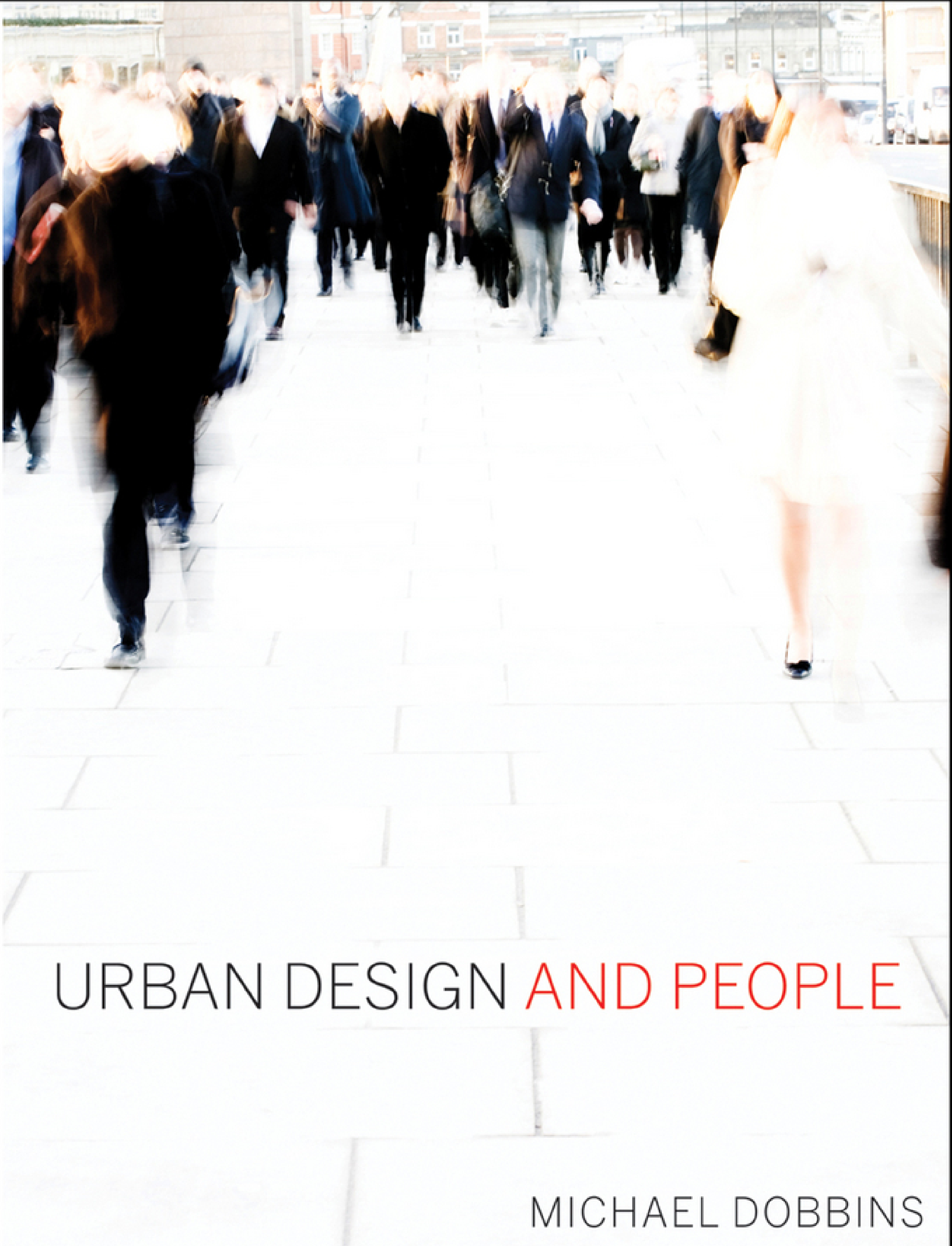

URBAN DESIGN AND PEOPLE

MICHAEL DOBBINS

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WILEY

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To Peggy, Jeb, and Clem, who keep me going;

To all citizen activists who work tirelessly to
improve their public environment; and

To all public servants who keep the faith

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Preface

Urban design is a diffuse and abstract term. It means different things to different people. For those not directly involved in its practice or aware of its effects on their daily lives, it may not mean much, if anything at all. I first heard the term in architecture school, but I didn't really think much about what it might mean until my schoolmate Jonathan Barnett started using it to describe his aspiration to put together with some of his colleagues a design capability in the New York City government. That opportunity had come up after the election of John Lindsay as mayor in 1966. Lindsay, concerned about deterioration in the public environment, empanelled a study commission on design, chaired by William Paley, chair of CBS. The commission's report asserted that the quality of design was of utmost importance, that the city government should take the lead in advancing a public design agenda, and that, among other measures, it should recruit and employ trained designers toward that end.

I am honored to have been the first hired by the design group initiators (which in addition to Jonathan, included Jaquelin Robertson, Myles Weintraub, Richard Weinstein, and Giovanni Pasanella). They had negotiated with the Lindsay team and settled on placing the group in the City Planning Department. We set up shop in April 1967 in an "eye-ease" green-walled, gray linoleum–floored space on the 14th floor of 2 Lafayette Street where the city planning department was housed. So began for me a total redirection of my career, from an architect worrying about finding the next commission to devoting my energies and whatever were my design capabilities to improving the quality of the public environment. I came to a whole new concept of the *client,* from single patron to the city's 7.5 million citizens. I've been a public servant ever since.

For me, *urban design* came to describe the design and functionality of all urbanized places—how they looked and how they performed. Furthermore, the emphasis in urban design is on *public* places—the streets, parks, plazas, the open spaces that everyone shares. These are the places that provide the interface with and connection to the *private* places—the home, the workplace, the mostly enclosed spaces where people carry on their more personal and private life activities. Urban design is the design of the public environment, the space owned by all, as it connects to, frames, and is framed by the private environment—that space owned by individuals or corporate entities. Urban design is the public face and public base of human settlements. People proud of their places are the mark of good urban design.

In 40 years of practice as a public sector urban designer, in addition to the usual base of urban design theory and practice, I have identified at least three important themes that get short shrift or are ignored altogether. First, people are the core of successful urban places. If a place looks good, feels comfortable, and meets its functional expectations, it will attract people and engender their embrace, ongoing interaction, and stewardship. Such a happy outcome is more likely to occur if representatives of the people who are or will be in the place play an active role in guiding the design and development decisions and priorities that make places happen. I've never met anyone who didn't want to live in a better place.

Second, urban design work does not and cannot happen without the integration of all the interests that together regulate, build, and use the public realm. Whether conscious of the role each plays or not, every public place reflects and exhibits the government, which owns it; the private sector, whose buildings frame it; and everyday citizens, who need it to get around and to come together. Where the relationships between the three spheres are often more important than the spheres themselves, a conscious and positive partnership is a key factor for making places better.

Third, the disciplines responsible for designing public places must integrate and synthesize their activities in an informed, thoughtful, and respectful way—the opposite of what usually happens. Civil engineers in their various subdisciplines are most responsible for the design of the public right-of-way. Architects design the private buildings that frame and connect to the public space. Landscape architects are more and more involved in designing streetscapes, public parks, and plazas. And city planners design and administer the public policies and rules that determine the activities and sizes of buildings and their relationships with the public realm. Other design forces are in play as well, but these big four must come together around common design visions if places are to get better.

I write this book because much of the information that my colleagues and I have gained in carrying out wide-ranging urban design and development initiatives was not sufficiently covered in existing texts. Pieces of what constitutes urban design practice are covered in many books, often in elegant forms. But the substance of mine and others' day-to-day work experience, what really happens and how to get the job done, I have not found. Furthermore, while most of us agree that urban design is mainly about design of the public realm, I find little that covers the three themes noted above, which I believe to be vital to successful urban design and development outcomes.

The book is organized in five parts: Background, Content, Principles, Processes, and Strategies. The text draws on experience, mine and others'. It is an exposition more of practices that work than a product of academic research. Accordingly, the reader will note that most references and many examples are presented as sidebars. In addition, as a comprehensive treatment, the text suggests many references in the form of websites, and the reader is encouraged to use Google or Yahoo search engines to probe subjects in depth and to gain other perspectives. It is for students, for teachers, and for practitioners across the spectrum of disciplines who come together to design and build the public environment. Maybe most importantly, though, I have written it as a guide for everyday citizens who are concerned about their public environment and who want to (and work to) make it better. If it's successful, it should provide a general roadmap to design and development in the public environment and a starter kit of tools for effectively engaging these processes. Further, it should prepare people in their various roles to understand and embrace the role of everyday citizens as stewards of the public environment, at all scales.

Finally, a word about civil service and government: Usually, city planning and urban design administrators working for the local government are in the best position to understand and help facilitate the necessary, but often left out, interactions among all those who make public places happen. And they are often the "point person" responsible for bringing together all parties in the more complicated of the private-public-community development initiatives. Committing to public service generally is an uphill battle in the privatizing societal and economic structure and culture that began with the Reagan years, first in California and then nationally. Civil servants became easy to attack and hard to defend, and both government and the numbers of service-minded citizens who might be drawn to it went into a protracted state of decline. People are now awakening to the effects of this decline on their daily lives, in public institutions, parks, infrastructure, services, the quality and functionality of the public environment, and, most recently, in the impacts of deregulation on the finance industry. I hope this book will serve as a useful reference for citizens pushing to shift American priorities toward public service, toward government meeting citizens' day-to-day needs and improving their quality of life, a role that privatization has not fulfilled.

I have worked for a few local governments and with government agencies at all levels. I find that my fellow workers are good people, committed to making things better in their various spheres of activity, and they generally work on an ethical plane usually above their private sector counterparts. When I talk to students, I remind them that as they look for work in the private sector they will have to be valued more for the revenue they generate minus salary, than for making places better, the reason why most of them went into urban design and planning in the first place. Then I ask them where else could they work twice as hard for half the pay but have 10 times the impact—local government. And I leave them with the thought that if they want to take back their government, the best way is to work for it. Some of them do.

Acknowledgments

Everyone I have ever worked with to make places better—neighborhood people, businesspeople, city planners, engineers, architects, landscape architects, civil servants, elected officials, my colleagues at city halls, teachers, students, colleagues at universities, developers, contractors, homebuilders, attorneys, lenders—has contributed to this book.

My wife, Peggy, has contributed the most, sustaining me through 40 years of practice with ideas and analyses, providing a rich theoretical base, only some of which I have so far been able to put into practice. So I have a way to go. My son Jeb, a writer, early on reminded me that writing something that is readable requires a kind of attention different from that of bureaucrats writing memos—and he marked up parts of the text to make his point. At least the text is better than it might have been. My son Clem, a neuroscientist who was finishing his PhD while I was working on this, kept my head up, looking forward, as I tried to do for him.

