbanist communitarian view of social life to more pragmatic arguments regarding the realities of urban development processes. While I agree with the stated criticism of New Urbanism, I believe many can be further developed.

Chapter 5: The Four Deadly Horsemen of New Urbanism

Does the idea of promoting social connectedness primarily through physical planning remain to be seen as a worthy aim for land-use planners? My intention here is to criticize New Urbanism for its simplistic view of the relationship between physical planning and social connectedness on multiple counts. First, this view romanticizes the past through an analysis of the physical environment while underestimating the importance of social and cultural factors. Second, while New Urbanism frequently focuses on notions of social connectedness, its meaning is often determined through physical planning. Third, from a research perspective, New Urbanism often downplays the limitations of empirical findings. Finally, this relationship generally overlooks the reality of land-use development processes and ignores the fact that people are not passive actors within an environment. A design can support certain behaviours but it does not reliably determine them (Barker & Wright, 1951). So why have designers continued to promote the idea that proper design can elicit social connectedness? I endeavor to shed light onto these four key issues that arise and complicate the communitarian arguments of New Urbanism. In my view, these issues create barriers which are not easily overcome through spatial alterations.

1. Romanticized Past

New Urbanism believes in an ideal neighbourhood being based on historical patterns. This belief in history assumes there was some sort of Golden Age during which the local people all cohesively bought into the same communitarian way of life. This homogeneity, however, diverges from New Urbanism's principle of heterogeneity which argues that neighbourhoods should be diverse in use and population (Congress of the New Urbanism, 1999). As Furnham

and Bockner (1986) conclude, living in an ethnically cohesive community, an ethnic minority may develop a sense of connectedness with his/her ethnic community which in some cases leads to a reduction in psychological illness. So why then does New Urbanism maintain this romanticized view of the past? Especially given the changes to socio-economic conditions, technological innovations and lifestyle changes.

Proponents of New Urbanism demonstrate that the movement merely attempts to emulate and update historical patterns of life (Ellis, 2002). Urban design has a long tradition of borrowing lessons from the past and modernizing them (see: Kunstler, 1996). While New Urbanist developments use the latest construction methods, incorporate communication technologies, and provide age and work friendly living arrangements, the New Urbanist view of social connectedness and community is still firmly rooted in the past. Sociologist Gerald Suttles wrote in 1972 that folk models of urban communities “have become the operating bases for both the urban planner and citizen” (p. 4). Although his comment precedes New Urbanism, the desire to recreate an idealized small town rural-life remains true today. Many sociological models of society are based on folk models which not only validate but also provide scientific legitimacy to such models. The prevailing New Urbanist model of society and the ways in which communitarian ways of life have been limited are addressed below.

Nostalgia is raised as an issue time and again within discussions on New Urbanism (Ingersoll, 1989; Landecker, 1996; Huxtable, 1997). Some have used it to criticize New Urbanism’s failure to confront reality and instead participate in the falsification of the past (Davis, 1979; Stewart, 1988). In my opinion, New Urbanists want to return to an idealized view of small-town rural life, purged of all the unpleasant elements and patterns of domination and exclusion. A view not so different from Tonnies’ concept of *Geimenschaft* where the absence of folk traditions hinder the formation of neighbourly bonds. As previous chapters have shown,

New Urbanist developments are not without their own share of exclusionary practices and “formal control mechanisms [that] furnish the substitutes for the bonds of solidarity that are relied upon to hold folk society together” (Wirth, 1938, p.11).

Many researchers speak to segregation as a contemporary problem which New Urbanism attempts to address (Arnstberg, 2008). Yet, it is naïve to believe that past populations did not face their own share of segregation. Certainly North American cities have a fascination with gated neighbourhoods but so did medieval clans. Segregation, once a planning ideology in the form of zoning which separates uses, has today become a tool in the planner’s arsenal to add value to a landowner’s property, often pricing many out of an area. As Arnstberg (2008, p. 248) argues, “the affluent people, the urban winners in this world of ours, have never had any desire for sharing the reality of urban poor, homeless people, low lifestyles, or displaced immigrants and ethnic minorities”. While New Urbanism offers solutions that diversify housing types and tenures through mixing incomes, races, and ages, as long as the market determines the development agenda, there is not much of a mixture. The question remains, do people want to live in more diverse neighbourhoods?

