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UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, DIASPORA
Utopias are powerful elixirs. Is it any wonder that planners, being idealists, are drawn to them? Visions of the ideal life have guided the modern planning movement since Camillo Sitte lit the path. Ebenezer Howard, Sir Patrick Geddes, Benton MacKaye, Lewis Mumford, Martin Meyerson, Tom Reiner, Robert Fishman, Peter Hall, Paul and Percival Goodman, and Frank and Fritzie Manuel are just a few utopian authors known to planners. The collective vision of these utopias--that an ideal community can and should exist--has assumed the status of myth, to be passed on to future generations.

As myth, these utopias have dominated planning and design discourse. As fact, their influence has been real and measurable. As planners expand their authority, this myth will spread beyond their own domain. Moreover, worldwide evidence spanning millennia supports the utopian thesis of compact settlement form. Historically, humans have flocked toward cities. Cities are the very basis of civilization. Most importantly, the very nature of utopias--they are visions--endows them with their greatest strength. They portray, they compel, they inspire. This essay addresses the misrepresentation by some members of the planning community of the meaning of these utopias in the contemporary debate about development.

The debate is not: about sprawling versus compact form, high versus low density, or environmental protection versus economic development. These polarities cast the issue in a simple way that glosses over the complexity of life today. By focusing on a narrow issue, such as open space or housing prices, these representations prescribe a single measure. Take, for example, contentions regarding sprawl forms of settlement--that they may be price-efficient.[1] This use of a single measure--price efficiency--doesn't reflect "externalities." In a complex and interconnected world where hair spray usage and leaky refrigerators and air conditioners on one continent may affect skin cancer rates on another, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw boundary lines marking externalities. Wise economic research, in the end, will likely show that the very notion of externalities is at the heart of this problem.

In the past, most determinants of development success have measured growth. Growth measures have been, by and large, quantitative--efficiency, productivity, size, and abundance are prominent examples. Often, growth measures have been used singly or as a set, measuring a single factor. Proposals that follow from these analyses are skewed toward that individual criterion. History has shown that a single-measure-based proposal, if implemented, is more likely to create new problems than to solve existing ones. These proposals also miss the mark because they gauge development, an economic enterprise, and not settlement, a community enterprise.

Community as Measure
A better measure for growth is community. How does growth contribute to the community it is in? Is it compatible? Or destructive? The recent focus (since 1970, generally) of growth management, historic preservation, urban design, and ecological planning on "community character" evinces a growing sensitivity in this regard. Nonetheless, even some of these techniques select a set of parameters, such as physical form, construction materials, or environmental criteria, to measure against.

Another approach has been used by biologists, particularly ecologists, and anthropologists, especially ethnographers. These scientists use a broad-ranging method that encompasses all aspects of a community or an ecosystem (a biological community). The shorthand term that biologists use for a community-wide measure is functional integrity. Some planners and designers are incorporating these ideas into their work.[2]

Functional integrity is based on sustainability. Sustainability is a finite capacity of any place at any point in time to support activities, given a set of impacts that those activities have on the place. Once that capacity is reached, the impacts of additional growth or activities harm the integrity of the place. Functional integrity refers to the ability of a place to continue to function as a healthy, living whole without excessive outside support that, if removed, would endanger its health.

How should planners and designers strive for sustainable communities? Certainly not according to current mainstream practices. A recent article in this journal, "Ideal Urban Form and Visions of the Good Life: Florida's Growth Management Dilemma," by Ivonne Audirac et al., challenges the re-emerging view of compact settlement patterns as good by asserting that low density development is preferred by consumers because it is cheaper, and less harmful to its surrounds.[3] Allow me to contrast their view to the New Jersey experience. New Jersey poses an interesting and vexing case. It is America's most densely populated state. In it 567 municipalities exercise zoning control over development, complicated by fragmented control over other aspects by 21 counties, 19 state agencies, and numerous regional and federal agencies. Add to this one of the world's most sensitive environments, the one-million-acre New Jersey Pinelands, a United Nations International Biosphere Reserve. Then juxtapose against this background one of earth's greatest concentrations of chemical, pharmaceutical, and petroleum firms. Is it any surprise that in this milieu development is as dispersed as the responsibility for it?

Sprawl as Myth
The authors of "Ideal Urban Form" conclude that sprawl is less expensive and more desirable than nonsprawl. But how can a definitive conclusion be drawn about sprawl when, as the authors concede, there is no accepted definition of the term? "There is no consensus on definitions of urban sprawl--its physical characteristics, causes, and effects."

