A Critical View on New Urbanism Theory in Urban Planning: from Theory to Practice

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Abstract

In the wake of Jacobs's criticisms of planning, planners increasingly felt a level of angst over, or even responsibility for, the condition of the city. Schooled in preparing and implementing plans and land use regulations, they appreciated the appeal of a new movement that offered a simple, tangible, and marketable recipe for practice. New Urbanism Theory is one of the contemporary urban theories that developed as a movement within practice as a response to the failure of cities and suburbs in the mid-twentieth century. Now these questions take shape in one's mind: May New Urbanism lead to planning a good community? How is new urbanism developing theory, and how does it contribute to our understanding of theory? How is planning theory responding to new urbanism and the insights its practice generates? These are questions that the present paper tried to answer them. Using content analysis, various ideas and views about New Urbanism and its formation from theory to practice have been reviewed and criticized. We concluded that although the new urbanists want to turn the situation around and they envision cities without suburbs, in practice, they could not make a good communityaccording to the principles that this normative theory is committed to. In present day, most new urbanist projects have proven relatively homogeneous in composition. Rather than minimizing differences, new urbanist projects have sometimes exacerbated societal differences by creating enclaves of affluence in the urban environment.

Keywords: New Urbanism Theory, Good community, Civilization, Criticism

1. Introduction

What drives this interest in new urbanism? Some express it in a word: sprawl.The twentieth-century city seems to have no limits, oozing inexorably over the landscapewith little form or character. At the same time, the resentment of sprawl has spread quite far and popular culture seems to accept the premise that the suburbs are meaningless places.

The search for an alternative paradigm for urban development goes back to atleast the 1970s. The energy crisis and accumulated government debt of the 1970sled to fiscal conservatism and retrenchment in the 1980s. David Harvey (1994) saysthat the end of the era of industrial accumulation spawned a period of flexibleaccumulation along with a new urban crisis. Certainly, the fortunes of cities had begun to change, with many industrial cities showing clear signs of decline. Historic structures threatened by destruction became sites of contention and dispute: rallying points for a new approach to development (Elshater,2012:826 – 843).

The population was also changing. Many of the premises that had supported the ascendance of the garden city model in the early twentieth century no longer held.2 Households were getting smaller, and often included two working adults. The population was aging rapidly. The cost of housing had become a significant barrier to many families. By the 2000 census in the USA, 25 per cent of households had a single person; half the population was 35 years or older. The same thing, or worse, was happening in other societies as well. Smaller, older households would need a different kind of city (Chiras and Wann 2003).

Into this opening – where the modernist city found itself challenged on several counts – stepped the vigorous prophets of new urbanism. As an antidote to the placeless suburbs, they offered a new prescription for neighborhoods that followed historic principles and buildings that employed traditional materials. To reduce the ailments generated by car-oriented development, they advocated urban living in vibrant, connected, and diverse places. Their ideas have inspired a generation of designers and planners.

1.1. Representation of New Urbanism

The New Urbanism is a product of modernist criticism; it is established on the basis of the architecture and urban design theory in the 1960s and 1970s; it aims to eliminate the defects of the sprawl suburban development mode (Liu, 2012: 16)

In some ways, we can see the history of planning as a series of new urban approaches. Crises in urban conditions lead to new planning concepts and approaches meant to rectify the situation. How do we situate the origin of newurbanism of the late twentieth century?

Was the first salvo of new urbanism from DPZ, Duany and Plater-Zyberk's planning and design firm in 1982, with the creation of the Florida resort at Seaside?Or should we look earlier to Krier's (1978) writing and lectures about urban quarters?Perhaps we might date it to the end of modernism with destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing high-rises in St Louis in 1972. Or we might look even earlier atthe influence of Jane Jacobs's (1961) short but provocative best-seller on the fate ofAmerican cities.

We could look much further back in history for inspiration. After all, Kelbaugh (1989) notes that new urbanists draw on 2000 years of experience in building good cities. The first planned cities in the Indus Valley date to as early as 2500 BC (Hammond 1972). They feature some of the principles that new urbanists employ today: mixed use, small grid blocks, pedestrian orientation. The lessons of ancient cities give us a sense of the range of approaches to urbanism through history: varied ideas of what the city can be or should be.