The truth is New Urbanism underplays the social realities of contemporary life. People have chosen a mobile lifestyle, one which focuses on electronic over physical relationships and individualistic over communitarian needs. Each person is an individual but individuality is defined by cultural norms. As Stephanie Coontz (1992) demonstrates prairie farmers owed their survival to government sponsored land grants, military protection and infrastructure investments. A farmer succeeded by cooperating with neighbouring settlers, sharing resources, collectively helping with construction, harvesting, threshing and most other aspects of settler life. Most people do not live their lives as prairie farmers with a frontier mentality. Society today has been so radically altered that private desires almost completely supplant public values. Perhaps

the same might be said about sense of social connectedness, that the desire to connect as rooted in one's culture has moved from being a collective concern to being defined by individual pursuits. This demonstrates the inappropriateness of arguing for building social connectedness through design as a principal planning concern.

2. The Non-deterministic Socio-Spatial Relationship

To reiterate, social connectedness, here, is defined as: a subjective sense of belonging which influences desires to interact with people and physical space. Social connectedness is not necessarily geographically based but rather based on an aggregate of all social experiences, subjectively evaluated. While New Urbanist principles are by definition geographically based, one does not have to live in the neighbourhood to benefit from the social aspects of an area. Social connectedness also emphasizes the individual's view of the world and not necessarily social relationships (Baldwin, 1994). Providing opportunities for people to identify and participate within their social world allows those that want to take part, to develop a social lens that according to self-psychology literature guides future feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (see Baker & Baker, 1987 on this latter point). My choice of social connectedness as a subject for my research was in a large part due to Talen's (2002) contention that planners should avoid the term community in relation to physical planning matters. The reason for this according to Talen (2002) is how sense of community can at times refer to a social component and/or an affective component, both of which are fully multidimensional. The literature on these numerous dimensions which account for the varied meanings attributed to social life is voluminous (i.e. Unger & Wandersman, 1985; Wellman, 1981; McMillian & Chavis, 1986). I agree with Talen (2000a, p. 172) in the contention that "the problem, for planners, is that the notion of community is easily misinterpreted and misapplied, and planners have not exhibited

any particular sign that their use of the term is well thought out". Therefore, should physically developing a more socially connected society be something planners are concerned with?

While New Urbanism might be able to address the community as a physical construct, the social construct is a bit more of a stretch. I concede that New Urbanist developments can lead to an increase in social interaction and that their participatory methods which stress the ongoing participation of stakeholders does lead participants to develop values and feelings tying their identity to a place (Feldman, 1990). As Putman (2000) demonstrates, social capital is in decline due to financial strain, rise in the private television, and pressures of work, which all reduce extra-curricular memberships. In order to connect, people often turn to social media, video games and other electronic outlets. This dependence on electronic networks is meant to increase social connectedness but rather it increases asocial behaviours and issues with well-being within physical settings.

Contemporary society is "a world in which communal emotions are in short supply ... [leading to] a steady consumer demand for community substitutes" (Bauman, 2000, p. 78). New Urbanist commercial streetscapes often sprout cafes, designer shoe stores, boutique hair and nail spas and marijuana dispensaries. But whose idea of community is this? Land-use planners work with the ideas and definitions of community that play to the desires of their high income clients, who planners themselves somewhat identify with. New Urbanists advocate for mixed-use developments with shops at ground level and residential above, for its ability to increase the opportunity for people to interact. Yet, Campbell and Lee (1992) found that social interaction is significantly correlated with socioeconomics, age, gender, and lifestyle rather than on propinquity.

From the Not-In-My-Back-Yard sentiments to Pro-Forma applications of social connection, those that can choose, live where there are more people in search for security rather than connectedness (Healey, 200, p. 56). Uncertainty does not foster social connectedness, rather perceived homogeneity stimulates group interaction (McMillan, 1996). And when “resident feel safer and more secure ... they are likely to interact more with their neighbours” (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 58). As Fung (1997, p. 56) points out, New Urbanists are “reluctant to insist on building communities with a genuinely diverse population because they fear that to do so would threaten their market. Yet they are reluctant not to insist on diversity because failure to do so would undermine the value of what they are doing”. This demonstrates that there is nothing controversial about seeing the environment as affecting behaviour or that physical planning does affect some social goals. But neither of these can be used to endorse the notion that physical designs determine social connectedness.

