Better Together:
Lively Main Streets, Vital Neighborhoods, and Engaging Public Spaces.

Cornelius O'Brien Conference
Historic Preservation & Indiana Mainstreet Conference
October 16-18, 2008, Bloomington, Indiana

Professor Michael A. Krassa, PhD
Chair, *Human Dimensions of Environmental Systems,*
at the *University of Illinois.*

www.environ.uiuc.edu/hdes   www.illinois.edu/~Krassa   Krassa@illinois.edu

This presentation discusses the links between three important aspects of community life:

- Third places

- Engaged neighborhoods

- Successful businesses

The three have a "synergy" in that they are at least mutually reinforcing,

and may turn out to be an "iron triangle" (the other two are necessary for the third).

Neighborhoods: Appearances can be deceiving.

Low engagement, low desirability.

$350K+, high turn-over, high crime (robbery, auto theft, burglary), low commitment to place, low use of local businesses. No third places.

Unique, architect designed homes in country club area.

$300-700K, fifth most transient neighborhood in the state. Cheap by comps. Very high auto theft and breaks. Nine miles to nearest "third place."

$200-500K, fairly isolated, older neighborhood. Turnout below 20%, seeks disconnection, very high crime compared to similar neighborhoods.

High engagement, high desirability.

$400K, low turn-over downtown location with high use of local business. High use of local businesses and "third places."

$500K, low turn-over, not near amenities but high use of near-by strip mall spaces and high use of HOA Center (coffee-house, 7/11, meeting space.) Suburban location.

"Executive" tract homes.

300-700K, new homes with very low turnover. Internal 3rd places are highly used and even visited by others. Remark-able due to pace of sales & engagement. Has own CBD.

Unique, architect designed. Mix of houses, condo's, and apartments

One cannot tell by looking whether a neighborhood is strong or not. Of these six "nice" neighborhoods, three suffer from low engagement with their community, and none are the kind of neighborhood that "academia" says should be successful. Crime rates are the rate compared to other neighborhoods of comparable prices in the same region; they are not absolute measures.

Businesses: Appearances can be deceiving, part 2.

Below average profit; low local use.

Destination, but lower than expected profits and low local use. In retail and office pod; no residential nearby.

Control: two identical "lifestyle" centers.
Differ in location and presence of 3rd places.

Above average profit; high local use.

Higher than expected profits. Very high local use. Surrounded on three sides by residential. Six "third places."
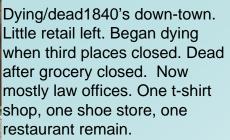
Shopping district surrounded by residential, but suffering. High antiques, B&B, and high tourism. Low local use. Only restaurants show decent profits (and only some).
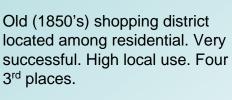
A new "downtown" in a new "greenfield" subdivision that is 4 miles from the city's downtown. To date it has very high use and has become a destination. Integrated among residences.

Dying/dead 1840's down-town. Little retail left. Began dying when third places closed. Dead after grocery closed. Now mostly law offices. One t-shirt shop, one shoe store, one restaurant remain.

Old (1850's) shopping district located among residential. Very successful. High local use. Four 3rd places.

Local retail that either underperforms or exceeds expectations compared to equivalents. They range from downtowns to businesses inside neighborhoods, to strip malls at the neighborhood edge, to strip malls in retail pods.

Third Places: What are they and what do they do for us?

Albuquerque Chess

Formal Definition (Ray Oldenburg): Places that are neither home nor work, but a place where people regularly gather to engage one another in conversation and social activities.

Colloquial Definition: local "hangout"

"…where everybody knows your name…"

Harlem barbershop
(cf: Mayberry Barber)

South Central LA music shop & cafe (closed, 2008).
Garage businesses also thrive here.

"Cheers" is the most common (and universally understood) example of a third place.

Third Places are defined by the following characteristics

Openness. Low barriers to use/entry. Open to all people.
This is one reason that bars, coffeehouses, and bookstores often are mentioned as the best examples. Low cost; ability to linger.

Leveling.
Class, income, profession, and other distinctions become unimportant. (The mailman and the psychologist are "equals" in the conversations and activities.) Not the doctor's lounge or lawyer's bar.

Conversation is important: it is a key activity of the third place (even if not the stated function).

Easily accessed; Oldenburg says walkable.

