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The Importance of Space and Place: The Sustainability of the Modern City

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Abstract

The concept of space and place has been exemplified and embodied in society since the inception of creating shared living spaces. The two words are interrelated and go hand in hand cross-culturally. More recently the significance of studying the concept has reinvented cities and changed the face of communities. Studies show current trends in community development offices of United States cities supporting the creation of a place and space that is unique to a community. New practices of creating space and place have allowed societies to function experience more success due to the attention and retraction of people that support the well being of the community. This paper examines current trends and recent research on the impact of utilizing

space and place as a significant tool to improve the community at large.

Keywords: space, place, new urbanism, quality of life, aesthetics, beautification

Introduction

There is a national trend across cities and towns throughout the United States that space and place are a marketing strategy cities can utilize to attract and retain the creative class that fosters economic growth. The question today is what are the best practices and cutting edge research on housing development, beautification, and trends of new urbanism that create a distinct sense of space and place. Government and community leaders are looking to recreate the image and face of their hometown and make it the place to be through efforts to maintain the unique aesthetics and identity of the city. This paper will assess trends found cross-culturally to develop a strategic plan for small cities to follow and apply to community planning.

Understanding the dynamics behind the scene of a downtown area leads to sustainability, attraction, and most importantly retention.

Defining the Concept of Space and Place

A community creates a distinct sense of *space and place* as a direct result of the needs of the people. From the beginning of modern civilization a society creates space to eat, sleep, entertain, cook, socialize, study, pray, and live in; a place to exist that meets their social and biological needs. As a result of developing space, people are inherently constructing a face to their culture and identity (Nelson 412). The unique decision process on the creation of place is now analyzed as a tool cities can use to attract and retain the post graduate young professionals. Cross-culturally throughout time this phenomena plays a significant, but unique role in the success of a region. Actively planning and managing urban development can be the force that keeps a city thriving, especially in the current competition of a global economy. By planning the creation of space in partnership with meeting natural and social needs, any geographic region can provide a cutting edge on competition to attract and retain the creative class (Florida).

Space and place refers to the cyclical phenomenon that takes place in the process of creating a community and a region's built environment. The community shapes space and place, and in effect the aesthetics and identity that results, further influences the people. The demands of a society are expressed through building a place to live and function in, which ultimately creates a culture and identity for a region (Nelson 420). In essence space and place become tools in the design process. It's a cyclical force which when decomposed can be manipulated to create a place where the people want to be. Specifically the concept focuses on the holistic view of the face of a community, including aesthetics, green space, accessibility, historic district, housing, and basic amenities.

Using Aesthetics for Place Making

Architecture, design, and city planning are tools that will promote interaction between its residents, creating a distinct sense of place. Interaction leads to innovation, because innovation is impossible in isolation. The people learn, share, and grow from each other in a shared sense of place. Two housing developments, Midtown Mall and College Suites on Washington and Hawley in Binghamton, New York are currently in construction. For the city of Binghamton, both projects will establish the student population as the dominant demographic to support business, entrepreneurialism, and innovation. The layout and design of a city fosters social relationships and will ultimately create ties between the students and the year round residents, in a sense creating one big 'campus'. Everyone will begin to share civic and cultural life while calling Binghamton home. The creation of an intimate city is important for retention because of the creation of a social network; which often times is a leading reason why graduates leave. From a birds eye view, the places with distinct sense of place will become more attractive to developers.

It is important to notice that entrepreneurs are coming together with common goals and the city offers resources to achieve their goals. As a collective whole, it creates a larger message that reflects off of the city. It markets the area and geographical region to small businesses and young entrepreneurs alike. The theory behind place and space is critical, especially in building an

environment and what people see. In essence the creation of space and place leads to the building of a creative urban core, where young talent and intellectuals will thrive.

Place and Space as Marketing Tools

Place needs to have concentrations of business and housing to create polynuclear urban regions (Priemus 425). Both business and housing amenities create an ideal place for the revival of an urban economy. Priemus describes a “doughnut city”, as a city with empty buildings, derelict areas, crime in the center, and wealth, happiness, and family life in the surrounding area. Cities need to work to strive away from the possible outcome of a doughnut city and look to create value. The city comes to rely on small business and housing to support the community, while the community supports the local business and residential structures. Specifically Priemus references the benefit of replacing the nuclear family with extended multi-family units. Ultimately, a university environment will capture this by moving into the downtown core, as a result aiding in the recovery of the economy.

