

history of new urbanism

New urbanism is a planning and development approach that emerged in the late 20th century, focusing on creating walkable neighborhoods, fostering community interaction, and promoting sustainable living. This article will delve into the history of new urbanism, tracing its origins, key principles, notable projects, and its impact on urban planning.

Origins of New Urbanism

The roots of new urbanism can be traced back to various historical movements and philosophies that aimed to address the shortcomings of modern urban planning.

Post-World War II Urban Development

After World War II, rapid suburbanization occurred in the United States, leading to the development of car-centric communities. This shift resulted in urban sprawl, where cities expanded outward, often at the expense of the urban core. The consequences included:

- Increased reliance on automobiles
- Decline of public transportation systems
- Loss of community cohesion
- Environmental degradation

In response to these issues, urban planners and architects began seeking alternatives that addressed the social, economic, and environmental challenges of suburbanization.

The Garden City Movement

The garden city movement, initiated by Ebenezer Howard in the late 19th century, played a significant role in shaping new urbanism. Howard envisioned self-contained communities surrounded by greenbelts, combining the benefits of urban and rural living. His concepts of mixed-use development, community focus, and green spaces laid the groundwork for new urbanist principles.

Modernist Influences

Modernist architecture and planning, which emphasized functionalism and the separation of land uses, also influenced the development of new urbanism. However, modernist approaches often led to sterile environments that lacked human scale and community engagement. As a counter to this, new urbanism sought to reintroduce mixed-use development and pedestrian-friendly designs.

The Birth of New Urbanism

The term "new urbanism" was coined in the early 1980s as a response to the challenges of urban sprawl. It was officially defined in 1993 with the establishment of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU).

The Congress for the New Urbanism

Founded by a group of architects, planners, and developers, the CNU aimed to promote walkable, sustainable communities. The organization established a set of principles that would guide the new urbanism movement:

1. Neighborhoods should be designed for walking and cycling.
2. A mix of housing types should be provided.
3. Commercial and residential areas should be interspersed.
4. Public spaces should be prioritized.
5. Transportation should be integrated.

These principles served as a framework for developing communities that prioritized human interaction and environmental sustainability.

Key Figures in New Urbanism

Several influential figures emerged as leaders in the new urbanism movement:

- Andrés Duany: A founding member of the CNU and co-author of the influential book "Suburban Nation," Duany is known for his work in designing new urbanist communities, such as Seaside, Florida.
- Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk: An architect and urban planner, Plater-Zyberk has played a significant role in promoting new urbanism through her designs and advocacy.
- Peter Calthorpe: A prominent urban planner and designer, Calthorpe's work emphasizes sustainable community design and smart growth principles.

Key Principles of New Urbanism

New urbanism is characterized by several core principles that guide its approach to urban design:

Walkability

Walkability is a fundamental tenet of new urbanism. Communities are designed to encourage walking and cycling, with pedestrian-friendly streets, sidewalks, and public spaces. This approach not only promotes physical health but also fosters social interaction among residents.

Mixed-Use Development

New urbanist communities feature a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. This integration allows residents to live, work, and play within the same neighborhood, reducing the need for long commutes and promoting local businesses.

Human-Scale Design

New urbanism emphasizes human-scale design, which prioritizes the needs of pedestrians over vehicles. Buildings are typically designed to be visually appealing and contextually appropriate, with a focus on creating inviting streetscapes.

Community Engagement

Fostering a sense of community is central to new urbanism. Public spaces, parks, and plazas are designed to encourage social interaction, while community events and activities promote engagement among residents.

Sustainability

New urbanism advocates for sustainable practices, including energy-efficient buildings, green infrastructure, and the preservation of natural landscapes. By promoting sustainable transportation options and reducing reliance on cars, new urbanist communities aim to minimize their environmental impact.

Notable New Urbanist Projects

New urbanism has inspired numerous successful projects across the United States and beyond. Some notable examples include:

Seaside, Florida

Seaside is often regarded as the flagship new urbanist community. Designed by Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk in the 1980s, Seaside features a walkable layout, mixed-use buildings, and a strong sense of community. Its design has influenced countless other developments.

Celebration, Florida

Developed by the Walt Disney Company in the 1990s, Celebration is a master-planned community that embodies new urbanist principles. The town features a vibrant downtown area, diverse housing options, and an emphasis on community events and activities.

Kentlands, Maryland

Kentlands is a pioneering new urbanist community that was developed in the late 1980s. It features a mix of residential and commercial spaces, walkable streets, and a strong sense of community identity. The project has received accolades for its design and successful integration of new urbanist principles.

Impact and Criticism of New Urbanism

New urbanism has significantly influenced urban planning and development practices, promoting walkable, sustainable communities across the globe. However, it has also faced criticism and challenges.

Positive Impact

- Promotion of Sustainable Communities: New urbanism has encouraged the development of environmentally friendly communities that prioritize sustainability and reduce reliance on automobiles.
- Revitalization of Urban Areas: The movement has led to the rejuvenation of declining urban neighborhoods, fostering economic growth and community engagement.
- Increased Awareness: New urbanism has raised awareness of the importance of urban design in shaping social interactions and community well-being.

Criticism and Challenges

Despite its successes, new urbanism has faced criticism, including:

- Gentrification Concerns: Some critics argue that new urbanist developments can lead to rising property values and displacement of low-income residents.
- Homogeneity: There are concerns that new urbanist communities may lack diversity and become overly homogenous in design and socio-economic status.
- Implementation Difficulties: The principles of new urbanism can be challenging to implement in existing cities, especially those with entrenched car-centric designs.

Conclusion

The history of new urbanism reflects a growing awareness of the need for sustainable, walkable

communities that prioritize human interaction and environmental stewardship. By learning from the past and embracing innovative design principles, new urbanism continues to shape the future of urban planning. As cities grapple with the challenges of population growth, climate change, and social inequality, the lessons of new urbanism remain relevant in the quest for a more livable and connected world.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is New Urbanism?

New Urbanism is an urban design movement that promotes walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, with a focus on sustainability, community, and the integration of various forms of transportation.

When did New Urbanism begin?

New Urbanism began in the early 1980s, gaining momentum with the establishment of the Congress for the New Urbanism in 1993.

Who were the key figures in the New Urbanism movement?

Key figures include Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Peter Calthorpe, who were instrumental in developing the principles and practices of New Urbanism.

What are the main principles of New Urbanism?

The main principles include walkability, connectivity, mixed-use development, diversity of housing options, traditional neighborhood structure, and sustainability.

How does New Urbanism address environmental concerns?

New Urbanism emphasizes compact, walkable communities that reduce reliance on cars, promote public transit, and encourage green spaces, thereby minimizing environmental impact.

What role did the suburb boom play in the rise of New Urbanism?

The suburb boom in the mid-20th century led to urban sprawl and dissatisfaction with car-dependent lifestyles, prompting a movement towards more integrated and community-focused living environments.

Can you name a notable New Urbanist community?

Seaside, Florida, is one of the most famous examples of New Urbanism, known for its design that emphasizes walkability and community interaction.

How has New Urbanism influenced city planning policies?

New Urbanism has influenced city planning by encouraging policies that support mixed-use developments, zoning reforms, and the creation of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

What criticisms does New Urbanism face?

Critics argue that New Urbanism can lead to gentrification, may not adequately address affordable housing, and sometimes oversimplifies complex urban issues.

What is the future of New Urbanism?

The future of New Urbanism likely involves greater integration with technology, addressing social equity, and adapting to climate change while continuing to promote sustainable urban development.

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