A whole string of colleagues, public, private, and community leaders, have guided me into and through my quests for the better design of places. Bill Gilchrist, my collaborator in saving Birmingham's Civil Rights Institute as a building of distinction and my successor there as planning director, has steadfastly encouraged me to put my experience into print. My Atlanta City Hall urban design colleagues, Alycen Whiddon, Aaron Fortner, Caleb Racicot, Enrique Bascunana, Renee Kemp Rotan, and Beverly Dockeray-Ojo, worked with me to infuse the city with urban design guidance and influence. More recently, my Georgia Tech colleagues in the City and Regional Planning Department and the Architecture Department have provided valuable feedback and encouragement as I pushed along. The work of my urban design colleagues at Georgia Tech is reflected throughout the text, whether noted or not. Doug Allen, Ellen Dunham-Jones, Richard Dagenhart, Randy Roark, David Green, and John Peponis have all contributed significantly to the rich dialogue that we share in Atlanta with communities, government agencies, and private sector practitioners and developers. More generally, colleagues whose voiceprints have guided me include the late dean, Tom Galloway, who figured out how to provide me a home in academe; behavioral psychologist Craig Zimring; and city planning professors Michael Elliott and Catherine Ross. All of my other city planning, architecture and building construction colleagues have encouraged me along my way, as well. Mike Meyer in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department and Eric Dumbaugh, now at Texas A&M University, gave me good feedback and advice on how to incorporate transportation and traffic engineering considerations into the context of the book. Georgia Tech students Renato Ghizoni, Chelsea Arkin, and Jared Yarsevich all contributed valuable research on various aspects of the content, as well as examples from which some of the illustrations are drawn.

Paul Drougas at Wiley somehow thought that I would be able to write this book, or something like it, thus giving me both the confidence and the structure to persist, for which I am most grateful. And his colleagues have borne with me as a newcomer to the publishing world.

PART I

BACKGROUND

Setting the Stage

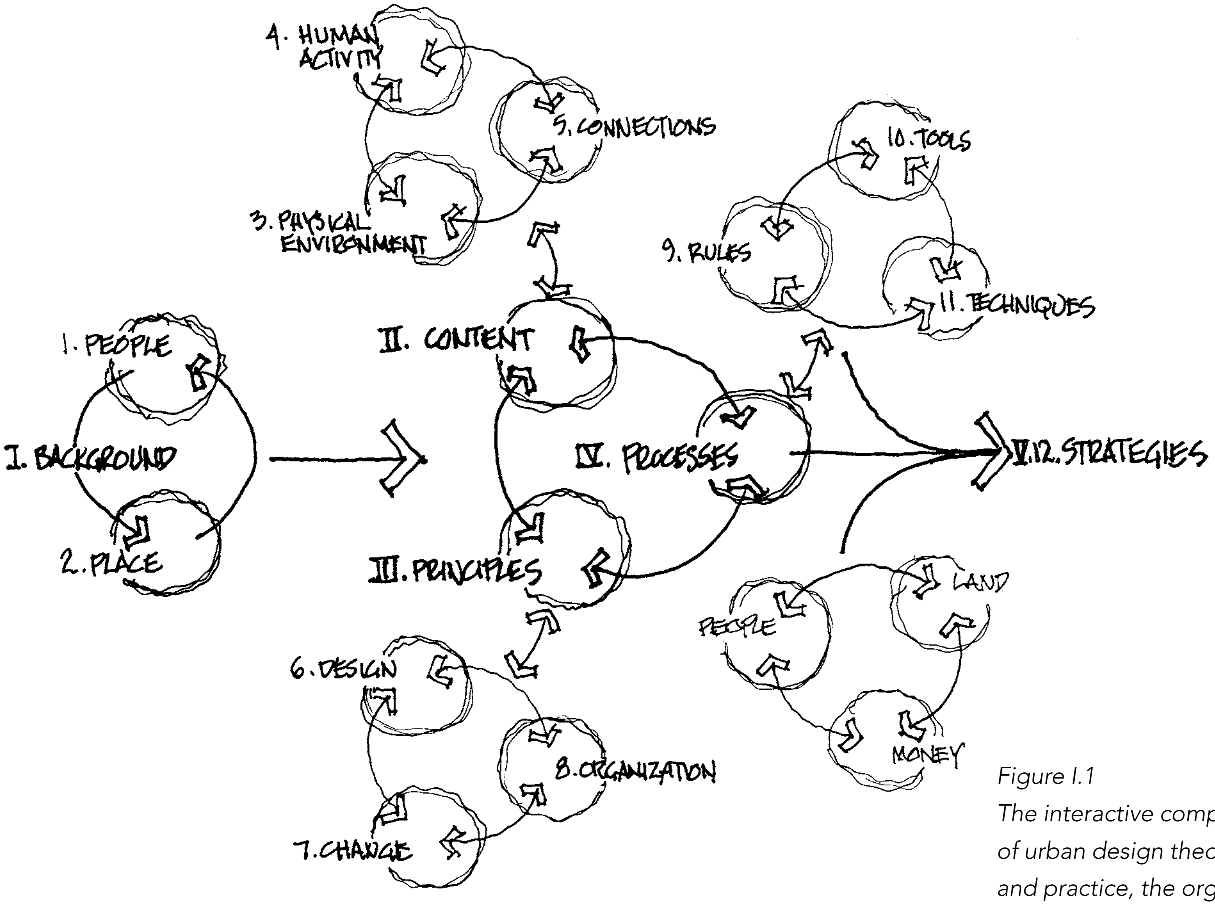

4. HUMAN ACTIVITY
5. CONNECTIONS
3. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
10. TOOLS
9. RULES
11. TECHNIQUES
1. PEOPLE
II. CONTENT
I. BACKGROUND
IV. PROCESSES
V. 12. STRATEGIES
2. PLACE
III. PRINCIPLES
LAND
PEOPLE
6. DESIGN
8. ORGANIZATION
MONEY
7. CHANGE

Figure I.1
The interactive components of urban design theory and practice, the organization of the book.

Overview

I base this text on two overarching premises:

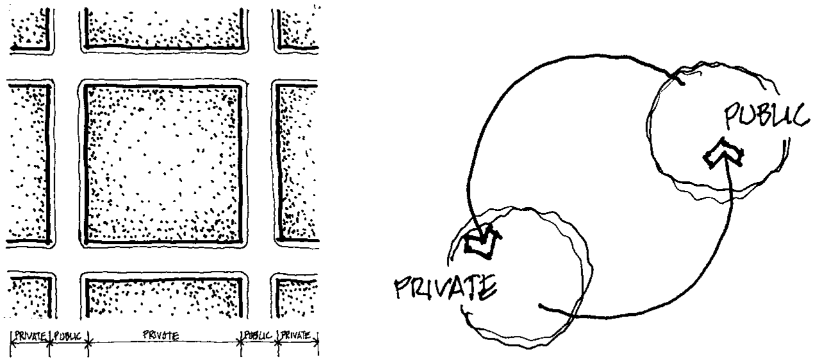
- People want to live in better places
- Urban design can make places better

Places refers to the civic environment, generally the publicly owned space shared by all for public activities like walking, biking, driving, riding, parking, getting on and off transit, going in and out of buildings, sitting, dining, picnicking, hanging out, getting together, playing, relaxing, having festivals, partying, congregating, parading, marching, demonstrating—in short, the full range of public activities as provided for under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These activities occur in such places as streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, and squares in neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, suburbs, regions, and natural areas all over the country. Sometimes, these kinds of activities may occur in privately owned spaces of similar physical character, but in these cases the private owner controls the range of activities permitted. Public spaces and the activities they support represent the points of interconnection, the seam between the public and the more private activities that occur within the buildings and yards that typically provide the borders of the public realm. Altogether, the public spaces and the private activities that frame them make up the physical component of what gives places their character, their memorability, and their identity.

In recent years, finding the places that define their public identity unattractive or dysfunctional or both, people have been initiating civic improvement activities all over the country. Civic leadership for these initiatives may come from all walks of life, and it spans the full scale of urban territory, from neighborhood to region. The numbers of such initiatives and the range of initiators, along with the sophistication and effectiveness of their efforts, have been accelerating. A decided increase in organized citizen leadership marks this drive for change and the progress it is making. Government and the relevant private sector development interests are increasingly having to react and respond, either positively or not. Part of the purpose of this book is to support citizen activism for better places with experiences and observations across a career dedicated to listening and trying to respond to the citizen voice.

Urban design in its current incarnations is a relatively new field, now growing fairly rapidly. People are coming to understand the need for synthesis as they realize how much that is dysfunctional in their daily civic environment is attributable to the dominance of any one discipline to the exclusion of the others. In the room where the decisions affecting place design and development are made, the seat for someone who understands how it all comes together, the urban designer, has been empty. Urban design focuses on the public realm, the quality and workability of the public spaces that connect and engage buildings and other activities (some may occur on private property), at all scales. Urban design addresses the whole of these places, how they look and how they work as the continuum of experience for the citizens who depend on them to connect with each other and with the activities that make up daily life.

To do this, urban design must consider all of the individual design disciplines and interests typically at work in the public realm and it must synthesize these in order to fulfill visions shared by citizens to achieve the



a

b

Figure I.2
Plan diagram of public (blank) and private (stippled) spaces in urbanized setting (a) and how the two are in constant interaction (b).

desired improvements. Further, urban design needs to incorporate and contribute to both the regulatory and financial processes that combine with design to develop the civic environment. In service to citizens' aspirations for better places to live their lives, urban design thus functions as a nexus for the disciplines and interests that build places. Supporting urban design's drive to strengthen this nexus is the other core purpose of this text. In the business of improving places, people matter in ultimately judging the success of public places by their presence and embrace, and design matters in making places that attract, that work, and that last.

The relationships and interactions between people and the places they occupy have varied widely over time and space. In the United States, in varying proportions, there are always three recognizable spheres of interest in the civic environment: the *private sector,* the *government,* and the *community.* The private sector—businesses, corporations, developers, realtors, and investors—designs and builds most of what frames the civic environment that provides access and foreground for the private activity beyond. The government—in urban places local government, for the most part—owns the public realm and it controls what and how much can be built on the private property to which its public holdings provide access. The community—everyday citizens as well as neighborhood-, business-, or issues-based groupings—experience the result and, as the greatest numbers of people affected, can exercise their voice through civic and political action.

As the diagram in Figure I.3 suggests, the relationships among these three spheres are interactive, not linear. That is, initiatives can arise from any one of them, along with their responses, in any order and in ways that are not necessarily predictable. Often the links between the spheres (the arrows) are more important than the spheres themselves. These interactive relationships define a process through which people make the places they occupy, a process that tends not to have a beginning or an end. Urban design is not a project or even a series of projects, but rather a kind of guidance system whose goal is to contribute to places where the people who inhabit them ultimately determine their success and long-term viability.

In the post–World War II years, most of the big decisions about how and where people would live, work, and travel were made primarily through interactions between the private sector and government spheres, in which the community sphere had little role. Failures in this system, like urban renewal, massive dislocation of people and places by infrastructure projects, the public and private investment that combined to build the

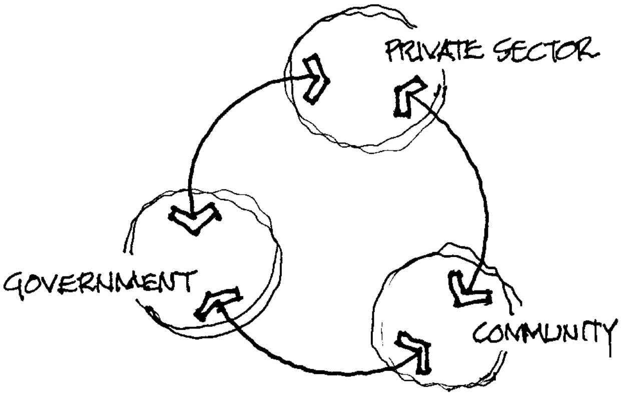


Figure I.3
The interactive relationships among the private sector, the government, and the community, visible in any public place.

settlement patterns now known as sprawl and its attendant environmental havoc, combined to call for an accounting and the consideration of other choices.