New urbanism takes a selective look at history, drawing its lessons primarily from the classical traditions of the Greeks, Romans, and Europeans. Urbanism in these traditions typically facilitated individual and cultural aggrandizement. The Greeks and Romans, and later colonizing European nations, built planned settlements as a way of achieving individual or imperial ambitions. Settlements controlled space. In these examples, classical principles served the interests of power. Urban form became a vehicle for conditioning submission.

In finding inspiration in the 'timeless ways' of classical forms, new urbanists rarely consider the cultural and social context in which their treasured principles developed. They abstract the architecture from its setting and social meanings. They value the aesthetics of classical forms while they focus on trying to meet the needs of contemporary urban residents.

When Christopher Alexander (1979) talks about timeless ways of building, he looks for historical and cross-cultural examples that reflect beauty and functionality. His work suggests that past, present, and future blend seamlessly together when it comes to good design. New urbanism shares this faith in universal principles. Yet, a study of the incredible diversity of urban forms through history dispels any illusion that all civilizations share an understanding of the quality or meaning of urban forms. The architectural (archaeological) record reflects diverse regional styles linked to materials, functions, social order, economy, climate, religion, and values. Efforts to generate timeless principles are necessarily selective: they reflect the values of the time and context of those who extract them. They are thus a product of ideology and practice.

1.2. New Urbanism Concepts

New urbanism advocates for the design of the compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use developments thought to promote walking, minimize car dependence and enhance sense of community (Foster,Hooper, et al.2017: 2).

New urban approaches appear under a variety of names. The early projects done by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk were often called neo-traditional town planning or traditional neighborhood design (TND). Peter Calthorpe and Doug Kelbaugh are known for transit-oriented design (TOD), transit villages, and pedestrian pockets. Since around 1993, with the development of the Congress for the New Urbanism, these approaches have fused in the 'New Urbanism' (usually written with capital letters by its proponents). By the mid to late 1990s, many people were talking about urban villages as nodes of new urban development. The National Governors' Association in the USA used the term new community design, and Emily Talen(2001) tried out traditional urbanism, but those did not catch on in a big way. By the late 1990s, the British grew excited about an urban renaissance and launched urban village programs, while the Americans and Canadians signed on to smart growth. In an era where branding has become the key to marketing success, the new urbanists have been successful in establishing their solutions as the strategies for achieving better places.

Whatever the label used, these new urban approaches share common principles: fine-grained mixed use, mixed housing types, compact form, an attractive public realm, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, defined centers and edges, and varying transportation options. In many cases – although not universally – they favor traditional architectural and design patterns, open space networks, and connected street layouts (Grant 2015: 812).

2. Theory and practice in New Urbanism

2.1. Theory of New Urbanism

The planning profession needs theory to inform practice (Friedmann 1979). Theory provides justifications for decisions, offers guidance on possibilities, and facilitates ethical behavior. Theory attempts to extract rules to describe, explain, and predict the world. We draw on our interpretations of the past, our present and potential futures to develop theory. By and large, though, we can see theory as a product of the times, embedded within a particular social context (Grant 2009).

The roots of new urbanist theory are most evident in the works of Jane Jacobs and Leon Krier. Jacobs (1961) focused on ensuring a mix of uses and peoplein the city. She documented the failures of modernist planning ideas – of high-risebuildings and large parks – to maintain the vibrant, fine-grained mixed use of theethnic neighborhoods of Greenwich Village that she loved. She associated deteriorating civility with changes to urban form. Krier (1978) concentrated more ondesign questions. His view of the good city insisted on visual coherence but mixedfunctions. He looked to compact pre-industrial cities as models of places that integrateurban functions while avoiding the confusion generated by a mix of buildingstyles or the inclusion of non-urban elements (Krier 1984a).

Kevin Lynch devoted a considerable part of his career to trying to offer guidanceon good urban form (e.g., Lynch 1981). He described three kinds of theories thatexplain spatial patterns in the city. Planning theory or decision theory examines howdecisions about city form are made, and how cities take shape. Functional theoryexplores the ways in which form works. Normative theory connects form to values:it answers the question of what makes the city good. Contemporary theory in newurbanism is essentially interested in normative issues (rather than questions of processor function). The principles of form that suffuse the normative vision of the good city for new urbanists typically derive from classical elements and traditional (pre-automobile) urban patterns. Principles for good urban form deal with issues such as massing, materials, proportions, formal spatial relationships, and the creation of voids or solids. Harmony, balance, coherence, and imagability are the goals of good planning and design.