The authors strive to further three other myths about sprawl. First, that municipalities want sprawl. In some quarters this myth has become known as the ratables chase, as if it were the title of a gangster film. Second, that people prefer sprawl. This is the "people's choice" award for the single family home. Finally, that the professions are not offering an alternative vision. Sprawl, it appears, is deeply ingrained in the collective subconscious of the American psyche. Or is it?

Do municipalities really want sprawl? Audirac et al. believe the evidence says yes. "Under the new federalism growth has become indispensable for the economic wellbeing of regions and cities." While the costs-of-sprawl debate is ongoing, recent evidence in New Jersey shows that the current development patterns (sprawl) have fiscal costs that exceed tax revenues. The cost of major capital facilities needs between 1988 and 2010 is projected to exceed tax revenues available to meet them by a factor of 1.66. This amount, moreover, is merely to maintain current service levels, which are in many cases inadequate.[4] The "Ideal Urban Form" authors assume that the ratables chase (the municipal quest for more property-tax generators) is not only a given, but a good. Data in New Jersey, and the authors' own citations of Florida's infrastructure condition, contradict that assertion.

Do people want sprawl? While Americans may prefer single family homes, this does not mean that they want them to exist in sprawling forms. To equate single-family home preferences with sprawl preferences is misleading. Single family homes, and other desirable housing types, can exist in non-sprawling community forms. Conversely, townhouses and other higher-density residential types can exist within sprawl. Clustered townhomes do not a community make.

In New Jersey, real estate prices, community and statewide surveys, and leisure time activity patterns show that traditional communities and their physical form are prized. In the dizzying markets of the 1980s, home prices increased more in established communities than in new subdivisions. In one statewide survey, 75 percent of the respondents would like to see development occur in cities or older suburban areas. In another, most would prefer to live in a small town or an older suburb, rather than new suburbs or rural areas; and less than one-third of the people in rural and new suburban areas want "some" or a "great deal" of growth in their hometowns. In a third survey, 75 percent of the respondents in center cities want growth to occur there.[5] Nelessen's data reveal that community residents, when shown images of both sprawl and traditional housing and community types, prefer traditional types anywhere from four to one to eighty to one.[6] On weekends, tourists flood the towns of Princeton, Cape May, and Lambertville and New Hope, Pennsylvania, on the New Jersey border.[7]

Do planning and design professionals promote sprawl? Alas, in some cases, yes. Yet to say that "[v]isions of new urban forms were practically absent in the 1980s" is to disregard some extraordinary conceptions of new designs for community living. One need only glance at the works of Christopher Alexander, Ricardo Bofill, Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi, Adele Santos, John Todd, Bernard Tschumi, and Sim Van der Ryn, among others, to know something is brewing. What is important is that these visionaries and practitioners do not cast the discussion as low against high density, or sprawl against compact development, except peripherally. Their primary focus is on creating or perpetuating vibrant communities.

The myth of sprawl is now starting to crack. Why, then, sprawl? While some observers have documented its causes, notably Kenneth Jackson in The Crabgrass Frontier, it is my view that people have not had a choice in a supply-driven market. Most new construction has assumed this form, for primarily expedient economic and political reasons, despite our druthers. The mass-producing industrial economy has translated the American dream of the single family home the only way it could--into large-scale suburban sprawl. Thus, the myth, and mistake, of sprawl has been encoded into everyday practices, etched in everyman's psyche. The non-communities formed by sprawl are the dystopias that, in part, cause dysfunctional living arrangements and dysfunctional lives.

Community as Means
Some people may see this response as another version of the grass-is-always-greener dispute. In reaction to urban ills, Ebenezer Howard and Frank Lloyd Wright painted the very different visions of Garden Cities and Broadacre, respectively. To counteract the banality of suburbia and small towns, Andres Duany and Le Corbusier gave us traditional neighborhoods and the radiant city, respectively. Yet regardless of scale, theirs were all visions of community, a place where meaningful life happens. A focus on communities is also a requiem for sprawl.

If the growth-versus-no-growth debate of the 1970s were replaced by the compact-versus-sprawl debate in the 1980s,[8] then let the debate for the 1990s and beyond--after all, humans have settled in communities around the globe for thousands of years--be community versus non-community. It is an aberration that sprawl has been the prevalent suburban and exurban form of growth in the United States for the past 50 years.

The community is not only the means of attaining desirable form, it is also the very forum for debate. Let the community decide whether or not it will have growth, whether it will be dense or sparse. In a pluralist society like ours, a healthy community is likely to have a little of everything. The ideal New England village, for example, its form and function derived from English counterparts, has a unity of style that suited the homogeneity of its early inhabitants, just as English and continental variants suited the cultural homogeneity of their residents. In the melting pot (mixed salad) of America, we are compelled to provide for a variety of lifestyles, through a variety of community forms and housing types. This is the province of planning and design.