Beginning in the 1960s, people started to question claims of technological and technocratic expertise about how to make places and settle territory, and organized to push themselves onto the stage where these decisions are made. Beyond the dissatisfaction so many have with so much about the appearance and workability of the places that frame their daily lives, access to information for how to do things better and how other places have done it seems to be fueling this move for a bigger role. Over the last 40 years or so, citizen participation mandates have improved the ability for everyday citizens to influence how design and development decisions get made. In addition, particularly over the last 10 years with the explosion of information available through the Internet, citizens have gained much better access to the information necessary to guide these decisions. Greater and greater numbers of people, eager to overcome the negative impacts of both harsh and threatening cityscapes and the congestion and disconnectedness of suburbanscapes, are using these resources to shape positive changes. They are working from the local scale of building, block, street, neighborhood, and district up to the scale of towns, cities, and metropolitan settlement patterns.

Examples abound where citizen action has changed things for the better, from the neighborhood to the regional scale. To mention a few of the more familiar from the 1960s and 1970s, San Franciscans blocked the Embarcadero Freeway from proceeding along the waterfront from the Oakland Bay Bridge to the Golden Gate Bridge and then succeeded in removing the parts that had already been built. A movement that included professionals, academics, and, more important, masses of ordinary citizens generated enough influence to restore the city's foremost amenity and character-defining natural feature: its visual and physical connection between the hills and the bay. In the same timeframe, another group of citizens, led and inspired by three intrepid women, saved San Francisco Bay from being significantly filled in for private development, were instrumental in the creation of the Bay Conservation District Commission, and succeeded in ensuring that most of the whole bay frontage would remain accessible to the public.

Beginning in 1961, Sylvia McLaughlin, Catherine Kerr, and Esther Gulick, with amazing energy, broad-based organizing, and connections with the University of California, overcame all odds and daunting opposition to assure the success of the Save the Bay movement and, at the same time, put the word *environmentalism* into the mainstream vocabulary.

Staten Islanders rallied to remove a planned Robert Moses freeway from running along the spine of its treasured greenbelt. New Orleanians organized the resistance that prevented the highway department from building the Riverfront Expressway, which would have severed any connectivity between the French Quarter and the Mississippi River. Just a couple of years later, a somewhat differently constituted group succeeded in blocking the planned construction of a massive new bridge that would have ripped through uptown neighborhoods along Napoleon Avenue. Atlantans dismembered the Georgia Department of Highways' plan to lace its older neighborhoods with a freeway grid, and then later forced the abandonment of a planned freeway, a project that instead became a linear park and parkway from downtown to the Carter Center and beyond. A downtown Birmingham public housing community succeeded in stopping the destruction of their neighborhood by a proposed freeway, obliging the highway department instead to relocate it to bypass them.

I was directly involved in supporting the citizens' initiatives in the Staten Island, New Orleans bridge, and Birmingham cases.

Virtually every town and city has such stories to tell, at all scales, where the government and leaders in the private sector have been thwarted from carrying out projects that are certain to degrade the quality of life for the many, usually for some short-term and short-sighted economic or political gain for a few. All of the above examples depended on alliances of people across all classes and interests to mount political pressure that, usually after long and contentious struggle, in the end could not be denied. All of them succeeded in creating alternatives to the initial proposal in a way that whatever merits may have been attached to the original proposal were achieved in a different way or different location. The resulting projects met their narrowly defined need and purpose and still managed to preserve and enhance cherished environments to the benefit of the whole citizenry.

Those in government and the private sector are taking note of the trend toward greater influence of citizen activists. The reality is that to make attractive and functional places that are meaningful and lasting, it takes all three spheres working in cooperation and ultimately collaboration to make it happen. The focus needs to shift away from what separates the spheres to where they might come together. In design and development practices, it is the interactions among these spheres that determine how the places people share look and work—interactions that are going through a period of dynamic and positive change.

To respond to this new reality, the people who plan, design, and build places at all scales are recognizing the vital need from the very beginning to include, listen, coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate, both with each other and in citizen participation processes. To understand these dynamics better, it is worthwhile to provide the background and context of the two intertwined themes of this book: the evolution of people's roles in shaping civic design and the design traditions that have shaped settlement patterns and urban form in the United States.

We are at the point where a convergence between planning, design, and development conceptualizations can be stripped of their mysteries. The shift toward this transparency and the legitimacy of more democratic processes has four principal causes:

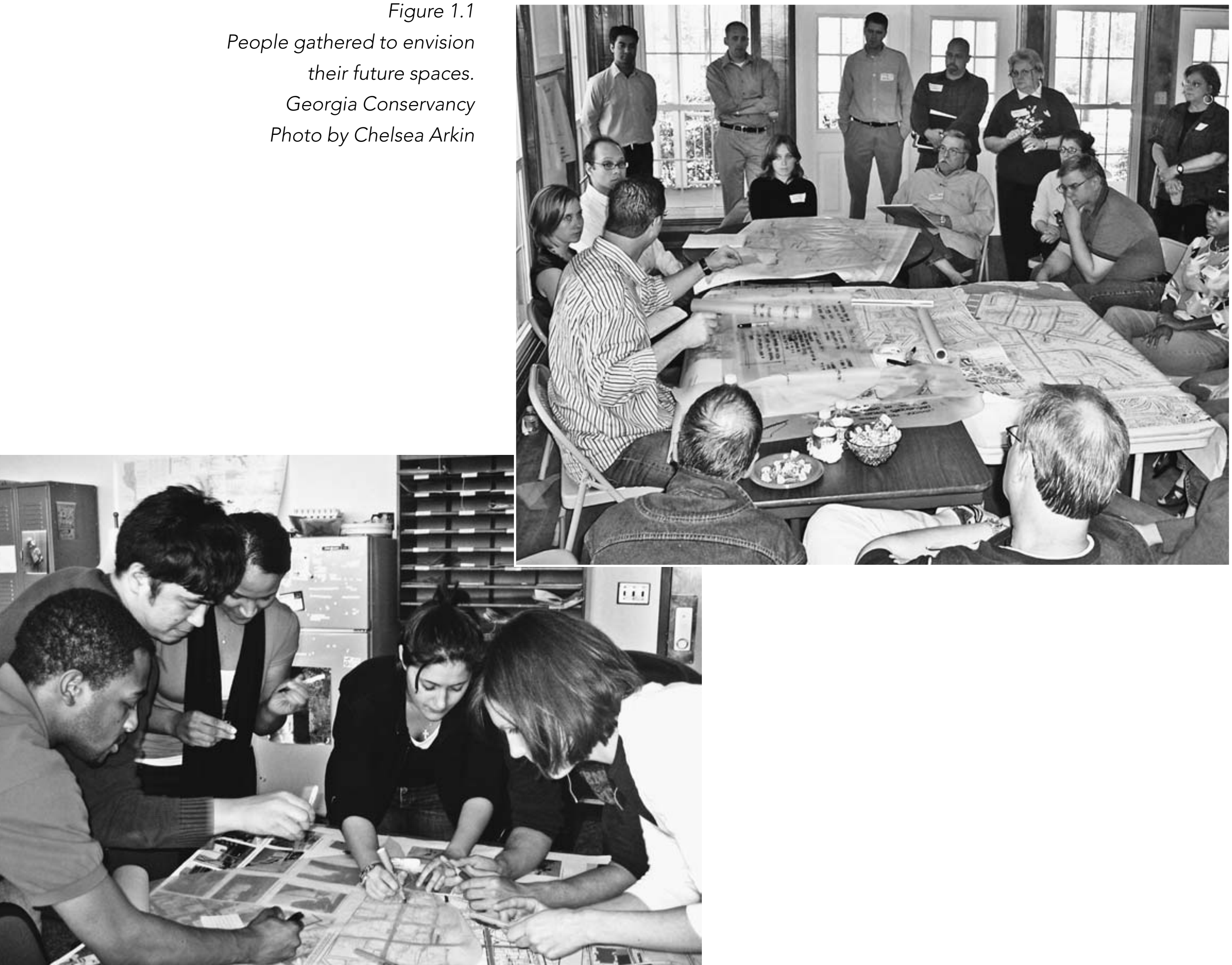
- Some of the old ways have not succeeded in making our built places better than they were before; in fact, some have devastated previously functioning and appreciated communities and the urban places they created and occupied.
- The explosion of access to information has armed growing numbers of untrained people with a reasonable working knowledge of the concepts and values of planning, design, and development as it affects their public realms.

- Common sense often trumps abstract, technocratic, one-size-fits-all, uni-disciplinary design conceptualizations.
- People are increasingly aware of, and chary of, the motives of the principal beneficiaries of many design and development initiatives.

The role of ordinary citizens, while still a theoretical and practical battleground, continues to move forward in influence, advocating for, shaping, and leading to better places to live. The fast-moving evolution of *citizen participation,* a new concept in the 1960s, is reaching the point where the citizen voice, the citizen aspiration for better communities can no longer be ignored. The four shifts mentioned above are all citizen driven, often over the objections of many in the planning, design, and development fields, the government, and many private sector interests.

The following two chapters frame the context for the rest of the text. The first describes what citizens and urban designers actively engaged in the improvement of their places have been doing about it. The second provides a theoretical and historical framework for reading and understanding the principal design approaches and outcomes that have shaped our places over the last few decades. The goal is to provide a background for people to get together to create a better foreground.

Figure 1.1
People gathered to envision their future spaces.
Georgia Conservancy
Photo by Chelsea Arkin



1

PEOPLE & PLACE...

How People Have Shaped Their Worlds

• • •

"Where's the voice of the people?"

"The city is the people."

• • •

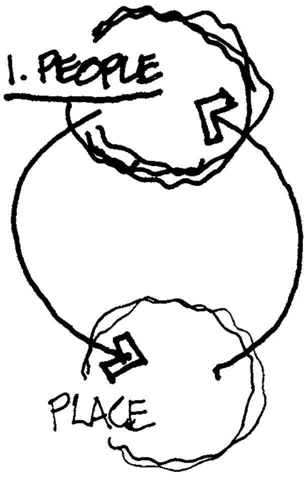


Figure 1.2
Diagram showing the interaction between people and place—each shapes the other.

My earliest direct experience with the concepts and potential of citizen participation occurred when I was the director of the Office of Staten Island Planning of the New York City Planning Department in 1969. A small and earnest group of Staten Island citizens, supported by nascent environmental groups including the Sierra Club, raised concerns with me about the future of the Staten Island Greenbelt. This was a wonderful and for the most part undisturbed ridge of forested and spring-fed land running some five miles from southwest to northeast in the middle of the island. Including Latourette Park and other semi-protected lands, this swath was the designated path for a ridge-top highway planned by Robert Moses as part of his "circle the islands and drive a cross through the middle of it" highway planning mantra. We were successful in relocating the parkway into an already degraded existing travel corridor, which served the travel need, was more cost effective, and saved the greenbelt. The effort was successful by almost any terms one might use to evaluate it, and it began to become clear to me that citizens' good sense, coupled with values larger than those usually found in government and certainly the private sector, held great promise for making places better.

Introduction

Design and development practices determine how the places people share look and work. The relationship between these practices and the people who experience the result is going through dynamic and positive change. Over the last 40 years, citizen participation mandates have improved the ability for everyday citizens to influence how design and development decisions get made. In addition, particularly over the last 10 years, citizens have gained much better access to the information necessary to consider these decisions.