Issues of power and communication hold little interest for new urbanists, even as their practice engages these concerns. As Talen and Ellis (2002) say, planners need guidance on what isgood in the city so that they can make better choices. What is the shape and characterof the good city? New urbanist discourse has invested heavily in answering that question. New urbanists search for theory for different reasons. They want principles and premises that can inform or justify the choices they make about the shape of the city. Their questions are not of process, but of materials and dimension: what kind of city shall we build? In the absence of guidance from the gurus of planning theory, the new urbanists have turned to developing their own theory. In their search for suitable models, they have found utility in ecological theory – albeit a narrow and, some may say, distorted version of the discipline.

If objectivity is impossible, and increasingly practitioners are expected to take amoral stance, then planners need reasonable theory to substantiate their normativepositions. What does a normative planning theory that can work in practice require?Planners generally accept that good practice relies on open and honest communicationand democratic processes. Lynch (1981) says that a theory of good urban formshould be simple, flexible, and easily applied. Planning the good community needs atheory of possibilities rather than iron rules. It must deal with plural and conflictinginterests. It proves a tall order to find the theory that can meet these criteria and generates consensus within the profession.

2.2. New Urbanism Practice

Many new urbanists are trained as architects before becoming town planners. As a quasi-profession, planning draws practitioners from eclectic sources. In each case, planners bring the reasoning and theories of their originating disciplines with them, adding to the toolkit they employ. With new urbanism, the literature highlights design rhetoric rather than empirical evidence. As Wyatt (2004) explains, planners and architects think differently. Urban

planning draws on the left side of the brain: it seeks to make rational arguments. Planners search for a balanced approach, encouraging full participation by those involved in outcomes, and ensuring careful consideration of all factors before making choices. Architects prefer a different strategy. Architecture draws on the right side of the brain: the creative and introspective approach. Architects may be less concerned with the general public interest than in the needs of particular clients. In the case of the new urbanists, we might argue, the designer planners use their own creative and introspective processes to determine the public interest perhaps in part to avoid the messiness of participatory evaluation and decision making (Heins, 2015:207).

Foucault (1977:141) wrote that: 'In the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space.' Today a small international élite has considerable control over the economy, public tastes, and location choices. Their decisions affect the fate of cities. Within our cities we often find residents' life chances differentiated by neighborhood. The most affluent areas are carefully controlled and beautifully appointed. These include the gentrified districts, the gated enclaves, and the upscale suburbs. Social, economic, and physical barriers keep poorer members of the community from feeling welcome in these areas. 'That which disguises itself as a disinterested, friendly, hospitable consumption sphere in practice draws up dividing lines between those in control and those they are excluding' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:109). New urbanist principles not only generate attractive homes for affluent consumers, but they also increasingly mark landscapes of inclusion and exclusion.

Planning operates within a social structure that defines the public interest as a justification for state intervention. That is, as long as restrictions on the use of property may be shown to have a wider public purpose, then planning is a legitimate practice. The modernists accepted that planning to ensure greater efficiency in the use of resources was in the public interest. Many early modernists also had socialist leanings and promoted equity. Practitioners felt quite comfortable in asserting the public interest in their work.

Urban renewal began to undermine faith in a unified public interest during the 1960s. Civil rights advocates and feminists articulated alternative interests that planners could no longer ignore. Hence we saw challenges to the public interest criterion in planning theory after this period (Klosterman 1980). Contemporary planning theory acknowledges and seeks ways to accommodate diverse voices and needs in planning practice (Sandercock 1998).

By contrast, the new urbanists have revived a commitment to a notion of the common good. For them, beauty, order, and coherence are universal principles of urban quality. New urbanism may appeal to practitioners because its rules for practice allow planners to operate without worrying about the messiness of divergent claims. Narrowing the focus of inquiry to a range of issues where correct answers are presumed to exist simplifies practice. Thus the public

interest is redefined in new urbanism as coterminous with a definition of the good community as a particular kind of place. Practitioners searching for strategic solutions to the problems their communities face have thus found useful and persuasive answers in the principles of new urbanism.

Cities are spaces of cultural consumption in which goods mark status (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). In the contemporary city, history and community have become commodities. New homes are sold as place products through which consumers identify their values and their status. Harvey (1989:271) suggests that urban life in the post-modern city is an 'accumulation of spectacles'. Cities act as display and performance spaces. Marketing of urban and suburban neighborhoods depends on product differentiation. In this view of the city, new urbanism adds value to articular neighborhood products. It allows consumers to mark their status and identify their values for all to see.