One of the egregious failures of new suburbia has been its relative inability to provide diversity in housing type, tenure, and price, and therefore residents, in comparison to cities. The scale of development has prompted builders and developers to mass-produce similar "units," which invariably, and inevitably, attract similar residents. The well-chronicled exclusionary mentality is also at work here. Compare Rye with Manhattan, Highland Park with Chicago, Shaker Heights with Cleveland, Gladwyne with Philadelphia, and so forth. Homogeneity may be acceptable, but let it be a conscious choice of the community, and let its form foster community.

As Wendell Berry states in "Out of Your Car, Off Your Horse":

Properly speaking, global thinking is not possible. Those who have "thought globally" (and among them the most successful have been imperial governments and multinational corporations) have done so by means of simplification too extreme and oppressive to merit the name of thought. Global thinkers have been, and will be, dangerous people. . . . Unless one is willing to be destructive on a very large scale, one cannot do something except locally, in a small place. Global thinking can only do to the globe what a space satellite does to it: reduce it, make a bauble out of it. Look at one of those photographs of half the earth taken from outer space, and see if you recognize your neighborhood. If you want to see where you are, you will have to get out of your space vehicle, out of your car, off your horse, and walk over the ground. On foot you will find that the earth is still satisfyingly large, and full of beguiling nooks and crannies.

If we would think locally, we would do far better than we are doing right now. The right local questions and answers will be the right global ones. The Amish question "What will this do to your community?" tends toward the right answer for the world.[9]

While Diaspora, the scattering of the Jews among the Gentiles outside of Palestine, may have been inevitable, the scattering of sprawl on our countryside is not. The notion of community as measure, forum, and means is being rekindled throughout our society. As practitioners, should we not live up to the enlightened desires of society? And do our share to create responsible visions for community that can enlighten and bring about those desires?

AUTHOR'S NOTE
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NOTES
[1.] *Ivonne Audirac, Anne H. Shermyen, and Marc T. Smith, "Ideal Urban Form and Visions of the Good Life: Florida's Growth Management Dilemma," Journal of the American Planning Association 56, 4: 470-82.*

[2.] *A primary contribution in this regard is Stephen Boyden, Sheelagh Millar, Ken Newcombe, Beverley O'Neill, The Ecology of a City: the Case of Hong Kong (Canberra: Australian National*

University Press). This synthesis of a multi-volume study was sponsored by the United Nations Man and the Biosphere Programme. More familiar examples of ecological approaches that consider functional integrity as a basis for comprehensive planning are the Pinelands Growth Management Plan adopted by the New Jersey Pinelands Commission in 1980, and the Florida Keys Growth Management Plan (Monroe County Comprehensive Plan) adopted by the Monroe County Commission in 1986. The planning program at the University of British Columbia is organized around the principle of functional integrity and sustainable communities.

[3.] Ivonne Audirac, et al., op. cit. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this essay are extracted from the Audirac article.

[4.] New Jersey State Planning Commission, Communities of Place: The New Jersey Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan, vol. I, 1988, p. 9; David Slater and Hammer, Siler, George Associates, Infrastructure Needs Assessment, New Jersey Office of State Planning Technical Reference Document 8715, May 1987.

[5.] The Gallup Organization, "New Jersey Land Use Planning: A Survey of Public Opinion," New Jersey Office of State Planning Technical Reference Document 86-3, December 1986, p. 30; Center for Public Interest Polling, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, "Housing Preferences of New Jerseyans," prepared for the New Jersey Builders Association, 1987; Center for Public Interest Polling, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, "The Crowded Road: A Survey of New Jerseyans' Opinions About Transportation, Growth, and Development," prepared for the New Jersey Department of Transportation, 1988, p. 16.

[6.] Based on surveys conducted in 18 communities in New Jersey from 1977 to 1991 by Anton Nelessen of Rutgers University. These surveys have evolved into 180 questions accompanied by 240 images, administered to over 8,000 people--an average of approximately 400 residents per community. While the typical community preference survey reveals a community's overall preference for traditional community forms over sprawl from 5:1 to 10:1, the surveys have revealed overall preferences ranging from a low of 4: I to a high of 80:1. These surveys are yet unpublished. These data are drawn from personal communication with Nelessen.

[7.] Tourists are becoming known as "tourrorists" as their invasions increasingly affect local sensibilities in some of the most visited towns. In Jackson Hole, Wyoming, a favorite T-shirt reads, "One must make a tourist of oneself to take the pain out of being a local."

[8.] Audirac, et al., op. cit. These different "debates" were variants of the same theme.

[9.] Wendell Berry, "Out of Your Car, Off Your Horse," The Atlantic (February 1991): 61-63.

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