Greater and greater numbers of people, eager to overcome the negative impacts of harsh and threatening cityscapes on the one hand and congestion and disconnectedness of suburbanscapes on the other, are using these resources to shape positive changes. They are working from the scale of building, block, street, and neighborhood to the scale of metropolitan settlement patterns.

The idea of widespread citizen participation as an integral part of the planning, design, and development process for projects in the public realm is relatively new. For the hundred years or so leading up to the 1960s, private developers, corporations, institutions, and governments made the moves that built places. These served their usually linked interests—governments acting with more or less integrity to fulfill the goals of public policies and the private sector acting to fulfill its return-on-investment goals, occasionally with a little flair or pride of self-expression. Yet, beyond the physical presence of government and private investments, virtually every civic space reflects the citizens who use it and put their mark on it too, one way or the other. Until the 1960s, though, access for ordinary citizens to play a before-the-fact shaping role in the policies and processes that create the civic environment was difficult and limited. The idea of actually influencing public and private development activities was foreign (except in the most affluent neighborhoods, which always have access).

Unrest in the 1960s, tracing from the civil rights movement and the mass movements that followed it, called forth sweeping federal legislative

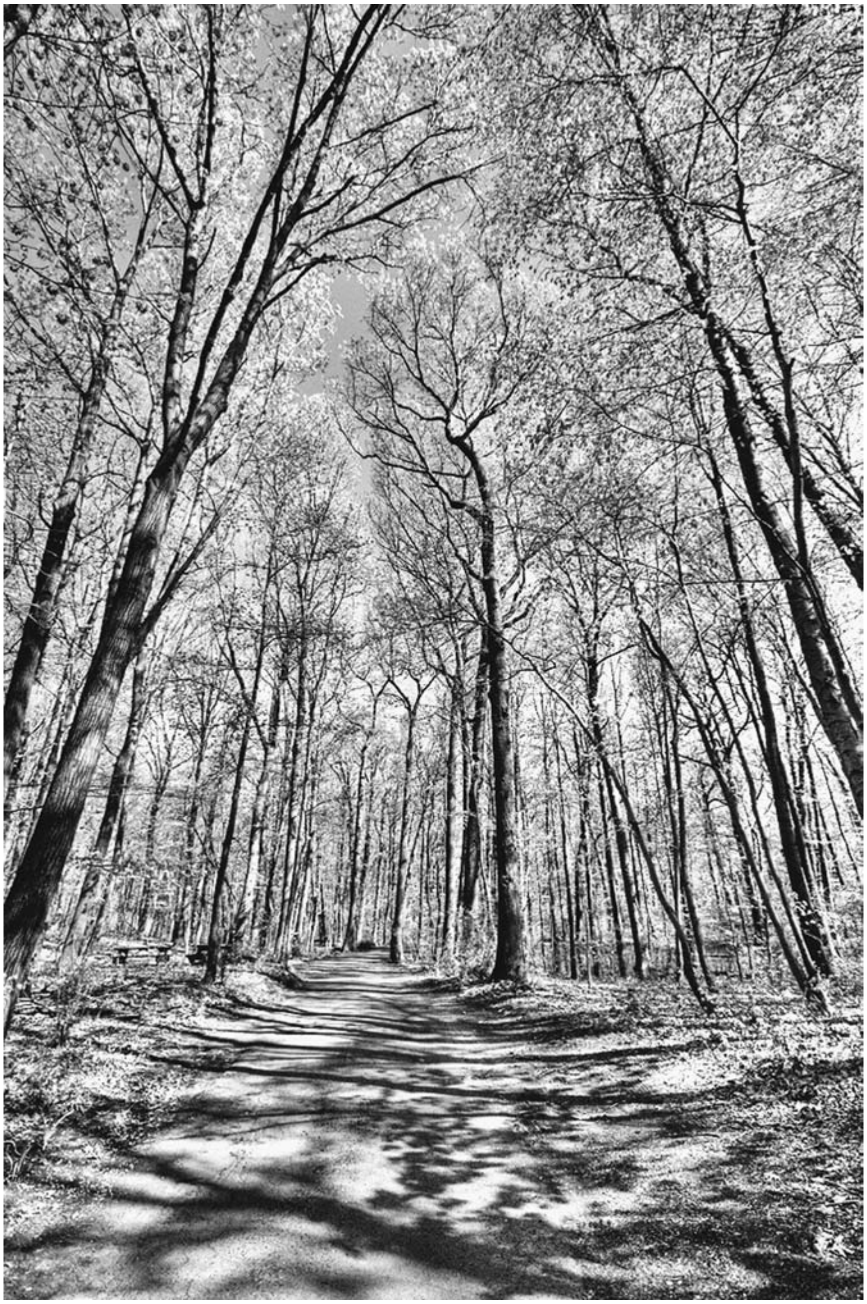


Figure 1.3
Staten Island Greenbelt, the path of an unbuilt freeway.
Photo by Andy Cross

actions to relieve mounting popular pressure for reform and to restore stability. Some of the many federal responses were designed to improve the civic environment through legislation and programs that addressed housing and community development, transportation, and the environment. Most of these programs required citizen participation processes to afford people affected by programs or projects receiving federal funding the right to speak. Just as the physical design of places is a dynamic and multidisciplinary enterprise, the new legislation and programs recognized that social, economic, political, and cultural forces directly shape the civic environment. So began a significant shift in the relative relationships

In the 1820s and 1830s for example, Frances Wright, a Scottish woman with radical ideas (and a confidante of the aging American Revolutionary War hero, the Marquis de Lafayette), in particular pursued ideals of equality, promulgating "workingmens' associations," promoting public education for all, and pointing out the obviously anti-democratic status of women and people of African descent. Her gender and some of her more iconoclastic views began to gain ground among ordinary people, threatening people in power who successfully attacked her and diminished her influence. She succeeded, though, in adding an effective voice to the movement for the abolition of slavery, to the idea that workers had a right to organize, to advocacy for the equality for women, and to the call for education for all. Americans who believed that the republic needed to be open and responsive to the needs and contributions of the whole of the population viewed all of these efforts as essential for the advance of an aspirant democratic republic.

In this experience I began to learn several key lessons that provided foundations for future practice and principles:

- The community holds key information about almost any issue affecting its future, information that is likely not to show up in conventional databases and information that is likely to be crucial for framing sound strategies.
- The community is likely to care more than anyone else what happens (except specific project investors).
- There are always some number of community leaders who are prepared to work hard for better results—from their point of view (not necessarily in agreement with prevailing public or political policies and more often not in agreement with private sector development aspirations).
- The need and commitment to listen is critical.
- Most significant, organized community initiatives can be a powerful force in achieving major change, both in government policy and in resetting the framework for private sector activities.

One of our initiatives of that time was the preparation of the "Plan for New York City," borough-by-borough plans introduced by a city-wide plan. Applying my new insights in preparing the Staten Island volume, I leaned on the services of my wife, a sociologist, to randomly survey ordinary citizens about what they liked and didn't like about emerging development patterns and incorporated the feedback into some of the analyses and recommendations that we made.

among the three spheres of interest—private, public, and community—that create and use civic space at all levels, a shift that continues to evolve.

The sections below trace the evolution of citizen participation as it affects civic space. It is important to understand the context in which place design at the urban scale is evolving—what opportunities and obstacles it faces—and how citizens are becoming empowered to respond to and initiate positive change. I seek to address key questions, like: How did people figure in place design leading up to the 1960s? How did the 1960s launch citizen participation? How has citizen participation evolved since? What challenges have some of the citizen participants encountered? Where does citizen participation stand now and where might it be going?

Antecedents

The idea of the interests of the broad citizenry having anything to do with place design and development in this country picks up from its birth. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, among others, put high stock in two ideas for making a democracy work: direct and sustained citizen involvement and people with means giving back. They felt that these two faces of civic responsibility were essential for the U.S. experiment in democracy to succeed.

Responding to these revolutionary visions, exhilarated by the opportunities of a new country, and eager to explore the paths that freedom and equality seemed to offer, people with new ideas set out to test the young nation's potential. Utopianists like Robert Owen, Frances Wright, Henry George, John Humphrey Noyes, and others imagined both social organizations and physical places that might provide better living situations for people than the old forms permitted. They built experimental communities, like New Harmony in Indiana, Fairhope in Alabama, and Oneida in New York. Out of these experiments other ideas, perhaps more practical and lasting, began to set the course for the waves of settlement that were under way.

Later, from the 1840s onward, two kinds of movements affecting the general population and relevant to settlement patterns and the civic environment gained momentum. Labor organizations were able to form and build up strength, fighting to overcome appalling and exploitative workplace conditions. And civic reformers, often well-placed in society, shone the spotlight on the abysmal shelter conditions in the neighborhoods where most of those same workers and their families lived.

These early movements reflected two approaches to citizen activism. Labor was a broad-based movement generated and supported by workers that focused most of its energy on striving to bring living wages, safer working conditions, fairer measurements of productivity, and limitations on hours of work to some humane standard. The labor reform movement established that labor, both in industry and in trades, could organize in the interest of workers for the purpose of protecting their life and livelihood interests, using the refusal to work as a powerful tool to get the attention of the bosses. The writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and a number of others contributed to the labor movement's base. Particularly relevant to the discussion here were the advances in theories and actions that reflected the interests and values of the whole citizenry, the other way around from acceding to an elite the right to make the big decisions about qualities and priorities for civic life and its physical environment.

The labor movement's effect on settlement patterns and the civic environment, while mostly indirect, leaves at least two lasting legacies. At the small scale, a number of places represent pivotal moments in labor history, whose visual traces may stimulate the struggle, memorialize losses, or proclaim success. At the larger scale, the ability for immigrants, the poor, and working people to move from tenement to flat to duplex to single-family house with a yard, by the millions, marks labor's contribution to building a society where wealth was shared to an unprecedented extent.

Well-educated and caring civic reformers, often church-based, represent a second approach to activism in the civic environment, in their case initially largely focusing on housing reform. By their own lights they undertook to improve living conditions for the urban poor, both at the habitation and the neighborhood scale. Often in the same or higher economic class as their slumlord targets, they made progress with more peaceable struggles than labor, whose gains came at a significant cost in strife and human life. Workers were acting directly in their own interests. Civic reformers apparently were motivated by that "certain social sentiment" described by Adam Smith in his landmark analysis and formulation of the tenets of capitalism as necessary to curb the excesses of greed and exploitation that are intrinsic in the economic system.

The civic reformers' initiatives, while not so much a broad-based citizens' movement, were comprehensive and did directly affect the design of cities and their places. They established that the patterns and conditions of housing and the neighborhood environment were a public interest and that government should moderate its laissez-faire ways and step in to advance that interest. In the 1890s, Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant and police reporter, wrote extensively and compellingly on the subject, and in his book of the same name coined the concept of learning and caring about "how the other half lives." The classic and familiar outcomes were tenement laws in New York City. First the "old law" (in 1867) and then the "new law" (1901) regulations were enacted, mandating higher levels of access to light, air, and sanitation facilities.

More broadly, as it was discovered that sources of disease, epidemics, and social unrest could be traced directly to the tenement housing quadrants of the city, these reformers took on larger public health and safety issues. They pressed for building codes, water and sewer standards, and roadway and other public works standards, many of which were either instituted or improved. They promulgated these reforms as necessary to improve public health for all, not just the immediate victims.