2.3. Connecting Theory and Practice

In its early days, new urbanism seemed disinterested in theory (Shibley 2002). Calthorpe explicitly privileged practice over theory: 'Because the social linkages are complex, the practical must come first' (1993:10). At times in Calthorpe's work, we find a kind of pride in avoiding the theoretical. 'The realities of the modern American city require a model which incorporates and reconfigures the diverse uses at work in the marketplace, not a theoretical construct which hypothesizes a fundamental change in the architectural "building blocks" of development' (Calthorpe 1993:45).

Bressi (1994) argued that theory could cloud issues for an action-oriented discipline. Amanda Rees (2003) describes new urbanism as anti-intellectual. Bohl (2000:777) agrees: 'the New Urbanist literature has not involved social scientific theory building and empirical testing, but rather marketing and manifesto instead'. Many key new urbanist authors write without citing sources, or building on previous planning literature: they engage in a kind of armchair philosophizing that has disappeared from most disciplines. Discussion lists amongst new urbanists are replete with rhetoric and even name-calling, sometimes displacing efforts to develop well-considered analysis or theory.

Despite the disclaimers and skepticism about theory, new urban approaches are informed by theory: sometimes that theory is explicit, but more often it remains implicit. New urbanism builds on selective precedents, and reflects a particular way of thinking about the city. In recent years, its advocates – especially those in the academy – have tried to establish a theoretical base for new urbanism. They recognize that new urbanism needs theory in order to gain respect in the academy and to increase its influence with decision makers. Theory can help new urbanism offerguidance grounded in a broader logic as it identifies the principles of the good community. The theory that informs new urbanism proves explicitly normative.

Although we can see new urbanism in part as a reaction against the extreme rationalism of the modernist approach, in some ways new urbanism continues the modernist project. The rational approach thought progress was possible only through planning (Boyer 1983). We find echoes of that in new urbanist writing. For instance, Kelbaugh (1997:112) says that 'cities that are not planned in some manner end up as illegible and confused as Houston or Tokyo'. Planning creates order and coherence in the built environment. Good designers and planners have the expertise to restore good communities.

Like rationalism before it, new urbanism affirms the importance of expertise. New urbanism posits two types of planners. The bureaucrat/administrator writes policy and enforces zoning rules: this planner has no imagination and little concern for urban quality. By contrast, the creative designer/planner generates visions of better futures and helps people achieve them. Cities need qualified designers to lead the design and planning processes, to identify and implement good forms and practices. Without expert designers, the new urbanists believe, the good community will remain elusive.

At first, new urbanism was essentially an architectural movement to reclaim town planning. The major practitioners came from architectural backgrounds; few trained as planners. As the movement spread ;however, more and more planners were 'drawn to the neo-traditionalist idea both out of a sense of guilt over past practice and a belief that planning could still play an important role in addressing social ills' (D. Hall 1998:28–9). In the process, we see that policy writing takes a reduced role in new urban planning practice. Short vision statements sometimes replace municipal planning documents that once ran to volumes. Local governments in some areas have hired urban designers and streamlined or transformed their zoning codes and land use regulations. Town planning has largely internalized the architectural critique, and absorbed many lessons from new urbanism.

The new urbanists see the public interest and a conception of the progressive community as strongly linked to good urban form (Talen 2000a; Talen and Ellis 2002). For the new urbanists, planners must go beyond managing processes to take positions of leadership in communities. Equipped with a theory of good urban form, and the power of their convictions, planners would have the expertise needed to generate good communities. In many ways, the new urbanist position thus seems closer to modernist view of expertise than the designers might like to admit (Grant 2009)

3. Criticism of New Urbanism Theory

3.1. New Urbanism Critics

New urban projects are appearing with increasing frequency in many countries.Thousands of people now live in new urban communities: many people find them beautiful and meaningful living environments. Are the places that have

been built examples of good communities? Not everyone believes so. Scully (1991) implied that they might be a new suburbanism. Leung(1995) thought they were a new kind of sprawl. Barber said 'sprawl with trim' (1997:A2). Pyatok (2000:814) suggested 'a more seductive form of business as usual'. Baxandall and Ewen (2000:251) criticized a form that they saw as the 'fantasy theme park village', while DeWolf (2002) lamented what he thought were faux towns. Marshall (2004) called them suburbs in disguise.

