

Green Urbanism

Part II – Land Use and Community

Chapter 2

Land Use and Urban Form: Planning Compact Cities

- American vs. European cities – much more compact and higher density
- Europe tends to grow at a rate proportionate to population growth; US outpaces population growth

Table 2.1

- Vienna - Highest Density (68.3 persons per ha)
- Houston – Lowest Density (9.5 persons per ha)

Benefits of compact/dense urban form

- Open space and land owned by cities; good public transit; quicker access to defined rural/natural areas
- Enhanced economic productivity
- Implications for sustainability: lower per capita energy and carbon dioxide emissions

Strategies for Compact Urban Development

- The Dutch embrace the virtue of compactness in urban planning; have had a national policy for compactness since the mid 80's
- Helsinki – Large wedges of green space in the urban core
- Amsterdam – Large green spaces, city parks, “green heart” of farms and open space in the urban core
- German cities / Freiburg – Tram expansions simultaneous to urban boundary expands; green space includes parts of Black Forrest; only 32% developed inside city boundaries
- Britain – use of greenbelts to contain sprawl; proven strategy
- Berlin – 90% of all development prior to 2010 assumed to be infill
- Leiden – planning for 300-400 new dwelling units on a 13 hectare rail yard; requested resident design proposals from which drawings were created and distributed in print for further community debate; ecological study ending in protection of a portion of the land
- Common theme in Europe: Mixed-uses

Compact Growth Districts with a Green Emphasis

- Leidsche Rijn Plan – Bike only bridges and routes, designed to discourage automobile use, extensive efforts to connect to the existing city, 70:30 private to public housing ratio, district heating system for hot water; dual water lines (treated drinking & re-use of untreated for non-consumption)

Urban Villages and the Importance of City-Centers

- City strategies to encourage urban-core strength:
 - Residential above commercial (80,000 people in Amsterdam)
 - Density and infill
 - Improved look and feel (transit, visual improvements, street furniture, green space)
 - Diversity in architectural styles: Java-eiland (east Amsterdam)

New Towns and Growth Centers

- Designing with urban centers that provide services (libraries, entertainment, retail, transit)

Regional and National Spatial Planning

- Regional plans; in Netherlands provincial “streekplan” – not legally binding but municipal plans must be approved by the provincial agency that creates the streekplan, so it works
- Large degree of public ownership of land; land leases control development uses
- Helsinki – regional planning for waste, transportation, and air
- National planning for settlement and spatial policy
- Norway – 5 year ban of shopping center development outside central core
- Characteristic of Europe – much more development control than US
- German national planning law that prevents building outside established communities

The Value of Rural, Agricultural and Undeveloped Lands

- Different “value” attached to rural land in Europe / preciously guarded
- Matter of national security – must have farm land to be self-sufficient
- No “right to develop private property” – In US, if this right is stripped, you must be compensated; no compensation for denial in Britain
- Limited development potential in Europe

Cultural and Other Influencing Factors

- Netherlands – egalitarian work ethic; Scandinavia – environmentalists
- Strong city-dwelling traditions; US is anti-city biased
- Public investment = more control; development in Europe is usually initiated by public agencies
- Safety: author advocating for gun control to encourage inner-city living; uses a biased statistic (p. 60) to compare handgun deaths in US to only the country of Britain which has the strictest laws and is much smaller than total US

Economic Signals and Policy Instruments

- Europe uses taxation to discourage consumption
- The US gives subsidies and tax breaks to encourage consumption (homes, gasoline, cars, roads, no public transit)

Sustainable Land Use Trends

- Europe – sprawl is occurring as a trend, but at a higher density
- Car ownership rapidly increasing
- Economic, racial, and social segregation increasing

Lessons for American Cities: Prospects for More Compact Urban Form

- Sprawl is growing concern in US (evidence: # of ballots measures)
- Americans can still have preference for single family – just need higher density
- New Urbanism – Provokes debates, but still creating sprawl and auto usage
- Requirements to set aside green / open space in new devs.
- Municipal land ownership increasing in US
- Inner-ring suburbs – huge potential for retrofitting into more dense cores
- Modify tax structure and shift tax burden from income taxes to consumptive
- Smart growth; incentives and restrictions

Chapter 3

Creative Housing and Living Environments

Planning Livable Environments

- Variety of choice in housing
- Human scale
- Private space
- Transit villages (built around transit stops)

Urban-Village Living

- Density must be designed so that it's integrated well with good urban design, green space, transit stops, and other amenities (retail, services, etc...)
- Avoid isolated land use patterns such as those encouraged by antiquated zoning
- Include live/work spaces

Accessory Units and Mixed Housing Environments

- Mix of forms (rooftop conversions, flats above shops, accessory housing, etc)
- Mix style, types of unit, people, incomes

Housing Over Shops

- LOTS campaign (Britain)
- Property managers can deal with tenants so property owners don't have the fuss

Hofjes, Cohousing, Ecovillages

- Hofjes – origin in Netherlands; Cohousing & Ecovillages – Scandinavian;
- Hofjes – high density housing developed with an inner green courtyard
- Cohousing – common house, shared activities (cooking, child care)
- Ecovillages – completely sustainable and environmentally / ecologically integrated; solar power, composting systems, waste treatment, rain water, etc

Preservation and Adaptive Reuse

- Conversion of historic and existing is sustainable and preserve materials and energy; fabric of the community; building re-use

Streets, Urban Design, and the Civic Realm

- Streetscapes and public space – attention
- Enhancement of public space (art, furniture, trees, beautification)
- Street grids to create "permeability of place"

Pedestrianized Centers

- Taking space away from or totally disallowing cars
- Increases the number of people b/c safer
- There is a richness in visual stimulation (people watching, activities, architecture)
- Traffic calming; signage; flower pots; public markets
- Pedestrianizing generally met with resistance; generally futile b/c increases business and economic development

Lessons for American Cities

- Shared, ecovillages, and cohousing arrangements are increasing – but still substantially auto dependent
- Reasons to provide variety: changing demographics – smaller households, single households, increase in 65+
- Strong planning controls necessary to promote vibrant downtowns and transit
- Resurgence of interest in downtown living suggests promise
- Proper planning and design can move Americans into a more sustainable lifestyle