Both movements, interacting with the growing progressive movement, achieved successes against powerful arrays of deeply rooted interests. They laid the foundation for government regulation of both private industry and private development to incorporate minimum measures to safeguard basic health, safety, and welfare priorities for the community as a whole. It is important to emphasize that regulation did not come out of the blue. It came as a reaction and a response to periodic fiascos, some of them catastrophes—building fires, building collapses, neighborhood pollution and disease, and so on—causing death and injury here and there around the country. While most industry acted more or less responsibly within the standards of the day, the tragic exceptions represented all too frequent lapses of responsibility and accountability that could be traced to private sector greed, callousness, or ignorance.

Until recently, labor's achievements of the 40-hour work week; minimum wages (at one time pegged as "livable" wages); workplace safety; and health, pension, and other benefits reforms became the basis on which the United States was able to build a middle class. For several decades, the labor movement was able to lift up the majority of working people to higher standards of living than each previous generation. It became possible for most Americans to begin to at least imagine a truly working democracy that could interact with its capitalist economic system to perform better for more and more people.

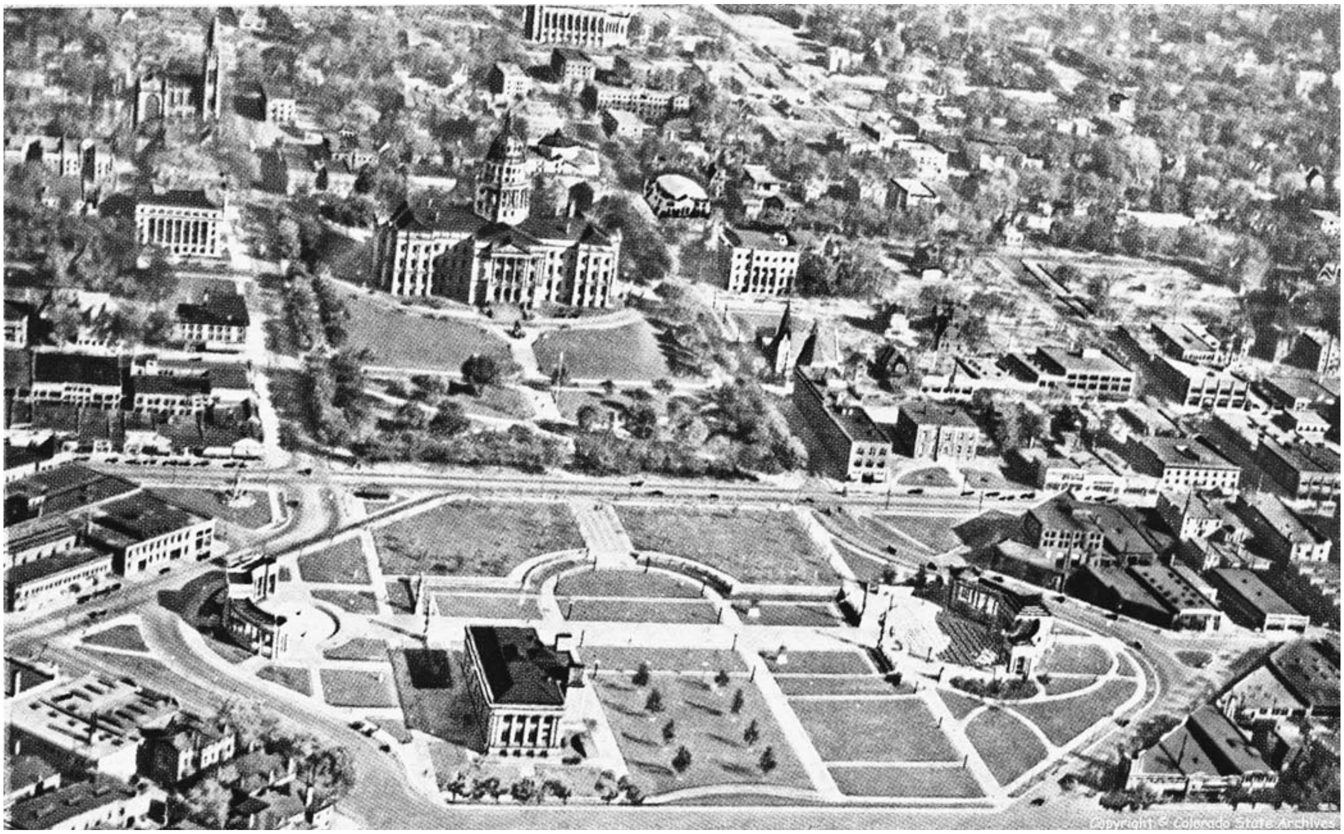


Figure 1.4
Vista of Mayor Robert Speer's City Beautiful vision for Denver's Civic Center.
Courtesy Brokers Guild, Denver

For many years, civic leaders found it easy to ignore the victims of these fiascos, mostly from the working and immigrant classes. But as progressive civic values, and particularly as the link between the conditions of the poor and disease affecting the rich was established, the reformers gained growing and organized popular support. Religious institutions that took their service missions seriously stepped up and, believing that rough conditions in the community led to moral transgressions, they also saw a fertile ground for conversions to their faiths.

The reform movements broadened and spread across the country. They shared a general call for civic betterment that joined economic, political, and community leadership to produce civic movements reaching for expressions of civic pride. In terms of city and space design, these movements, experienced by most cities beginning around the turn of the century, gave rise to what is widely referred to as the City Beautiful movement. This period often expressed itself in grand and sweeping terms—great parks, boulevards, and focal axes, framed by street-fronting buildings with regular bay spacings that marked an orderly progression of the street environment. This formal, classical, even monumental frame was often mixed and softened by the picturesque, romantic landscapes of the garden city traditions, particularly in parks and parkways. A few of the more famous of these initiatives included Chicago's Columbian Exposition (1893), Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's Plan for Chicago (of "make no small plans" fame, 1909), San Francisco's World's Fair (1915), St. Louis's Jefferson Park (the venue for the World's Fair of 1904), and Denver Mayor Robert Speer's civic center, parks, and boulevards (1904 on).

Traditional corporate and civic leadership structures, in which women and wives usually played an unsung but significant role, led the City Beautiful movement. Its focus on the quality of the public environment marked a shift toward balancing private interests with some broader sense of the common good. The recognition of the essential interdependence among everybody inhabiting the urban landscape led directly to federal legislation enabling states and, through states, local jurisdictions to establish zoning and subdivision regulations, city plans, and the administrative structures to administer both.

The community reform movements that improved the quality of the civic environment certainly represented advances in good government and for the most part did more good than harm. But their tools and processes were centered in local government, were manipulated by private real estate and development interests, and were not directly accessible to most neighborhoods or their citizens. Always an exception, affluent neighborhoods had and used the tools to their advantage, achieving significant place improvements in the areas they cared most about through their knowledge, resources, and access. It took the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s to begin to extend this access to the middle class and lower-income people so that they too could influence development and the civic environment in their neighborhoods and districts.

Planning, zoning, and subdivision have been around in most urbanized places from their inceptions, with the first zoning ordinance enacted in New York City in 1916. As publicly controlled processes, with public notification requirements, these rules created thresholds for communities to begin to have a say in the shape of what is to come. Since the citizen participation climate changed in the 1960s, everyday citizens have been crossing the thresholds in growing numbers. As such, one might consider zoning among the first of the processes that enabled people to have a significant say over the quality and appearance of their neighborhoods and districts. The new rules began to modulate the use of private property in the context of larger community values. The sphere of the community began to take a more active form, rising out of its formerly passive role as the receiver, sometimes the victim, of untrammeled private initiative. In some ways, subdivision rules are even more directive of the shape of the civic environment than zoning, particularly in residential areas, both urban and suburban, as described in some detail in Chapters 9 and 10. Typically, though, citizens have less access to the creation and administration of subdivision rules.

From the beginning, proponents and detractors have debated zoning and subdivision rules in an up and down trajectory, marked by successions of court cases and uneven outcomes. Land and development regulation lies at the very seam of public and private, let out at one moment and taken in at the next as the uneasy dialectic between public good and private gain plays its unending game. Development-regulating processes are always in a state of flux, both in theory and in practice, with a wide range of local responses. The debate will persist, on political, philosophical, and practical grounds, and citizens' influence in that debate is likely to keep growing.

Planning, zoning, and subdivision regulations have certainly been helpful tools for governments and increasingly communities to curb some of the more flagrant excesses projected by private initiatives. The effectiveness of that check has depended on cities' commitment and ability to

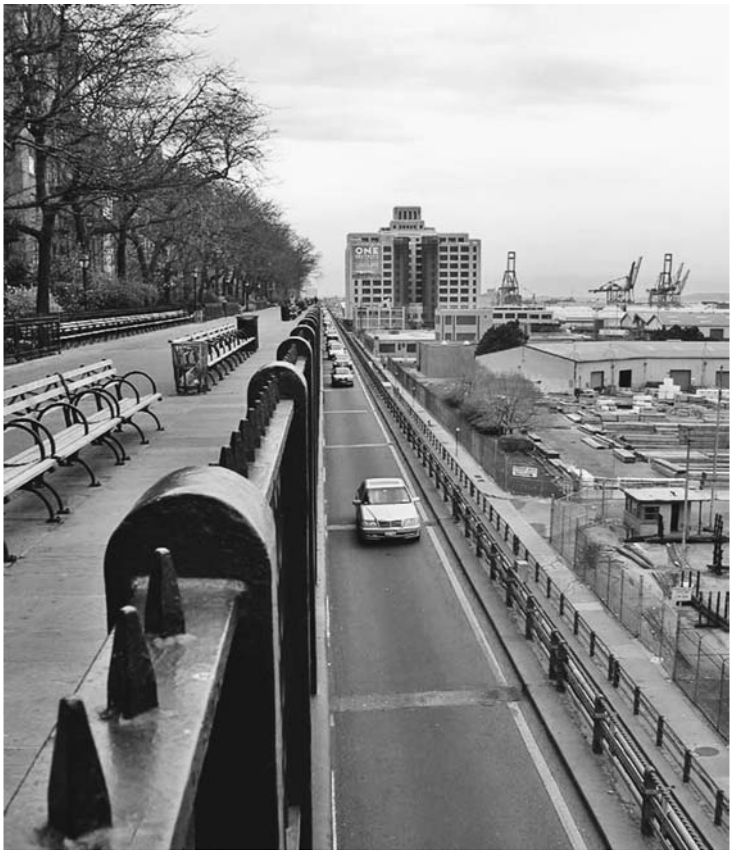


Figure 1.5
Affluent Brooklyn Heights citizens banded together in the early 1950s to block a freeway that would have cut off their view of the East River and Lower Manhattan. The result produced their famed esplanade, completed in 1954, which hung over the freeway lanes, which themselves are hung off the cliffs below.
Photo by Lucius Kwok ©

properly reflect their citizens' concerns and represent their interests in the development process. In recent years, citizens themselves are exercising greater direct influence on the processes. The private sector, meanwhile, with its vaunted scent for opportunity, has found and continues to find ways to shape the application of zoning and subdivision tools to advance their narrower, project-by-project interests over broader community or civic interests. The tensions in the system usually challenge the trust among the three spheres of private, public, and community. The interactions among the three, therefore, must always aim at finding areas of overlapping interest to establish the trust necessary to make places better.

The 1960s

What was it about the 1960s that so fundamentally altered access so that ordinary citizens could develop meaningful roles in the planning, design, and development of their everyday places? The following discussion puts this historical moment into perspective.