Florida argues that place is also necessary to serve as a talent magnet in addition to intellectual capital. A region that can thrive demands diversity in all aspects, from inhabitants to industry. Florida says, “...creative people empower regional economic growth and these people prefer places that are innovative, diverse and tolerant” (33) In essence, she refers to the existence

of an effective and supportive social network. Creating such a place supports the individual and cultivates innovation. For example as seen in the arts and enterprise session, the artists in the Binghamton community experienced success as a result of the mitigation of human resources and areas of interests through a support network of other local artists. The panel of leaders in the community talked to the effect of art facilitating relationships among those sharing the Binghamton area. According to the article supporting existing historic districts leads to revitalization clearly, in that it creates roots and a sense of belonging. Space is essential to retaining young professionals.

A study based on trends adopted by the Dutch government, focuses on knowledge-intensive business services to re-urbanize the city center. Then residents construct a sense of ownership and home, and invest in their property or other forms of residence. The cities recreate the spatial relationships between work and home life to create a distinct sense of place where the two worlds of work and play are intertwined. Housing projects such as these are turning space into place by offering central meeting cores that cater to entertainment and food demands of its residents. For example, The City of Binghamton has partnered with the developments to maintain aesthetic characteristic of the neighborhood, support historic restoration, and maintain the city's image of the city's specific sense of place.

A combination of space, place, and aesthetics creates the modern concept of "new urbanism". It is vital to foster community central-city revitalization through exemplifying the tool of space and place. Cities need to look into and work with their foundations to create a valuable

city. Establishing a distinct urban fabric is imperative to creating a sense of identity and belonging. Underdeveloped areas in a region become more attractive as an area of investment and change, and are comparable to painting over an old piece of art work to reuse the canvas. In a sense, the unnoticed people become a resource. Such regions of small cities are now being looked at as gems that resonate over the city. In many university cities, the local and university community do not fully recognize the benefits of coming together and sharing the small city. The article references the historical example of NYC and the change from five counties to one city and the profound impact it has had on creating an urban core that supports the city. Consider the image of filling the hole of the doughnut. Therefore this practice of urban containment has effects that penetrate the urban core and ripple throughout the city (Priemus, 424).

Using the Urban Core to Support the City

George Hughes references the importance of using strategies to adequately address and combat the growing alienation felt in public space. A city must create a space that is conducive to socialization, growth, and development. Binghamton is home to extremely diverse ranges of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Hughes specifically refers to the importance of rhythm analysis, which explores the links between innovation and its impact on place making (125). Specifically the main goal is to start at the center of cities. Hughes emphasizes in his

research that community events are a tool to solve and start work on the solution.

The six main trends of new urbanism are a very advanced practice that other American cities look up to and attempt to follow. Hughes writes, “Such strategies, in addition to their economic objectives, held out the tentative possibility of forging affective cultural alliances around the geographical entity of place” (130)

According to Hughes, the strategic use of ‘festive time strategies’ is an imperative trend and practicing city marketing leaders need to adapt to compete in the knowledge economy. He focuses specifically on the idea of sharing a space by sharing a common culture. Binghamton can thrive off of this concept. Hughes writes, “It combats the growing alienation and insecurity felt in public space.” (133) Celebrating culture brings the community together and sees other people, sharing ideas and socializing and it leads to the creative contagion. A sense of pride and confidence results and inspires people creating an entrepreneurial milieu. For example Binghamton, NY has many festivals throughout the year that celebrate the diversity of local cultures. Imagineering is a new trendy word to describe what is happening in American cities alike and creating a common space and culture creates an environment conducive to continuous innovation (Hughes, 135). Ultimately, partnerships can foster, and ideally an economic and political climate is re-created in a way that supports and sustains a city.

From Day to the Night Time Economy

According to Daniel Campo, with young professionals there is a demand for an exciting

night life, entertainment, and a place swarming with other young professional faces. The new housing developments and revitalization of downtown Binghamton, will transform the urban core, creating a thriving scene for young professionals will attract the best and the brightest. Thus we can refer to the “Night-Time Economy” and its tremendous impact on place making. Young professional have to live in an area where they have access to social gain, which has been exemplified through numerous thriving American cities. For example, Syracuse, NY, Detroit, Michigan, and the down town “SoHo” artist community in NYC are all models for, “yupified city centres”, which are essentially twenty-four hour cities according to Hughes. The streets are animated and there is an irresistible rhythm to the city.

Not only are these trends found in popular cities in the United States, it is a cross-cultural phenomena. International cities support entrepreneurs by focusing on space, place, and aesthetics. Exemplary practices by a city official in Britain are city marketing through waterfront development, garden festivals, and park and leverage planning. Their goal is to aesthetically revamp the cities, and it has worked quite well since it started (Hughes). For a city to successfully go through an urban transformation, recognition of the importance of focusing on the vitality and quality of life of the urban core. To portray the new urbanity, cities need to support conference centers, theatres, arena, concert hall, civic engagement efforts, and cultural activities unique to a city. Clearly, amenities and an attractive city are vital to a local economy.