Some might argue that new urbanism ignores complex urban realities. Indeed, new urbanism in many ways facilitates suburban development by making growth more attractive. Zimmerman (2001) argues that while it claims to promote urban lifestyles, new urbanism in fact legitimates growth on the urban fringe. As Marcuse (2000) says, new urbanist developments are not new and not urban. In some ways, new urbanism contributes to the problems of the suburbs: for example, its costs are high, making housing less affordable (Bookout 1992b). Making suburbs pretty doesnot undo injustice or stop sprawl.

Indeed, where we could argue that the war on blight produced suburbs on steroids, we might say that the war on sprawl is producing suburbs in period costume. The bulked up suburbs of the modernist era led to significant long-term health and economic implications; the dressed up suburbs of the contemporary period mask continuing inequities and unsustainable behaviors.

3.2. Looking for Acivility in New Urbanism Theory

In her classic book, Purity and Danger, anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966:3) wrote: 'The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship'. The justification for modern town planning is in part the quest for a civilized and civilizing community. Having given up on ritual incantations and religiousdogma to enforce good behavior, we turn now to government apparatus and private covenants to set and enforce codes of conduct.

The New Urbanism in fact connects to a facile contemporary attempt to transform large and teeming cities, so seemingly out of control, into an inter-linked series of 'urban villages' where, it is believed, everyone can relate in a civil and urbane fashion to everyone else (Harvey 1997:2). New urbanism also relies on surveillance to limit bad behavior. One role of thestate is to discipline and control individuals (Foucault 1977). Constant surveillancehas become a feature of modern life.New urbanism advocates 'eyes on the street'. Designers are encouraged to use built form to disciplinebehavior. 'The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation' (Foucault 1977:171). Users of spaces are conditioned to good behavior because they believe that others can see them. The good community keeps people in line.

If we had a civil society, would we need planning? In The Drama of Democracy, it is argued that planning provides tools whereby we manage insolvable conflicts over the use of land. 'Our society has institutionalized community planning as part of a cultural apparatus for dealing with conflict and social control' (Grant 2009:13). As we expand the role of physical design planning, we increasingly use planning to generate the rules for the good city. We still lack consensus, but new urban approaches offer a normative framework that eases the process by promising more explicit definitions of appropriate ends and more effective mechanisms of social control.

As we seek to restore civility, we find an appeal in the promises of new urbanism. We need to believe that we can minimize crime and maximize happiness. We long for a good city that is civilized, beautiful, socially-engaged, and just. We want to live in places that are proud of the past and hopeful about the future.

But how do we create a civil and just society? New urbanism can deliver on the desire for beauty, but can it restore civility and justice? Rabinow (1984) says that while Noam Chomsky suggests a just society will be guided by universal reason and justice, Foucault believes that justice must involve a struggle to change power relations. For the most part, planning theorists have tended to agree with Foucault: hence radical planning advocates overturning power régimes that harm the interests of the poor and push them into alternative behaviors. John Friedmann (1979) wrote that a just society will resist hegemonic power. Planning for justice would mean a radical form of practice as the moral option. Justice entails a program of reform to improve living conditions for all, to enhance social mobility, and to guarantee democratic participation. Thus we see that ideas of the good community as a just society reflect the premises of the political economy approach.

While new urbanists want civility, they seldom show an interest in changing power relations as a strategy of achieving a good community. Instead they focus on issues of community character, identity, and sense of place. They believe in universal reason. They want to make everyday life more pleasant and comfortable. They seem content to take the political and social structure as a given, but within that they hope to create better places for people to live their lives. The new urbanists problematizes the character of space rather than the social structure that generates it. They believe that an attractive and meaningful built environment can create conditions to enhance civility amongst citizens.

3.3 Searching for Good community in accordance to New Urbanism theory

Before proceeding to develop a theory of good urban form, Lynch (1981:1) begins by suggesting that it may be meaningless to ask what makes a good city. Cities are simply facts of nature, he says. They are certainly facts of history. They are here; we have to deal with them. Settlements may be good for some and not for others. But if we are to justify our activities in planning communities – to account for the choices we make on what to do or not do as interveners in developmentdecisions – surely we must have some notions of goodness in mind, either for processes or for outcomes?