Draw people in: is attractive and "compelling," not "off-putting" or "stuffy" or specialized. ("Busy, but not too busy; looks like a 'nice place to go.'"—TK)

Conversations are open to all, not a closed group.

A core group of regulars, which essentially insuring that conversations are ongoing and welcoming to newcomers and visitors.

ADD: Easy destination where one can head when one is bored or lonely and expect to find amiable companions.

Ray Oldenburg notes that Third Places are disappearing in the USA, contributing to:

- Reductions in the quality of local life.

- Fewer interpersonal connections among people.

- Increasingly distant connections/friendships.

- Increasing incivility of people towards one another.

- Increasing homogeneity/decreasing uniqueness of different locales, both with a single town and from place to place.
    - Possibly one source of their disappearance.

Note that this means Oldenburg's holds that Third Places

- High quality local life
- Strong local interpersonal connections & friendships
- Civility
- Heterogeneity and uniqueness of place

To this we need to add that third places help:

- Build "bridging social capital."

- Increase local concern and awareness.

- Increase loyalty to local merchants.

- Increase loyalty to neighbor, neighborhood, and locale.

- Increase local election/political participation (turnout, other).

- Decrease crime (possibly by increasing "eyes on the street.")
  (see Kelling, Coles, and Wilson, "Fixing Broken Windows")

- Increase civic engagement.

- Help build strong neighborhoods.

But, the caveat here is that third places cannot do this alone. In fact, they *need* strong neighborhoods in order to survive, let alone to accomplish these goals.

And strong neighborhoods also will require third places of some sort.

Strong Neighborhoods

Defined as neighborhoods in which residents have high commitment to place (see Hiss, *The experience of place;* Krassa, *Staying connected and staying put.*)

- They will stay and "fight" in the face of problems.
- They like their neighborhood. When asked if they would prefer to live in a different neighborhood in the same city, most say "no."
- They have friends and acquaintances in the neighborhood.

Characterized by:

1. High levels of social integration. In short, they know their neighbors (many by name) *and they interact with them*.

2. High commitment to keeping neighborhood "nice" or improving it.

3. High use of local amenities (parks, businesses, etc.), often even when they find them more expensive or not as nice as ones to which they would have to travel.

4. Low turnover. People tend to stay put, so vacancies are comparatively rare.

5. High property values (compared to similar stock elsewhere in same city). Obviously this is related to above.

6. Low crime (again compared to similar neighborhoods).

Successful Businesses

Once again the definition used in this literature is relative.

Successful businesses obviously make a profit, but the comparison here is how much profit.
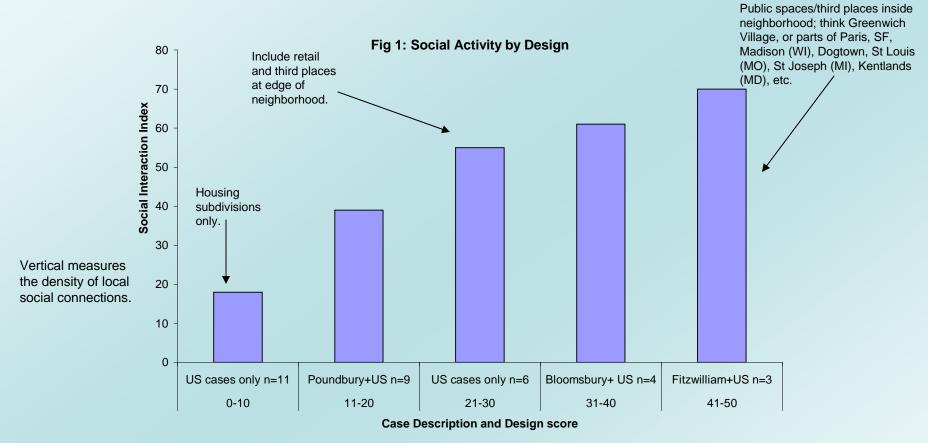
Successful businesses make better than expected or better than average profit. This allows for high stability in "Main Street," such that:

- There is low turnover; spaces are valued and businesses stay for a long time.

- There is moderate independence from local (and possibly national) economic conditions. People continue to patronize them in spite of layoffs, local downturns, etc.

- Insulation: less affected by national and regional cycles, especially downturns but also booms. (I have yet to find examples of businesses that go up with booms but not down with busts; either they are insulated or not.)

Not a part of the definition, but correlates of success appear to include:

- Business support for local events (meetings, charity runs, scout groups, park amenities, little league, etc.)