Leading into and through the 1960s, the civil rights movement made a great leap in closing the gap between what the United States claimed to be and what it was. With the Voting Rights Act of 1964 highlighting a whole string of policy, legislative, and legal advances for racial equality, this period marked progress toward democratization more dramatically

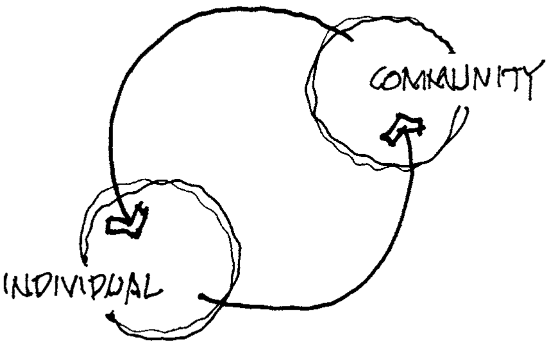


Figure 1.6
The individual and the community, where the values of the one are in continuous interaction with the values of the many.

than anything since the decades-long suffragette movement that finally gave women the vote with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Under leadership epitomized by Martin Luther King Jr. for numbers of local civil rights leaders committed to justice through nonviolent means, there came an insistence to be heard that marked a new day, including a dawning of the idea of citizen participation. The movement had profound implications for spatial and settlement patterns, as we shall see.

Dovetailed into the civil rights movement and indeed increasingly central to Dr. King's message came the widening dissension over the Vietnam War. Citizens became more and more disillusioned about the "public purpose" of a war so costly in lives and money and waged on ever more transparently questionable premises. First the free-speech movement and then the anti-war movement ultimately succeeded in tilting the politics to defeat the war's advocates and in bringing about U.S. withdrawal.

The women's movement, finding that the vote by itself did not establish equality, sought redress for the second-class status of more than half of the nation's citizens. At their most creative and ambitious, women envisioned a society where values of nurturing would become more central in guiding the United States' future, or at least in balancing the prevailing values that resisted civil rights and waged war. The prevailing message of their movement, however, placed women in positions to assimilate into and compete more effectively in the dominant, male-value economic structure, where glass ceilings for a few were a more important target than a stable floor for the many. Neither the anti-war movement nor the women's movement had particularly profound effects on settlement patterns or place design, although the latter did either introduce or support a range of access initiatives shared by civil rights, child care, people with disabilities, and pedestrian advocates.

All of these movements represented people rising against authority—on the face of it governmental authority—at all levels. Many in the movements also understood that those same governments were thoroughly intertwined with, and generally bending to the will of, powerful private sector interests, again at all levels, collectively referred to as "the establishment." For their part, the participants in the various movements, while diffuse, collectively referred to themselves as "the movement." There was sufficient alarm, particularly at the federal level, where both government and private sector interests placed stability over other values, in crafting a strategy to meet the threat, real or perceived. Surely the climate called for bending toward democratization, or at least appearing to do so.

In the realm of the civic environment, the vigorous expressions of dissent accompanying the anti-war and other movements of the day led directly to the walling up of previously windowed banks and businesses and even more pervasively the construction of windowless school buildings all over the country.

One could argue that the memorial to the Vietnam War, Maya Lin's hushingly successful D.C. monument, marked a radical shift away from the heroic individual war vision, like, for example, the Iwo Jima statue nearby, toward the reality of the masses who experience the result. This is, perhaps, another way of viewing the advance of citizen participation.

My contemporaries from that time are unlikely to ever forget President Nixon, a candidate for reelection in 1972, raising his hands over his head, pointing his forefingers to the heavens and bellowing out the Black Panthers' rallying cry: "Power to the people."

The "Movement" and the Civic Environment

The different movements that represented a sharp increase in citizen participation in matters that concerned them had profound and lasting effects on settlement patterns and civic space. While primarily about voting, public access, public education, and just plain justice, fairness, and decency, the civil rights movement had direct impacts on city form, on city planning, on citizen participation, and on place design. The movement's human rights successes triggered a whole range of spatial consequences, some anticipated, some not; some intended, some not.

Rather quickly after the passage of the range of civil rights measures, whites began to run away from cities, fleeing school and neighborhood integration in an expression both of historic patterns of white race–based antipathy to blacks and marking the superior economic means and choices available to whites. These "white flight" patterns coincided with, and were reinforced however purposefully by, the auto/petroleum industry assaults on public transportation coupled with federal subsidies for the white out-migration through VA and FHA financing, mortgage interest deductions, and public road and highway building. So began the heavily marketed and hyped real estate and road-building bonanza that many now call "sprawl," with impacts that physically separate people from each other by class, race, and even age; and separate people from their work, their schools, and their shopping and service needs.

Meanwhile, black businesses, no longer constrained by their imposed historic boundaries, moved to new locations in search of greater success, often depopulating once-thriving community retail and institutional centers. Black families moved into neighborhoods that were previously barred to them. All the while, the dislocational impacts of modernist urban renewal initiatives compounded the assault on what had been close-knit and viable, economic- and age-diverse neighborhoods of all ethnicities in cities across the land. In more recent years, African Americans and other ethnic minorities have been joining whites in identifying moving to the suburbs as the mark of having "made it." But as cities gentrify, the first-ring suburbs are becoming the nearest affordable housing to major job and service centers, and as their tenancy shifts from owner to renter and their structures succumb to age and substandard construction another significant urban out-migration seems to be well underway, this time led by lower-income families and including a significant proportion of growing Latino and Asian populations.

The mass white move to the suburbs, unintentionally fueled by civil rights advances, did not include in its agenda building or retaining places that attracted a diversity of people to share in civic purposes. As has been pointed out for years now, tracing from Gertrude Stein's famous characterization, in the suburbs "there's no there there," and the house–car–cul de sac cells of suburban geography are intentionally and effectively isolating. Some argue that these broad movements were citizen-driven, reflections of how and where people chose to live—in short, the exercise of free choice in a free market. These arguments are accurate up to a point. On the other hand, one could argue that the realistic choices for middle-class white Americans were actually quite limited. Driving the suburban settlement

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Also energized by the climate of the 1960s and early 1970s, but with deeper roots, consumer activism broadened its scope and concern, seeking accountability across the whole of the economy for the kinds of narrower reforms it had demanded and achieved in earlier decades. The ever more powerful impacts of sophisticated marketing accelerated the growing realization that consumers could be exploited and knowingly and cynically exposed to all manner of health- and life-threatening products in the pursuit of profit for their makers. Industry's emphasis accelerated a shift toward producing what they could sell most effectively and away from linking production to basic needs. The ripples of consumer advocacy continue to wash up on the not-so-friendly shores of the current not-so-civic era. While consumer advocacy did not generally seek to alter or advocate for place-based civic improvement, its goals were complementary and it accounted for one of the most remarkable improvements in the civic environment: the widening ban on smoking in public places.

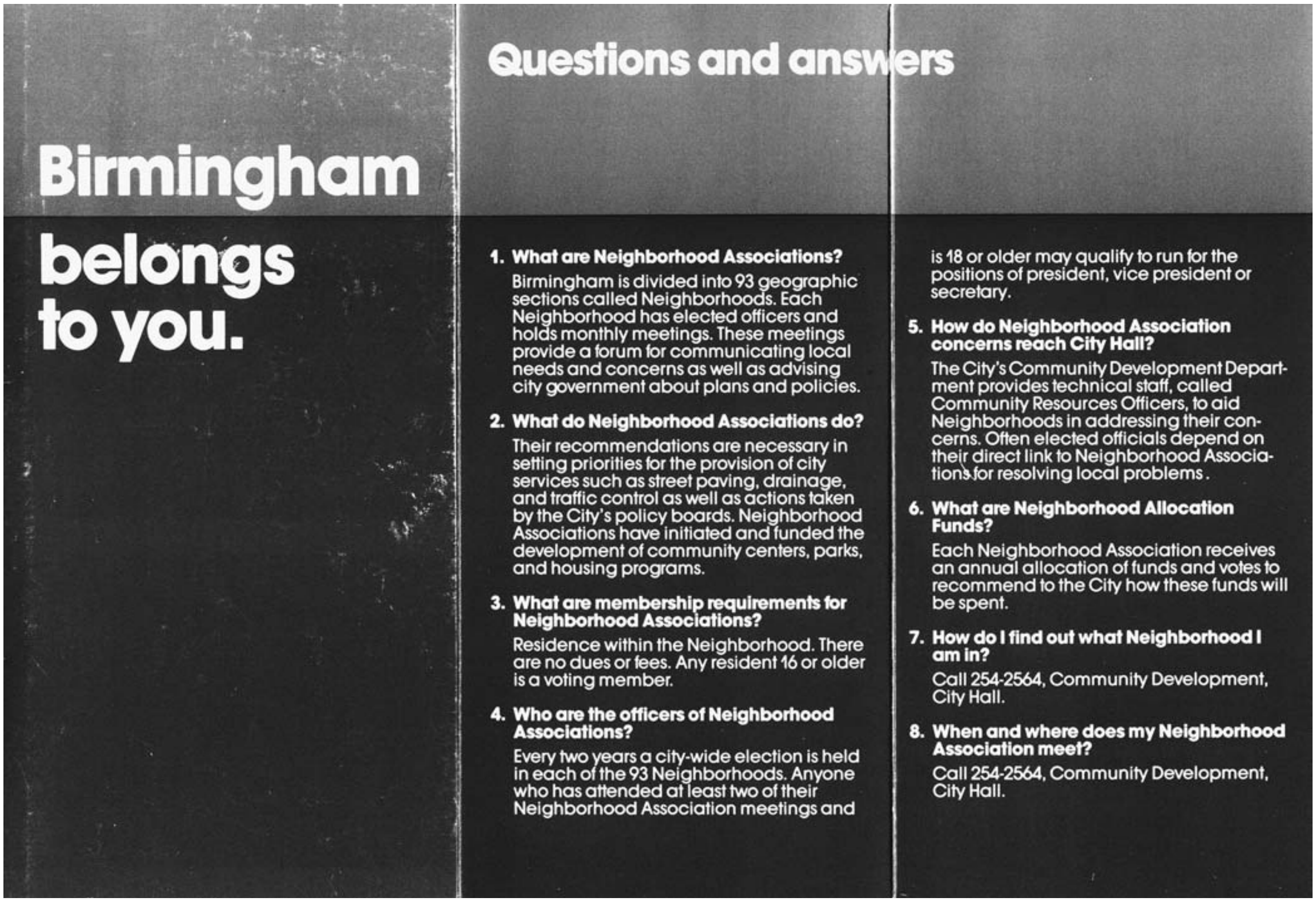
patterns were legacies of ever more sophisticated marketing, projecting “must-have” images built around the private car, the private house, the private street. These interacted with deep subsidies and racially influenced behavior to induce the suburban choice. In this sense, the “demand” was “socially engineered,” to borrow a phrase, by a powerful partnership between the auto, petroleum, real estate, and road-building industries, fully supported by both fiscal and monetary policy at all levels of government. The above is not the only analysis of how settlement patterns came to be what they are. Yet to be effective in making things better than they are, it should demonstrate how important it is for urban designers and community activists to have some understanding of the forces that dealt the hand they must now play.

Out of the civil rights movement came the beginnings of the concepts of community development and community economic development. One of the first of these that put in place grassroots structure and local citizen empowerment was the Model Cities Program, part of President Johnson’s War on Poverty, a part of the “butter” half of his “guns and butter” strategy for deflecting or defusing growing unrest over racism, sexism, and opposition to the Vietnam War. This program, launched in 1966 as part of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, sought to defuse unrest in urban renewal–afflicted and poverty-stricken urban areas. Citizens in the selected areas, by now mostly occupied by minorities, were able to create local governance structures for administering significant sums of federal block grant funding, aimed at catalyzing housing and economic development. Part of the purpose for these organizational structures was to endow grassroots organizations with the authority and the funding to conduct their own community renewal efforts.