As planners we focus on places, on the locations where social communities form in space. The spatial element is a given of our concern, and the social is implied. But how do we decide what is good? Often the models we look to as examples of good cities reflect a time when a small proportion of the population lived in the cities. Now that more than 50 per cent of us live in cities, we think of our cities as flawed. Have we exceeded the carrying capacity of what we might define as the good city? Those beautiful and charming urban gems of history achieved their compact glory by extracting the wealth of their hinterlands. Peasants struggled in the countryside to keep the burghers of Europe in silks (Huppert 1986). The lofty spires and fine piazzas reflect an unjust distribution of costs and benefits that we have no interest in reconstructing.

New urbanists seem keen to try to reconstruct a city that is centered, transit-dependent, and mixed in use. That kind of city thrived at the turn of the twentieth century. As Rae (2003) explains, though, that form uniquely suited a particular time and place. A constellation of factors related to energy generation, transportation technologies, agricultural innovations, and population dynamics created the centered city. When technologies and circumstances changed, the city transmogrified. It may no longer be possible to restore the centered option.

New urbanism proves vulnerable to idealized notions of good urban spaces. 'Concepts like village and community are heavily laden with moral and emotive connotations of an older, natural social order' (Brindley 2003:58). Traditionally, American and British cultures have idealized the rural; elements of that longing survive in contemporary ideas of urban villages. Yet new urbanism also reveals the lure of certain kinds of urban places. In planning a city in Iran, Robertson (1984:11) says he was 'trying to recapture the good city, the low-rise, harmonious, age-less City of Man'. This is an ambitious, but clear image. It aspires to a simpler technology, from an era when cities changed little from generation to generation. New urbanism looks to a time when change did not define experience, when urban traditions were sustained over generations, when individual identity seemed intrinsically linked to place.

For better or worse, most of us inhabit cities, suburbs, towns, or villages. We want to make those places good for experiencing our lives. New urbanists are trying to envision and create the good community, to enhance the normative theory of urban form. In that pursuit, they join utopians and others who have preceded them in the search for the good community.

New urban approaches are already influencing popular ideas of the good community. Many municipalities have engaged in visioning processes in recent years to set the public agenda for strategic action and investment (Shipley and Newkirk 1998). Visioning exercises typically generate statements of aspiration reflecting thepublic desire to create communities that are healthy, livable, safe, caring, moral, and beautiful. Unfortunately, such visions often say less about particular places than they do about popular cultural values.

Within vision statements and community plans, we find important cultural values. What themes dominate? We see aspirations for safe, healthy, equitable, comfortable, and productive social environments. People ask for vibrant, connected, beautiful, efficient, and green physical places. New urbanism focuses on the aesthetic questions, articulating a framework for good physical environments. In so doing, it draws the social from the physical. As Krier (1984b) argues, form cannot just follow function as the modernists would have it. Form is equally important in creating the context in which the ideal of community may be realized. 'New Urbanism seeks to create and sustain community, without seriously questioning the underpinnings or the appropriateness of this goal' (Day 2003:87). By simplifying the message, as in the minimalist vision statements so commonly found today, new urbanism ignores difficult issues of race, poverty, exclusion, and disenfranchisement in the contemporary city (D. Hall 1998). Instead it seeks consensus values within which it can operate.

Does the good community require a particular shape? The values in forms reveal the underlying cultural context that generates the patterns. The same form can mean different things at varying times and places. For instance, in American history the grid may have an association with democratic values and practices, but in other urban traditions it may illuminate hierarchy and function to keep people in their place (Grant 2004a). Later generations may dismiss the features we value in our communities today, just as we challenge the premises that drove the garden city planning models of our ancestors. This reality complicates efforts to identify the shape of the good community.

Many new urbanists would state emphatically that they are not trying to define a single form or set of forms as the prescription for the good community. They see new urbanism as a flexible régime that returns traditional town making principles to the table as an option for development. For Bohl (2000), the important question is whether new urbanism is better or worse at making satisfying living environments. He, and many others, would say it clearly does a better job than conventional development. In the Lexicon of the New Urbanism, DPZ (2003) argue that applying new urbanism principles contributes to improved quality of life for urban residents. Few people who have visited new urbanist developments come away without agreeing that these are beautiful places, beloved by their residents. If these places are not 'the form' of the good community, then they certainly provide amenable living environments.