- Local ownership or management (but this is less than above) helps business respond to local conditions.

- High use by immediate neighbors even if it is a "destination."

- Integration into local civic life.

Neighborhood Social Interaction, Civic Engagement, and Design.

Fig 1: Social Activity by Design

Public spaces/third places inside neighborhood; think Greenwich Village, or parts of Paris, SF, Madison (WI), Dogtown, St Louis (MO), St Joseph (MI), Kentlands (MD), etc.

Include retail and third places at edge of neighborhood.

Housing subdivisions only.

Vertical measures the density of local social connections.

Social Interaction Index (vertical axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80)

US cases only n=11	Poundbury+US n=9	US cases only n=6	Bloomsbury+ US n=4	Fitzwilliam+US n=3
0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50

Case Description and Design score
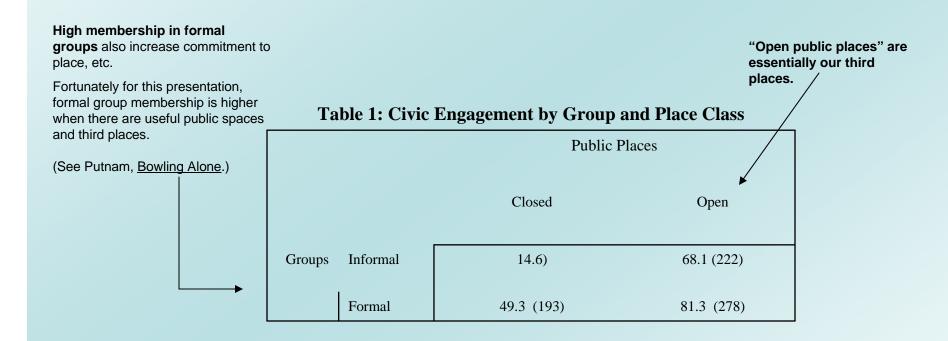
Horizontal axis measures increasing proximity of public spaces and third places to residential areas; The 0-10 category is separation by several miles, while 41-50 category is example of complete integration. The 0-1 category has no parks, no businesses, and less than 10 persons per acre.

Source: Krassa, "The Sociological Dimensions of the Built Environment," *Cambridge Letter,* Nov 2006

Public Spaces and Third Places Encourage Commitment to Place

This table demonstrates the effect of "third places" on the <u>local</u> population. They increase commitment to place, encourage "fight" over "flight" responses to local problems, and encourage high loyalty to local businesses. (These are the guys who will patronize a local coffeehouse instead of Starbucks, or a local burger place over McDonalds.)

High membership in formal groups also increase commitment to place, etc.

Fortunately for this presentation, formal group membership is higher when there are useful public spaces and third places.

(See Putnam, <u>Bowling Alone</u>.)

"Open public places" are essentially our third places.

Table 1: Civic Engagement by Group and Place Class

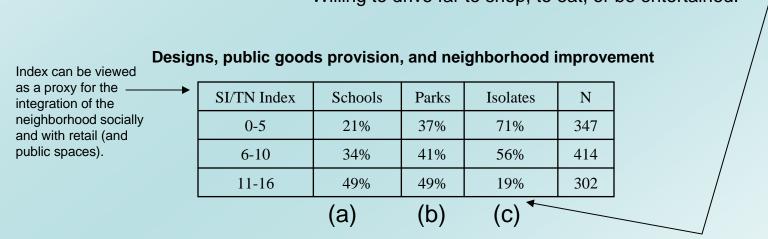|		Public Places	
		Closed	Open
Groups	Informal	14.6)	68.1 (222)
	Formal	49.3 (193)	81.3 (278)

Source: Krassa, "The Sociological Dimensions of the Built Environment," *Cambridge Letter,* Nov 2006

Neighborhood Design, Commitment to Place, and Neighborhood Improvement.

Increasing social integration in a neighborhood yields increased support for and use of local schools, local businesses, local parks, and decreased civic isolation.

Note that columns (a) and (b) have opposite trend from (c).

Isolates are characterized by low interest in local affairs (political, commercial) and higher interest in international/national politics and economics, high willingness to travel to shop, and high willingness to move ("flight") if there are issues in the local environment. Willing to drive far to shop, to eat, or be entertained.

Designs, public goods provision, and neighborhood improvement

Index can be viewed as a proxy for the integration of the neighborhood socially and with retail (and public spaces).