Franck (1984) provides a summary of why the New Urbanist view of environment-behaviour relationship is problematic. First, this view exaggerates the importance of the physical environment by underestimating the importance of social and cultural factors. For example, a park can play host to a myriad of activities given the occasion. From a location of leisure to a concert venue to it being transformed into a site for someone’s temporary home. Second, from a research perspective, determinism overlooks the importance of indirect environmental effects and interactions among several environmental variables acting in combination. Within a laboratory setting, variables can be independently manipulated which such control is often not afforded in the real world. Finally, determinism ignores the fact that people are not passive actors within an environment. People influence and change their setting as the environment influences and changes people. I conclude that a design may support certain behaviours but it does not reliably determine them.

3. The Limitations of Empirical Research

I do not dispute that physical environments have an effect on human behaviour. What is under question is to what degree can New Urbanism effect social connectedness. In order to draw connections between New Urbanist designs and social connectedness, the limitations of the empirical research documenting this effect must be reviewed. First, research often focuses on social interaction rather than the deeper social structure of social connectedness. Second, most research document extraneous variables that complicate the conclusions drawn from empirical studies. Lastly, conclusions may become unintentionally epistemologically violent, where reformers use empirical studies to hide their agendas behind moral rhetoric. Together, these limitations offer a snippet of how social connectedness is used as a marketing tool and mechanism for political legitimization.

Several researchers of New Urbanism have shown that mixed land-uses within New Urbanist developments do improve land efficiencies, urban quality, and social interaction (Duany et al., 2000; Talen, 2008). Others demonstrate the substantive relationships between the qualities of the physical environment and residential satisfaction (Rohe, 1985). It would be a leap to argue that social interaction and residential satisfaction are synonymous with social connectedness. Where, then, did this idea that interaction and residential satisfaction as direct signs of social connectedness come from?

For starters, the notion of person-place transaction plays a major role in defining how neighbourhoods instill a sense of social connectedness. These concepts analyze how the interaction between people and space, lead to better management of needs and emotions and lower levels of depression (Kohut, 1984). Based on the definition of social connectedness used

within this research, interaction is the first step within social connectedness. As Lee and Robbins (1998) argue, the emphasis is on the individual's view of the social world around them and not necessarily on the quality or quantity of relationships. Certainly pedestrian friendly places and participatory methods encourage interaction but interactions do not determine social connectedness. Planners need to realize that neighbourhoods are imbued with subjective meanings, composed of physical and social elements that can influence not only interactions but sense of belonging.

Looking at the second limitation, studies often express extraneous variables which complicate the possible conclusions researcher are able to draw from their studies. While New Urbanists believe that neighbourhood design leads to social connectedness, many others are not convinced due to the innumerable characteristics that have a contributing effect. For instance, Michelson (1976) demonstrates that social class and life cycle dramatically affects propensities for interaction. Athanasion and Yoshioka (1973) demonstrate that racial and economic homogeneity influence interaction. Personality variables such as tolerance levels to stimulation, have been associated with the extent and form of social interaction between people (Ahlbrandt & Cunningham, 1979). For those that downplay the importance of local relations ignore how New Urbanists social tactics (i.e. mixed-use, increased density) may or may not affect social interaction. Studies are mixed, Rohe (1978) found a positive relationship between increased density and social interaction whereas Booth (1976) found no relationship. More focus needs to be on the subjective view towards use and design of social spaces, how demographic characteristic play a role, sense of control over one's environment, and the desire to be social.

Nevertheless, Gieryn (2000) criticizes social researchers for undervaluing place as an important social unit. Gieryn (2000) argues that social researchers contend that spatial mobility

undermine the integrity of geographic space. While this may be true, it is by no means the full picture. For example, what is driving this spatial mobility? Spatial mobility is due to man-made problems such as technology, the inflexibility of city boundaries administrative fragmentation, marketing strategies but perhaps most importantly, as shown above, individual preferences. From empirical studies, the approach to physical design should focus on the users' values, attitudes and personalities. Different groups have varied preferences that are satisfied by differing spatial elements. As Patricious (2002, p. 82) argues "people conceive their residential environments more from a social than a physical point of view. That is, there is more concern on who the neighbours are than with the spatial layout".