To some extent these federally devised structures, which had direct lines of communication to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), obligated the cooperation of local government. The program educed a lot of cynical “you’re so smart, you figure it out” responses from professionals, developers, and local government officials. Occasional transgressions led skeptics or more affluent citizens who felt they were left out (an unaccustomed experience) to describe activists in the movement as “poverty pimps.” The effectiveness of these experiments was probably not so different than the other established development practices of the day, but the beneficiaries certainly were different.

Nonetheless, it established in the minds of many for the first time that people in America’s most distressed communities existed, and their needs became somewhat known. In fact, what these communities needed to be successful were the resources, experience, technical expertise, public policy commitments, and private investment patterns that their histories had denied them. Many Model Cities Programs structured their organizations on models that they had some familiarity with, like local city councils or school boards, building in all the obstacles that such organizations face in trying to reach fair and balanced decisions. So while not as effective in jump-starting community redevelopment as some had hoped, from the community perspective the Model Cities Program was certainly better than either the neighborhood-razing urban renewal programs that preceded it or the market forces that ignored these neighborhoods. Overall, the program varied and evolved from place to place, did some good, had some failures, but most importantly for this discussion, introduced the heretofore unthinkable notion that poor people should have a voice and

In Birmingham, for example, David Vann, first as a city council member and later as mayor, used the provisions for citizen participation in the CDBG program—which the city had earlier rejected because they didn’t want any of “that tainted federal money” with its anti-segregation provisions—to establish an extensive neighborhood-based citizen participation program. Vann, his staff, and citizens all over town worked to create some 100 neighborhoods, organized into communities, and a citywide advisory board, each level electing its leadership bi-annually. These neighborhood associations debate the issues of the day, weigh in on zoning and other development initiatives, and in a remarkable commitment to the democratic experiment, allocate capital funds set aside for them to civic improvement projects—the amounts based on population and median income. Thus in a few short years Birmingham went from being one of the most repressive cities in the country to one of the most progressively experimental, at least in the area of citizen participation. While Vann stepped up to formally launch these initiatives, they would not have happened without the support of civil rights veterans and social progressives, both black and white. Not every decision taken at the neighborhood level has been the wisest, but the program has produced a lot more successes than failures, and the tasting and exercising of democracy has broadened the base from which citizens elect their city council members and on which the city makes its policies and decisions.



Birmingham belongs to you.

Questions and answers

1. **What are Neighborhood Associations?**
   Birmingham is divided into 93 geographic sections called Neighborhoods. Each Neighborhood has elected officers and holds monthly meetings. These meetings provide a forum for communicating local needs and concerns as well as advising city government about plans and policies.
2. **What do Neighborhood Associations do?**
   Their recommendations are necessary in setting priorities for the provision of city services such as street paving, drainage, and traffic control as well as actions taken by the City's policy boards. Neighborhood Associations have initiated and funded the development of community centers, parks, and housing programs.
3. **What are membership requirements for Neighborhood Associations?**
   Residence within the Neighborhood. There are no dues or fees. Any resident 16 or older is a voting member.
4. **Who are the officers of Neighborhood Associations?**
   Every two years a city-wide election is held in each of the 93 Neighborhoods. Anyone who has attended at least two of their Neighborhood Association meetings and is 18 or older may qualify to run for the positions of president, vice president or secretary.
5. **How do Neighborhood Association concerns reach City Hall?**
   The City's Community Development Department provides technical staff, called Community Resources Officers, to aid Neighborhoods in addressing their concerns. Often elected officials depend on their direct link to Neighborhood Associations for resolving local problems.
6. **What are Neighborhood Allocation Funds?**
   Each Neighborhood Association receives an annual allocation of funds and votes to recommend to the City how these funds will be spent.
7. **How do I find out what Neighborhood I am in?**
   Call 254-2564, Community Development, City Hall.
8. **When and where does my Neighborhood Association meet?**
   Call 254-2564, Community Development, City Hall.

Figure 1.7
This widely disseminated brochure explained Birmingham's citizen participation program, with maps showing the neighborhood and community boundaries, descriptions of programs available, and telephone numbers to call for more information.
Courtesy of City of Birmingham

some authority in their home places and that that voice should be institutionalized.

Coming out of the "Great Society" or "War on Poverty" concepts of the Johnson administration, with Model Cities experiences both good and bad under its belt, the housing advocacy community rose with new force in this period. It was able to marshal the support necessary to secure the passage of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (HCDA) with its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, a major source of flexible federal funding tied to supporting low- and moderate-income communities. The act institutionalized citizen participation as a requirement for access to the funds, thus providing the basis on which communities could extend their influence over this important funding source.

The program, at the time joining the federal revenue-sharing program as ways of returning federal tax dollars to state and local jurisdictions, carried two purposes that characterized the federal response to troubled times: (1) recognition of the desperate straits of core cities and towns caused by the disinvestment patterns of suburban development subsidies and white flight; and (2) an effort to empower citizens experiencing these circumstances to have a significant role in doing something about it. The mandates for citizen participation, while providing broad flexibility for local jurisdictions to determine the funds' use, also required targeting the funds to improve conditions for people of low and moderate income, to mitigate slums and blighting conditions, and to assist in meeting urgent unmet needs.

Leading toward the formal codification of citizen participation in federal policy or most local governments, beyond the Model Cities experiment there were a number of issue-focused movements that coalesced and were emboldened by the fermentation of the times, some directly affecting the future of our physical places, some not. Some, however, did and still do have profound effects both on how places are designed and on the expanding roles of citizens to influence the process. These advocacy communities represent issues involving housing and community development, the environment, historic preservation, Americans with Disabilities, and other movements focused on improving the quality of various aspects of civic space, altogether constituting the citizen participation movement.

Housing advocacy activity remains strong and generally focuses on improving housing and neighborhoods of people with lesser means. In the dynamic interactions between public and private, however, the current market-driven ideologies and power alignments that suffuse the federal government do not seem to accept as a goal the aspiration first stated in the 1949 Housing Act: "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American." Backing off from policies that defined the 1960s and 1970s underscores the ascendancy of the private sector in setting government priorities. Nonetheless, the sector continues to take full advantage of heavy subsidies in the form of publicly provided roads, infrastructure, and tax and lending programs. Current policies, therefore, make the job of those advocating for housing affordability and decency particularly difficult.

In the same timeframe, the environmental movement coalesced, gained momentum, and focused its demands on a more conscious and sustainable stewardship of the earth's resources. It directly affected, and continues to affect, regional, city, and place design. Environmentally driven spatial analyses and initiatives are a major theme throughout the text. The sweep of environmentalism lies at the root of concepts like "sustainability," "growth management," "smart growth," "green building," "green communities," and legislation like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and countless state and local initiatives to measure environmental impact and mandate mitigation of negative impacts.

Among all of these, related to broadening citizen participation, NEPA was perhaps most sweeping and effective. Adopted in 1969, it required citizen involvement processes for providing input in all federal or federally funded actions. And it required some conscious level of environmental analysis on any such federal actions, with progressive analysis required based on the level of impacts identified. It sought to be comprehensive, requiring consideration of a full range of possible impacts—on air and water quality, habitat, land use, soils, historic and cultural resources, and official planning policy where the proposed action would occur.

The environmental movement too lies at the base of a range of local and regional interest groups pressing for more sustainable planning, design, and development policies and practices. Such groupings spread across a wide range, including smart growth movements, transit advocacy, bicycle and pedestrian advocacy, ecology commissions, tree commissions, creek "daylighting" initiatives, storm drainage management districts, conservation subdivision initiatives, farmland preservation movements, organic and "slow" food movements, and recycling programs, to name several.

Considered in its broader social context, sustainability raises issues of fairness and equity as necessary underpinnings of any truly sustainable approach to community design. Environmental sustainability is not conceivable without socio-economic sustainability, which cannot be achieved reliably without the willful participation of citizens at all levels. Environmental justice, for example, entered the lexicon of criteria for consideration for federally funded projects with President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898. Acknowledging that environmentally degrading facilities tended to concentrate in lower-income neighborhoods, the order at least obligated processes to face the problem and look for alternatives that would more equitably spread the impacts of the many environmentally undesirable activities and facilities necessary to sustain communities.

Another concurrent movement with direct impacts on place design and city form was the historic preservation movement. With roots in class-based efforts to preserve the mansions, cathedrals, banks, and plantations of patrician ancestors, the movement rather quickly opened its doors to broader and broader bases of citizens. These were appalled by the wholesale destruction of history and more importantly the destruction of the character of place caused by modernist urban renewal interventions in core cities. Many of the victims of these assaults, indeed, lay at the opposite end of the stick from the movement's progenitors. The work of Jane Jacobs helped popularize what had been a sometimes sleepy but well-defended sentiment for the preservation of heritage. It has galvanized all sorts of people to consider and honor their physical past, whether that past evoked glory or symbolized survival in conditions of race and class discrimination. In addition, the movement progressed quickly from buildings and landmarks to neighborhoods and precincts. Both public and nonprofit initiatives provided resources and support for communities, ultimately across class, race, and geographic lines, to resist wrong-headed private sector and public urban renewal practices.

A later movement that has and will continue to shape the public realm is the demand for equal access for people with physical disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, enacted in 1990, succeeded in putting in place standards at both the larger place and the individual building scales that improve the likelihood that people with disabilities will not be barred from habitations or public places because of their inability to get into or use such resources. Ramps, landings, elevators, wheelchair ramps, beeping traffic signals, disability access routes, and specified parking spots are some of the most ubiquitous manifestations of the outcome of this movement. More broadly, the ADA has affected site selection for public facilities and the basic design organization of countless parks and public buildings across the country.

In summary, the 1960s and 1970s movements and their ensuing legislation and implementation, beyond the specific thrust of each separate act, began the process of codifying citizens' participation as a requirement for actions contemplating the use of federal funds. Among those most directly affecting design and development in the public sphere were NEPA and the HCDA, both of which, however nominally, mandated public comment processes. Granted, the requirements were pretty rudimentary, often just requiring public hearings on contemplated plans or actions with duly published notification thereof. But they began and sanctioned processes that allowed democratic reform–minded local officials, like David Vann in Birmingham and Maynard Jackson, the first African American mayor of Atlanta, to push for genuinely progressive experimentations in democracy.

Organizational Responses to the Rise of Citizen Participation

The legitimization and rise of citizen participation began to unsettle established ways of doing business in government and in the private sector. At one level the initial moves in support of empowerment were those of a federal administration trying to smooth over unrest, placate the most vocal, and nip in the bud any sustained protest. At another level, though, many people in government service—in all positions—were legatees of the Kennedy "ask what you can do for your country" era, and these actively pushed for broader democratization. The federally sanctioned gesture toward empowerment encouraged citizen participation and spread demands for more involvement to the local and state levels. These change forces had a direct impact on the design and development of urbanized places as well.