SI/TN Index	Schools	Parks	Isolates	N
0-5	21%	37%	71%	347
6-10	34%	41%	56%	414
11-16	49%	49%	19%	302

(a) (b) (c)

Source: Krassa, "Neighborhood Integrity and Support for Public Improvements," *British Journal of Urban Studies*, May 2006
See also: Krassa, "The spatial dimensions of friendship networks and the sustainability of local commerce," *Sustainable Growth*, Winter 2007; and Flood and Krassa, "Neighborhood form, resident satisfaction, and civic engagement," *City and Neighborhood,* May 2004

Traditional Third Place Helps Neighborhood Revitalization.

Neighborhood coffeehouse reinforcing the community and enjoying high patronage.

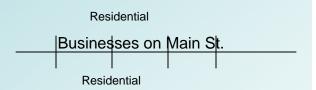High destination for neighborhood residents, which helps coffeehouse survive.

Also used for neighborhood association meetings, book club meetings, mom's group meetings, bible club meetings, etc.

Children's play area.

Residents go there when looking for someone to talk with during the day.

Popular with
--students in the afternoons,
--parents with children throughout day,
--people meeting after church on Sundays,
--"meetup" groups
--and has become general destination as well for a wide circle of the city

Residential

Businesses on Main St.

Residential

Credited with being a key to building a neighborhood identity among residents.

Neighborhood has high civic participation due to high interaction.

Low crime despite bordering on high crime area.

Very low residential turnover compared to city rates.

High levels of NIMBYism.

In this city of 65,000

> Only a few other independent coffeehouses continue to exist, most suffering from low traffic and competition from Starbucks.

> But this one was adopted by and adopted the neighborhood.

> Had high local participation in a remodel, and high traffic returning immediately after remodel was completed.
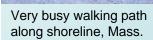
> Has high revenue compared to competition.

> Credited with helping turn around the business area on Bancroft Ave and with helping rehabilitate the neighborhood, which was seen as "nice but deteriorating" as recently as 1990.
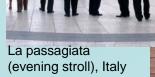
Noncommercial Third Places?

Oldenburg claims that third places must be commercial establishments.

Other places may have some of the same features and fill some of the same functions.

Very busy walking path along shoreline, Mass.

7 days a week farmers market, Calif.

La passagiata (evening stroll), Italy

Busy downtown library, In.

Public Chessboards, NM

Key features seem to be that they

- Have high local use.

- Bring local people together to form local social networks (Granovetter's weak ties).

- Help engender local pride and commitment to place.

- Walkable?

Nontraditional (or Partial) Third Places May Enjoy the Synergy as Well.

Nontraditional third places certainly do better when they are situated in a strong neighborhood. Unknown is whether or how much they contribute to neighborhood. A Saturday draw and gathering place. More?

Thriving Saturday Farmer's Market.

Busy city park and popular promenade

Partial third places have only some of the features Oldenburg lists. They fill some of the functions as well. Both the park and promenade pictured have been socially important features of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Partial and nontraditional third places seem to fill at least some of the same functions of traditional third places. Which features contribute to what remains to be seen.

Neighborhood in slow collapse.

Very high turnover rate, high vacancy rate.

Above city rates for crime, but most crime is break-in's, car theft, broken house and car windows; not much violent crime.

Below average increase in property values.

Over five year period:

• Number of neighbors a resident could identify has fallen by 2/3.

• School (and playground/park) closed and apartments built.

• Six store closures in nearest retail area (of 9 store strip).
  • Coffeehouse now check cashing.
  • Deli now "Subway."
  • Bookstore now "Papa Murphy's Pizza."
  • Record store now "Blockbuster."

Decreases in civic engagement:

Attendance at HOA and neighborhood meetings has fallen by half.

Participation in PTA has decreased (possibly due to the fact that the school no longer in the neighborhood; possibly due to decreased engagement).

"Neighborhood Watch" essentially disbanded due to lack of interest.

Increased vacancy rates; increased turnover.

Note that this is not a "bad" neighborhood, but it is no longer as "nice" and as desirable as it once was. It is "falling behind" the region.

The relationship between the decline of the neighborhood, the decline of the public spaces (and third places), and the decline in retail success is not known….

BUT, the coincident decline or success of all three is a common observation across neighborhoods. The three are clearly linked. How they are linked remains to be discovered.