Thirdly, the use of a moral rhetoric based on empirical research produced by social scientists often become as, Thomas Teo argues (2004), *epistemologically violent* (i.e. the act of interpreting data to the detriment of a group). In turn this research is then co-opted by the planning profession to produce and administer policies that emphasize a pragmatic logic which favours developing techniques, strategies and programs to solve problems temporally. This logic to a large extent bolstered the slum clearance movement in metropolitan cores and in turn supported the suburban sprawl movement. I wonder how this same logic is being applied to curtail sprawl and encourage New Urbanist principles.

Proponents of sprawl prescribed efficient and harmonious communities which is argued could only be obtained through a middle-class paradigm (Purdy, 2005). As David Ward (1984, p. 304) argues, urban reformers saw 'slums' as expressing "the presumed casual links between social isolation, and adverse environment and deviant behaviour". These situational arguments perpetuated an immoral portrait of city-dwellers and inevitably aided in bolstering the justification for the urban renewal movement. Knowledge and power became operative in and through controlling space and, alongside, the individuals that inhabit it.

Studies continue to describe sprawl as an enemy of the planning profession (Soule, 2006). New Urbanism, is then presented as the optimal solution to support social connectedness and eradicate the propinquity towards asocial behaviour. Planners and researchers must critically examine and question the interpretations of the empirical data in which these arguments are made. Take for example the study from Wayne Batchis (2010) which noted that living in sprawl is linked to higher levels of chronic medical conditions, lower quality of life, and educational inequality. Evident here is what Thomas Teo (2004) labels as epistemological violence, which describes how the use of empirical studies perpetuate notions of inferiority. Through the act of interpreting data, one might implicitly or explicitly construct the *Other* as problematic in order to sell an idea or hide a political agenda (i.e. higher densities equate to increased property taxes). Planners should critically examine the consequences of interpreting empirical results to the detriment of a group.

4. The Complications of Reality

My last contention, questions why the physical determinist view of New Urbanism cannot live up to the communitarian way of life advocated by New Urbanists. This argument hinges on the realities of the development processes within Canada which I argue use urban design to advance market driven strategies. New Urbanism's communitarian rhetoric is precariously caught between policies promoting higher densities, among others, and homeowners concerned about housing values and safety. New Urbanists are agents of a normalizing disciplinary power which uses policy as a way to control social behaviour.

Policies become a created form of the history, traditions, and beliefs of society, which are set within the discourses constructed by political actors (Stark, 1992). One such discourse is the notion of community which deals with, among other things, the role of politics and policy in broader dynamics of production and reproduction. As shown above, within planning, decisions are seldom made without some reference to social benefits, no matter how ill defined. Within planning, decisions are also made in reference to financial consequences (i.e. what effects does investing in public space have on reducing asocial behaviour?). These consequences restructure the logic of decision-making and redefine mechanisms for processes of development (Hodge & Gordon, 2014, p. 356).

One such mechanism is the process of financialization, which briefly, attempts to understand the ongoing process of state restructuring to deal with the reconfiguration of financial arrangements. Davidson and Ward (2014) argue that as municipal governments become more entrepreneurial, municipalities in turn take on major risks through the implementation of speculative urbanism. This form of urbanism can be understood as “the ways in which cities speculate on future economic growth by borrowing against predicted future revenue streams to make this growth more likely” (Davidson and Ward, 2014, p. 84). This is much the same way that real-estate has been financialized, where houses are seen as an asset used to borrow capital to reinvest in perhaps more real-estate with the hope that the value increases and in turn be used to borrow more capital. In a sense municipalities become creatures of a growth machine fueled by land speculation which sees land for its exchange value rather than its use value.

This process of financialization relies heavily on notions of power which discipline society into normative action (i.e. get a job and a mortgage). Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the biopolitics of neoliberalism, Maurizio Lazzarato (2012) defines finance as a form of power,

which through the production of debt, encourages economic actors towards an “entrepreneurialism of the self” (Foucault, 2008. p. 226). People are for example responsible for their own health, through their adhesion to specific lifestyles. Thus, a lack of social connectedness, is perhaps caused by a form of biopolitics, where through the state, situations are created in which all forms of agency are encouraged to achieve financial “freedom” and power not communitarian goals. In this sense, discourse becomes a form of discipline which is legitimized through forms of political and/or economic subjection that govern the possibilities of action (Foucault, 1982). While the creation of policies and initiatives to encourage social connectedness seem equitable, municipalities, essentially rely on the speculative market to construct new units and generate taxes. When New Urbanism promotes higher densities as a way to increase social connectedness it hides the politic agenda of seeking a larger tax base.

