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RE-EMERGENCE OF VALUE IN PLACE AND IN PLACE MAKING

Place making is a significant element of a livable community. Leonardo Vazquez, AICP/PP, describes place making as follows: "Place making is a process by which a space becomes a "place"—a physical area that is seen by its users and others as distinct from other areas. This comes largely from the place's history, combination of uses, and the feelings it evokes among the people who know of the place. All major cities around the world have similar objects and uses. Yet Paris, France, is widely seen as a different type of place than the city of Los Angeles in the United States. Place making is often an organic and unintentional process that happens without the active knowledge of the people who give a place its identity, and help retain it."¹

Since World War II the development of new communities and redevelopment of existing cities in the United States has been institutionalized, and "sameness" has spread across the country. Daniel Gilbert, a professor of psychology at Harvard, declared in a New York Times Op-Ed column that we may have reached nostalgia's end, meaning "literally, a longing for the places of one's past." Gilbert writes, "Americans can drive from one ocean to the other, stopping every day for the same hamburger and every evening at the same hotel. Traveling in a straight line is no longer much different from traveling in a circle."² Local businesses have died off to be replaced by malls "promising us the same goods arranged in the same way as they are every other place."

Place making/new localism—The enactment of a national historic preservation act in 1966 was a major step in getting communities to recognize their historic fabric of landmarks and historic districts that make them special. National recognition led states and municipalities to enact laws to regulate historic districts. To one degree or another, many cities, towns, and villages have taken steps—like creating heritage areas—to preserve structures and districts that make them special. Today, citizens in communities across the nation are creating what can be called a "new localism" or what a nonprofit planning firm, Project for Public Spaces (PPS),³ calls "place making." This intentional place making is emerging for economic, environmental, cultural, and social reasons. The new localism, or place making, is giving an impetus to celebrating and capitalizing on qualities of particular places.

An early example of the new localism—and distinguishing the qualities of a particular place, as well as strengthening its identity—was the establishment in Ithaca, New York, of the Ithaca HOUR,⁴ the oldest and largest local currency system in the United States. One Ithaca HOUR is valued at \$10; although price is negotiable, one Ithaca Hour is recommended for one hour's work. This currency system fosters a local economy by circulating money amongst neighbors who are more likely to utilize local services and goods produced locally. The effect has been

to strengthen Ithaca's local economy and thwart the standardized consumption represented by chain stores.

As another example, eating locally is the vanguard of new localism. Farmers' markets, community gardens, food co-ops, and growth in local farming—with farmers increasingly producing products using what is grown or raised on the farm. Instead of buying fruits, vegetables, and meats that may have traveled 1,500 miles or more from farm to processor to your table, locally grown or raised foods can be bought directly from the farmer at a farmers' market. The markets frequently become social places where citizens gather to socialize as well as to purchase food; and local farms help preserve the rural landscape around cities, another dividend from eating locally.

Protecting and enhancing qualities of place has also joined the agenda of tools for promoting economic development. High tech industries of the mind depend upon attracting educated workers who desire to work in communities known for high quality of life and place. Business websites like Portfolio.com and bizjournals.com rate communities on their cultural institutions, recreational opportunities, and other qualities of place.

Euclidian vs. holistic approaches—Euclidian zoning⁵ (a traditional zoning practice named after a Supreme Court case upholding land use ordinances in Euclid, Ohio) is known for separating and segregating residential, commercial, and industrial uses. However, city, suburban, and small town planning is now moving away from Euclidian zoning and moving, instead, to flexible, holistic, and community-participatory approaches for defining the specific outcomes desired in particular places. Increasing attention is being given to enlivening streets (for pedestrians and cyclists as well as autos), parks, and other public spaces, and no longer separating residential and commercial activities. Project for Public Spaces advocates for revitalizing “our cities through a process of making better places,” and calls for imagining “interdisciplinary teams—park planners, traffic engineers, economic development experts—working together with local residents to realize a vision for key places in their communities.”⁶

New urbanism—The “new urbanism” is a planning approach that looks back to the future with walkable cities and towns, denser development of homes with porches, transit-oriented development that connects residential and commercial areas with civic and business areas, and relegation of the auto as necessary to foster pedestrian and transit uses. Emerging from the new urbanism is a new type of unified land-development ordinance for planning and urban design. New urbanism joins zoning, subdivision regulations, urban design, and optional architectural standards into one compact document. It advances community vision, local character, conservation of open lands, transit options, and walkable and mixed-use neighborhoods—where one can easily walk from one's home to the grocery store, to friends, and sometimes to work.

Livability—Implicit in place making is the creation of socially compatible communities that will foster caring, more citizen participation by all ages and

cultures, age-integration, enlivened streets and parks, protected natural areas, and aging in place for all residents.

References

¹ Leonardo Vazquez, (April 22, 2010) "Principles of Human Needs Placemaking," *PDI Advisor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Professional Development Institute.
<http://rutgerspdi.blogspot.com/2010/04/principles-of-human-needs-placemaking.html>. Also, see *Planetizen* web site:
<http://www.planetizen.com/node/43950>.

² Daniel Gilbert (December 30, 2009), "Times to Remember, Places to Forget," *The New York Times: Opinion*.

^{3, 6} Project for Public Spaces: <http://www.pps.org/>.

⁴ *Ithaca HOURS, Local Currency*, Ithaca, New York: <http://www.ithacahours.org/>.

⁵ "Types of Zoning Codes," *The Official Site of the Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission: Zoning Matters*: <http://zoningmatters.org/facts/trends>.

Other resources

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