Additionally, restaurants, cinemas, cafes, and entertainment open at night; makes a city lively and as described by Campo exemplify “aesthetic eclecticism.”

Campo discusses in depth, the role of entertainment in a city to idea of pleasure, a vital entity to a city that makes it in a competitive in a global world. “Recreation educates the body and leisure educates the mind” (Campo). The visual aspect of an environment full of energy and an exciting night life can support a city full of young professionals, while the scene orchestrates the ideal image of place. Creating a place that is safe and accessible to the public, in a sense requires a friendly ambiance.

Best Practices

The best practices found locally are Restore New York, West Side Neighborhood Project, The Main Street Initiative, and Pocket Parks. The revolution in student life downtown will have a tremendous impact on the city. The City of Binghamton is actively planning and preparing for the new changes by supporting projects that develop a distinct sense of place for the city. A new concept of “green ways” is a way to apply new urbanism trends locally. Many researchers have uncovered the power of walking trails and community access. The city is working to make the city a place for families and students to come together and enjoy by increasing access to food and entertainment within walking distance. The theory strives to bring people together and creates a distinct sense of both space and place. The creation of green space is calming to a community and psychologically inspiring. Specifically the river trails that run along the water banks of the city will eventually be renovated to provide more than thirty miles of pedestrian trails. Ultimately, the trails are estimated to reach Owego and Port Dickinson. The city is exemplifying the unique

impact a distinct sense of place reduces to. The trails literally create a “massive network system” that is connecting the city together and intensifies the community sense of place.

The city has also extensively supported the same mission of CIC2020. The city has worked with Price Waterhouse Coopers Scholar’s Program, David Slone Wilson, and Binghamton University to design and build community gardens. The city also provides materials for the talented Students for Free Enterprise (SIFE) to organize neighborhood clean-ups. Therefore the city manages talented university students to reinvent the face of Binghamton.

Next the Main Street Initiative is a project based on the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which is a strategic four point approach to meet local needs through opportunity. The Main Street Initiative is supported by partnerships among the city, business, and community partners working to develop the downtown commercial and historic district.

Ultimately, the city supports efforts that benefit residents and stakeholders by creating value for the city. Behind the efforts of Tarik Abdelazim, some projects and initiatives the planning department has taken are to create partnerships for change. Through projects, neighborly relationships can develop between local residents and students to create a community. “That’s the vision- creating a distinct sense of place, where families and students can walk and sit to enjoy the city” (Abdelazim). For example, the city is creating several pocket parks. Pocket parks are little pockets of land nestled directly in residential neighborhoods providing space for communities to share and enjoy. The underlying concept is to create space for a community to gather together that is conducive to socialization and relaxation.

There are also huge efforts underway to support beautification projects that will serve to visually enhance the city and stimulate a distinct sense of place. The city is offering a “design your own parcel contest” in order to create a sense of ownership, of the place where local residents, families, students, and retired elderly live. They can take responsibility, acting and sharing creating a sense of community.

Residents will be able to select from a dozen identified vacant lots across the city, and work with a team from BU to develop a creative design that accommodates all neighbors. Two teams will be selected to build out the pocket parks next spring, and though design matters, the judges will look to see which teams are enthusiastic, inclusive and engaged. We're not just building parks, we're also building social relations. (Abdelazim).

In addition, place making is exemplified in the West Side Neighborhood Development Project. The project is a projection of an idea made by the West Side consisting of locals and students. The group is working to foster relationships between other student and young professional residents. The group aims to maximize the potential the west side has to offer, by supporting vibrant small businesses and well-kept historic houses (Basler). Also the group has created an extensive plan that partners with the City of Binghamton, in order to maintain a neighborhood that preserves the high quality of life found on the West Side.

Recommendations

Similar to projects like the River Trails and Green Ways, I recommend building trails that possibly lead to the university and create a vein that literally connects the heart of the city to the university, creating an empowering intellectual hub.

Also, there are historic train trails throughout the Southern Tier that would increase access and provide more transportation creating a transient population.

I also recommend building upon the character of an existing to encourage recycling and innovation with infrastructure, housing, and recreational facilities.

Another idea I had is to create a program that eases accessibility for incoming graduates to buy houses and become homeowners. The city could offer incentives to students by supporting and marketing Binghamton University's graduate programs, local employment opportunities, and entrepreneurs.

Lastly, there should be an office space for the CIC2020 class in the city to encourage partnerships to support and highlight the individual goals of the students. The office would help

students in the class to focus their accomplishments, interests, and life goals. Moreover CIC2020 can represent a familiar crowd of faces, serving as a resource for other students to go to and connect to the city and thus, the Southern Tier.

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