Krier (1984a) talks about a charter for reconstructing the city: a moral project that mirrors a political constitution. New urbanists have adopted many charters through the years, laying out their principles for inspection and inspiration. Their ambitions are clear. For new urbanists, the form of the city is deeply connected to the fate of the city,

and to the health and happiness of its people. But who will decide what makes a good city and which people will benefit from the way in which we develop? New urbanists assume that people generally will enjoy improved cities. Anyone can walk the safe and friendly streets, shop in the handy commercial districts, and watch children play in the parks. The poor will no longer find themselvescrowded into ghettos from which they have no hope of escape. Workers will walk or take trains to work, cutting down on transportation costs. Taxpayers will face reduced long-term costs because of the efficient urban infrastructure. Although the theorists of new urbanism insist that good urban form merely creates opportunities for social development (what they usually call 'environmental affordance'), new urbanist practitioners reveal a stubborn streak of environmental or spatial determinism. In their vision, everyone wins. Good urban form leads to a better society;if only life were like that.

The real and troubling experience of many urban environments illuminates the challenge of finding solutions to intractable problems through planning. Although we are unlikely to remedy our ills without planning, we find no guarantees that planning can solve our worst problems. Despite public celebrations of diversity, few private neighborhoods welcome poor residents. Even as designers talk about how pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented some developments may be, residents still lead car-oriented lives. The most beautiful new developments may meet the physical definitions of the good community, but do not address the social or sustainability objectives.

Should we expect to find the good city filled with beauty, harmony, and happy people? Marcuse (2000) reminds us that real urbanism involves dirt, disorder, congestion, and even poverty: it always has. Perhaps the search for the good community diverts our attention from dealing with specific issues we can identify as problems and tackle if we have the political will. Or perhaps the search for better design reminds us of what is important in cities over the longer term (Frey 1999).

4. Conclusion

With the aim of solving the problems of garden city and modernism, new urbanism theory was born and includes new ways of thinking about urban form and development. This new way of thinking and planning about cityhas been quickly spread, and attracted experts and decision-makers in different continents. New urbanism has normative foundations on its theory and in an era that modernism is deeply affected the city form, tries to create new image of a good community. Like every new theory, new urbanism has critics tooin both theory and practice.

Someof the critics believe that new urbanism promotes kind of a new suburbanism and ignores the complex realities of city. New urbanism tries to create justice among all social classes by presenting principals such as variety of house.The most successful new urbanism projects – except for a few European and Canadian examples which boast

reasonable levels of public or affordable housing – have become affluent enclaves where working class cannot hope to find a home.Indeed,the New Urbanism failed to provide equal opportunities for all people in a society and leading to formation of affluent spaces from whichthe poor people of society stayed away.

A strong streak of environmental or spatial determinism runs through new urbanism (Harvey 1997) and follows many paradigms that have had immense influence in planning practice. Certainly, the garden city revealed deterministic assumptions in its normative model. Its advocates believed that building satellite cities could control sprawl, protect agricultural land, safeguard the family, and eliminate the ills of the industrial city. Garden city idea appealed widely and found a way into many countries to inspire planners during the twentieth century (Ward 1992). Of course, practice demonstrated that planning garden cities did not only solve the problemsof the city but also generated the problems that now inspire the new urbanists. Can we expect new urbanism to be similarly successful in being applied cross-culturally, and similarly unsuccessful in solving the problem of the city?

Despite the normative approach, new urbanism seeks to represent universal principles. Although this theory is a reaction to extreme rationalism of modern times, it has a rational approach and thinks only with planning, progress may occur. The close relationship between Canada and America and both countries'following capitalism and liberalism may have lead to the transferring of this theory from America to Canada easily. However, the process of transformation of this theory is partial in European countries, perhaps because of equity approaches, and also it has approximately been unsuccessful in Asian countries such as Japan.

Finally, applying new urbanism principles as the formula for planning better communities remain a challenge. As Krieger (1991) notes, our dreams and values work against good communities. Our desire for privacy, individuality, elbow room, and cars make many of us resistant against new urbanism prescriptions. For every household willing to buy a home in a compact transit node, another two to four households may choose detached homes in the suburbs. For every household willing to buy a unit in a mixed income and mixed usesneighborhood, more households prefer homogeneous districts. Despite the influence of new urbanism prescriptions in plans and vision statements, those buying and selling houses in the city may not share the new urban view of what makes a good community.

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