

Case Brief – New Urbanism

Case Study Assignment

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New Urbanism's Importance to Land Use and Transportation

New Urbanism is centrally important to both land use and transportation as it is a philosophy that has design and strategy implications affecting each in basically equal parts. New Urbanism is considered a reaction against the suburban sprawl development patterns typical of much of the United States, and evidently elsewhere such as the UK and Australia. Suburban sprawl is typified by large lots, curving streets and cul-de-sacs, inadequate sidewalks, segregated land uses and auto oriented living. In contrast, developments designed in the New Urbanism style promote the traditional concept of a neighborhood with pedestrian friendly streets, common areas for community congregation, a modified grid pattern design, large front porches, rear alleys and detached backyard garages making for a community feel within the streetscape and increased interaction.

Policy Implications

In reaction to typical suburban development, New Urbanism posits thirteen design principles (listed in the attached reading materials) aimed at increasing the sustainability of local neighborhoods. Such design principles are aimed at decreasing the overall footprint - both carbon (transportation related) and spatial (land use related). Depending upon the priorities of the communities considering such design, different policies would be used involving land use and/or transportation. In this instance, principles and policies that would be used span land use and transportation – indeed, they strike at the very heart of the nexus between the two, such that it is difficult to separate land use and transportation in the recommendations. Take for instance the suggestion that “most of the dwellings are within a five-minute walk of the center [of the neighborhood], an average of roughly 2,000 feet.” This principle speaks to the issue of walkability, which is more a transportation issue than anything else. However, another principle stipulates the placement of dwellings which encourages density - a land use policy decision. This demonstrates the interrelated nature of land use and transportation, within the context of New Urbanist principles.

New Urbanism: The Evidence

The evidence for the desirability of New Urbanism is mixed. One of our articles adopts a critical stance toward New Urbanism, largely from the standpoint of safety and law enforcement. The authors discuss the concept of “crime prevention through environmental design” or CPTED, which is “the proper design and effective use of the

built environment [which] can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime and the incidence of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life.”¹

The authors find that New Urbanist designs are likely to cause more security problems than cul-de-sac type developments. For instance, criminals are more likely to blend in in grid patterns, whereas they may “believe that they have less justification for being” in cul-de-sac areas.² Alleys, or “rear laneways” may neatly conceal automobiles in New Urbanist design, but they may also “provide offenders with easy, concealed and unchallenged access to the rear of properties and to vehicles that may not be routinely or casually overlooked by residents.”³ The UK’s Association of Chief Police Officers advocates non-permeable cul-de-sac designs, as it has been estimated that New Urbanist designs are three times more expensive to police than cul-de-sac designs.⁴ Taking into account some other criteria such as walkability, social interaction, and travel behavior, the authors conclude that the evidence for New Urbanism is inconclusive at best, and that cookie-cutter solutions to individual developments are inappropriate.⁵

Larsen (2005) is quite a bit more optimistic, though not utopian, about New Urbanism. Evaluating the role of New Urbanism in efforts to revitalize two older neighborhoods in Orlando, Florida, the author concludes that this history “reveals that local governments can effectively incorporate new urbanist design interventions into plans and land development codes as traditional city guidelines.”⁶ New Urbanist strategies have been somewhat more successful in the Eola neighborhood than the more economically distressed neighborhood of Parramore. The author notes that even New Urbanist thinkers admit that New Urbanism “alone cannot address intransigent social and economic issues.”⁷ Social justice and equity must be factored in and balanced against the goals and methods of New Urbanism.⁸

Conclusions:

Thus, the combined lesson from these two articles is that New Urbanism is not a cure-all even when viewed in the most positive light. However, it is one strategy to be kept in the toolbox of the urban planner.

¹ Cozens, Paul and Hillier, David. (2008). The Shape of Things to Come: New Urbanism, the Grid and the Cul-De-Sac. *International Planning Studies* 13(1) 51-73. p. 52.

² Ibid., 58.

³ Ibid., 59.

⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵ Ibid., 63, 66.

⁶ Larsen, Kristin. (2005). New Urbanism’s Role in Inner-city Neighborhood Revitalization. *Housing Studies* 20(5) 795-813. p. 810.

⁷ Ibid., 811.

⁸ Ibid., 799, 811.