The Public Sector

Cities responded in different ways to the new empowerment language written into federal statutes and programs. Some took a dim view of this unsettling foray into the established turf. Some politicians viewed mandated citizen involvement as a breeding ground for aspirant challengers to their seats. Many public agencies, on the one hand, were pretty sure they knew better and didn't want to open themselves up to second-guessing, and on the other, were nervous about their report card results that could be spotlighted by greater transparency and public accountability. These tended to take the minimum route—small, buried advertisements for public hearings to be held at times inconvenient for most working citizens, a perfunctory reporting, and usually dismissal of whatever comments the minimum public process produced. NEPA-related activities evolved to require a written response from the sponsoring agency to every comment that the mandated citizen participation process required. The responses mandated by the Housing and Community Development Act, while less rigorous, still provided for some degree of transparency and accountability.

As the mandates for community development and citizen participation in particular were spreading, though, some cities' planning agencies embraced community development as a goal generally consistent with good city planning practice and positioned themselves to tap the resources that HUD was focusing into housing and community development. These agencies tended to be both philosophically and functionally committed to pushing the limits for democratization, and so became those cities' frontline community interface agencies. Other cities, however, viewed the housing and community development mission more narrowly, as a production function more than as part of comprehensive renewal strategies, and were less concerned with how CDBG fit into the bigger picture. Both paths had successes and failures, and both paths represented measurable steps forward in effective citizen involvement. Still others resisted the whole premise and did the minimum necessary to secure the federal largesse. Some cities kept their city planning and community development functions separate, while others combined them, an indication of how comprehensively they viewed their opportunity.

Some cities, like Birmingham, Dayton, Atlanta, and Seattle, moved forward more quickly than others to embrace and activate citizen participation processes. In these, local political leadership committed to actively test and extend the institutions of democracy to a broader population than had been active or encouraged before. Because I worked for jurisdictions that were more committed to taking this path, most of my observations stem from that experience. The examples I use to put a face on citizen participation may presage what could be turning out to be a profound shift. Broadening bases of citizens to exercise more control over the government and private sector actions that affect them in their immediate civic environment could prove to be a model that works. If so, informed and committed citizens and their organizations could join or even surpass private sector and government agencies as places to look for leadership in making the day-to-day world a better place to live.

Under Maynard Jackson's leadership, the City of Atlanta set up a system of Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs), 24 in all, each of which provided an umbrella for a handful of geographically associated neighborhoods. This system was recognized in the city charter, thus giving each NPU the voice to render advisory opinions on zoning and variance proposals as well as other public actions affecting the civic environment of their neighborhoods. The NPUs receive planning support from the Bureau of Planning, by which a planning staffer attends each monthly meeting of each NPU to give an update on activities relevant to it and to hear the NPU's position on issues as well as process requests for information. Typically, staff from the public works, parks, and police and fire departments may also be in attendance with reports and information as called for. NPUs typically have their own committee structure, covering such issues as land use and zoning, transportation, the environment, and public safety. It is not a perfect system, yet the NPUs' formal status ensures that all neighborhoods in the city—black, white, poor, rich—have a seat at the table of local governance.

The Private Sector

That part of the private sector most directly affected by the new stirrings for broadening the base of decision-making were developers, including the lawyers, lenders, design consultants, accountants, and real estate team members likely to come under the developer umbrella. Needless to say, most developers took a dim view, even though not many of them were building in the low-income areas where the shift toward citizen participation was having its greatest transformative impact. The developers' calculus depends so much on time and money that anything that could threaten to take more time or cost more money is a red flag.

The other side of the developer picture, though, is that there is usually an indefatigable, resolute aspect to the industry that accounts for its ability to maintain momentum by adjusting and persisting—it takes what it takes. From this perspective, coupled with the singularly project-centered focus that it takes to get the job done, developers were more oriented toward finding what would work out of these new mandates than what would not. The local control aspect of the CDBG program, for example, provided the potential of access to new sources of funding that could be attractive. From the point of view of start-ups and minority business enterprises, CDBG, however laced with accountability provisions, offered access to capital that white-controlled finance did not offer at the time.

Furthermore, development is an intrinsically interdisciplinary enterprise, calling on lots of different people to play one role or another as projects proceed from conceptualization to completion. Adding one more dimension to this process was not so off-putting. The industry's home base, the Urban Land Institute (ULI), had already been running an early form of community engagement process, the panel advisory. This program brought to cities and places all over the country interdisciplinary resources and knowledge to work on development problems identified by the community, albeit usually the development community. Its processes tended to engage a larger representation of affected citizens than the more traditional client-consultant way of developing projects. This program is described in more detail in Chapter 10, Tools.

Over the years, perhaps through the community-serving panel advisory program, and particularly now, developers are moving to more tolerant positions on community input. Many have benefited through taking a cooperative and participatory approach, not just as a way of easing approvals, thus saving time and money, but also in terms of improved product. The ULI for some years has provided leadership in encouraging positive steps toward community involvement among its members. Even the more specialized homebuilders and industrial and office park associations are softening their historic oppositional positions to engaging the local community in their policies and practices.

Just as cities, communities, and developers responded to the new empowerment movements, so did the professions. Architects, at least a few, acted on the need to better support the physical space needs of neighborhoods and communities around the country. In New York, Richard Hatch worked with low-income neighborhood activists to put together the Architects Renewal Committee for Harlem (ARCH). Young architects in New York, responding to the tenor of the times for addressing poverty and substandard housing and living environments, formed the Architects Technical Assistance Committee, a loosely organized effort to provide direct services to low-income families. One idea, concretized by a group that called itself Operation Move In, was to assist people to move back into buildings long abandoned in the Upper West Side urban renewal area, an early case of the squatter movement. They took direct action, hooking up turned-off electricity, gas, and water (usually bypassing the meter), doing minor home improvements, making the structures reasonably habitable for "illegal" tenants—in short, paying attention to the overwhelming unmet housing needs across a city with a considerable inventory of relic buildings from the urban renewal era.

The Professions

A few members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) began to respond to the call for technical assistance from communities around the country. First, in 1966, they created a program that evolved into the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team or R/UDAT. Later the AIA provided some support for community-driven efforts at local revitalization in the form of Community Design Centers. These programs have been supported by architects who are urbanists, who heard the call of Jane Jacobs on the importance of reflecting peoples' needs and cultures in any urban strategy, who saw what architecture's stand-alone trophy buildings were doing to urban places, and who were determined to explore other paths to apply their design skills to improve the civic environment.

From early in the R/UDAT program, these architects developed processes in which a charrette structure provided for citizen participation and interdisciplinary teams. The charrette brought together professionals (architects, planners, landscape architects, civil engineers, developers, economists, sociologists, and public officials, to name a few) with local civic leadership and ordinary citizens to consider complex urban design and development problems. With a typical pre-charrette preparation period of six months or so, the charrettes themselves take place over a very intense five-day period, the outcome of which is a public presentation of the findings, usually with a supporting document. The charrette as a way to gather people into a consensual visioning process has continued to expand, mature, and by now dominates how jurisdictions, and even some developers, structure their public processes to consider district-wide civic improvement planning, design, and development approval initiatives. In fact, managing such processes has become a mainstream offering of many design firms. The program is described in more detail in Chapter 10, Tools.

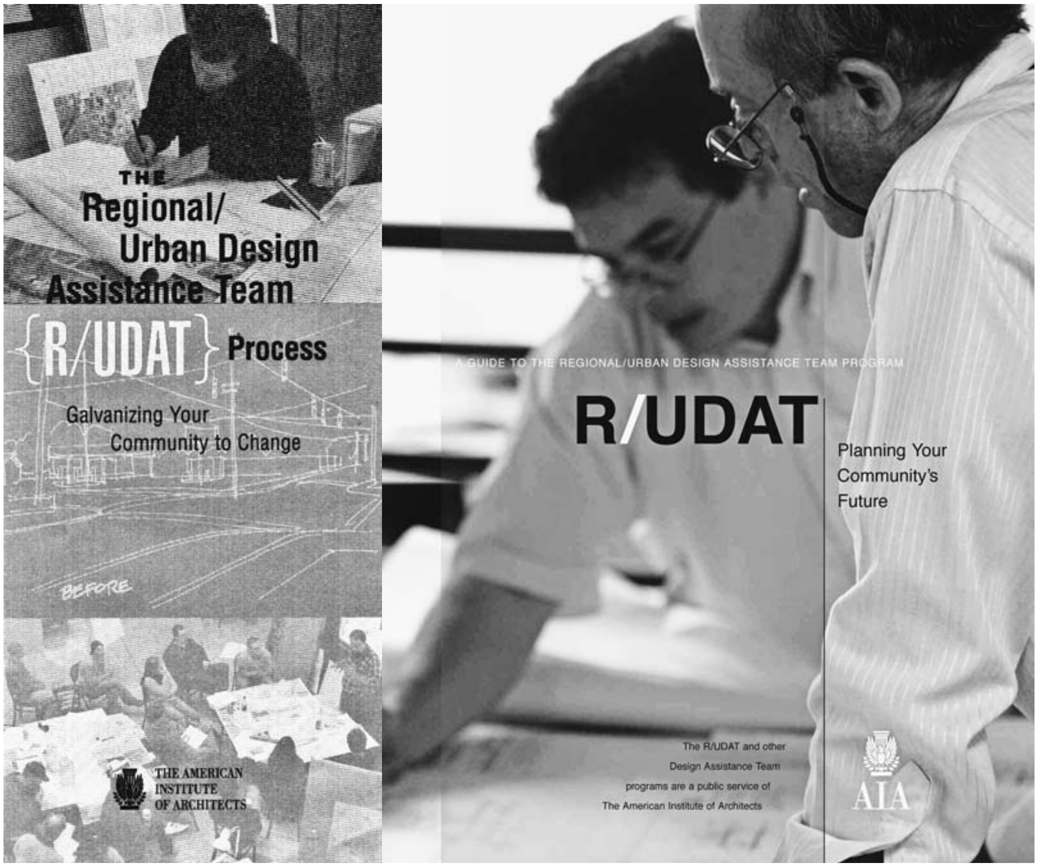

THE
Regional/
Urban Design
Assistance Team
{R/UDAT} Process
Galvanizing Your
Community to Change
BEFORE
THE AMERICAN
INSTITUTE
OF ARCHITECTS
A GUIDE TO THE REGIONAL/URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM PROGRAM
R/UDAT
Planning Your
Community's
Future
The R/UDAT and other
Design Assistance Team
programs are a public service of
The American Institute of Architects
AIA

Figure 1.8
Brochure describing how the R/UDAT program helps communities develop a vision for their future. Courtesy American Institute of Architects

City planners, by this time reacting to the negative consequences of urban renewal in which they had been complicit, had left the fold of the physically dominated city-shaping forces of the post–World War II era and instead oriented themselves toward policy, information management, land use, development regulation, economic development, transportation, and other more specialized pursuits. At the same time, many had joined the War on Poverty commitment to the under-represented, under-resourced populations spotlighted by such community organizing and advocacy pioneers as Saul Alinsky and Paul Davidoff. In fact, of all the professions involved in the business of planning, designing, and building our urban environments, only planners reached toward the new democratization opportunities in any great numbers. They became, mostly either as public or nonprofit workers, the professional force that set about seeking to assist communities and cities in structuring citizen participation. Unfortunately, some of their bosses tended to be not as enthusiastic, and not all cities stepped up to the opportunity.

Interestingly, though being in the forefront of advocating the democratization of planning processes, the American Planning Association has never developed a program for offering direct technical and organizational assistance to help communities in the way that the AIA's R/UDAT or ULI's panel advisories have done. Perhaps the whole idea of the charrette and its intense focused effort are more in the character of architects and developers, while planners, so many of whom are working in and for the public sector, know that the long haul of sustained effort is where the dif-