Planning policies, then, inadvertently use professional jargon to form a disciplinary boundary which limits public access to the planning process and advocate for a particular form of development. Power comes from a form of knowledge orchestrated from the normalizing contentions of the professional planning institute of each province. As Bachrach and Baratz (1962) contend, power is the creation of social values and institutional practices in agenda setting to protect the interests of particular groups. Within a speculative market there are obvious winners and losers due to the ability of some to manipulate information, such as investment conditions. The planning process continues to be attacked, so long as there are those who gain from policy decisions.

Unfortunately, the requirement of residential growth to increase municipal revenue continues to shape productive forces due to the “unwillingness of federal and provincial governments to extend governance autonomy and revenue powers to municipalities” (Fanelli, 2016) within Canada. This prevents municipal governments from implementing public policies

that morally safeguard against market driven imperatives, which continue to exacerbate social concerns. Planning, can then be used as an arm of the state, implementing plans and policies that act as a form of social control rather than promoting equity and efficacy (Yiftachel, 1998). As witnessed through the multitude of urban policy studies that favour the dominant ethnic group (see, for example, Yiftachel, 1998), the market benefits of the ruling elite. As the state manipulates market conditions to control spatial conditions and as planning is sanctioned and empowered by the state, social connectedness through physical alterations to the environment remain suspect. Apart from believing in the “if you build it they will socialize” mantra, if planners think urban form can fix the injustice wagon, they are dreaming. In my opinion, planners must go beyond a normative view of architectural determinism to understand and address planning as a form of power.

Even if planners come to an agreement on how to address social connectedness, it would be naïve of me to assume that urban design efforts, including New Urbanism, will be killed off, given the title of this chapter. Rather than a seeing this chapter as a prophecy of impending doom, I would hope that the reader sees it as a warning. A warning to see New Urbanism for what it truly is, one version of a desired physical, social, and economic landscape, which limits and directs planners in addressing social concerns.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to organize the issues revolving around the New Urbanist goal of achieving social connectedness through physical design. First, constructing a working definition to social connectedness revealed that perhaps some of the elements within the definition are not appropriate goals for land-use planning. Second, analyzing the conclusions of many social thinkers (e.g., sociologists, psychologists, and planners) on the issues of lacking social connectedness demonstrates the foundations of communitarian thought. These social scientific epistemologies provided New Urbanism with the scientific backing to integrate the notion of social connectedness into the New Urbanist oeuvre of planning. Next, I distilled the New Urbanist development process and participatory method, in relation to social connectedness. Following that, I addressed the process of post-war suburban sprawl which gave the moral foundation on which New Urbanism stood. I complicated this moral frame with anecdotal evidence, in order to continue the threads of addressing the subjective realities of planning on the ground. I presented several critiques of New Urbanism to shed light on the epistemological tension that New Urbanists seem to overlook. In the end, I presented four fundamental reasons why, in my opinion, New Urbanism cannot design physical environments according to New Urbanist principles that lead to a more socially connected way of life.

Much in the same way advertisements promote rock solid abs in three weeks just by changing your diet and workout routine, New Urbanism promises social connectedness through a few design alterations. As demonstrated above, this is a fallacy and a marketing ploy: people do not get washboard abs by making a few changes to their routine alone nor do people achieve social connectedness just by living in a New Urbanist designed development. People's individual characteristics play a major role in the formation of social ties and need to be

evaluated within any alteration to the built environment. In my opinion, the social conclusions presented by New Urbanism should come with the caveat: results may vary.

Humans are social beings driven to communicate and interact with one another. The way people communicate and interact has changed. People spend more time online than in line. Furthermore, whether or not design of urban form can influence interaction, interaction is in no way an appropriate measure of social connectedness. Looking at empirical studies, extraneous variables often cloud judgements and complicate some of the conclusions used by New Urbanists to sell their communitarian vision. In short, I have illustrated that the next time social connectedness comes up as a core consideration within planning policy, planners must be more hesitant in buying into a singular vision of how to address social connectedness.

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