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Article 40

Our Cities, Ourselves

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OUR CITIES, OURSELVES

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ABSTRACT

Just as we are what we eat, we are where we live. We breathe the air, drink the water and inhabit the built and natural landscapes. We make our places and they, in turn, make us. While great places nourish body and soul, poor environmental and urban quality challenges us physically as well as emotionally. How might we heal our places, so that they sustain us, rather than strain us?

HABITAT HAZARDS TO HEALTH

There are habitat hazards just as there are occupational hazards.[1] Indeed, the places we inhabit can present hazards to our health.[2] Most significant are poor air quality, automobile-related accidents, lack of walkability and public space, and inadequate access to safe places of recreation, health care, nutritious food, efficient transit, employment opportunities, good schools, and a range of housing options that offer affordability, social diversity and aging in place. In sum, a broad range of related environmental and urban factors significantly impact physical health and emotional well-being.

Poor outdoor air quality—due to carbon monoxide from automobile emissions, pesticides and proximity to facilities that produce or store hazardous substances—has wide-ranging effects. Over half of outdoor air pollution in the U.S. is produced by automobiles, and the rest by industrial and residential sources. Poor indoor air quality is linked to Sick-Building Syndrome, a condition attributed to contaminants from "office machines, cleaning products, construction activities, carpets and furnishings, perfumes, cigarette smoke, water-damaged building

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[1] For providing materials regarding environmental and urban impacts on individual and community health, I would like to thank Dr. Brian Moench, executive director of Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment and Professor Kevin Henry of the University of Utah Geography Department. Thanks also to Phil Allsopp for alerting me to Keynes' talk and essay.

[2] Tom Farley and Deborah Cohen argue that the leading killers of our time have environmental causes – from accidents to chronic illnesses such as heart disease, lung and breast cancer, diabetes and stroke. See: Farley and Cohen, *Prescription for a Healthy Nation: A New Approach to Improving Our Lives by Fixing Our Everyday World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005).

materials, microbial growth (fungal, mold and bacterial), insects and outdoor pollutants."[3]

This poor air quality not only affects our lungs, causing respiratory illnesses such as asthma and pneumonia, but also affects our heart, brain and DNA because it produces inflammation on a cellular level. Particulates in the air inhaled through the lungs can be transmitted through the body via the arterial system, leading to increased rates of heart attack and stroke, especially when exposed for prolonged periods. Poor air quality has also been associated with type 2 diabetes (and diabetes is the greatest healthcare expense), breast cancer, other cancers, birth defects and smaller head size for babies.[4]

Air pollution can also be detrimental to child development—cognitive and motor—due to decreased blood flow to developing brains which can result in lower IQs along with higher rates of asthma and other illnesses.[5] Recent research suggests that autism, which currently affects about one in 110 in the U.S. and has risen in incidence by a staggering eight-hundred percent since 1993, can be caused or exacerbated by environmental factors such as pesticides and cleaners.[6] One study

[3] "Workplace Safety & Health Topics: Indoor Environmental Quality," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (May 18, 2011), http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/indoorenv/ (Accessed September 5, 2011).

[4] For Example, see: American College of Cardiology, "Air Pollution Damages More Than Lungs: Heart And Blood Vessels Suffer Too," *ScienceDaily* (August 14, 2008); Maura Lodovici and Elisabetta Bigagli, "Oxidative Stress and Air Pollution Exposure," *Journal of Toxicology* (August 13, 2011); Shannon Levesque et al., "Air Pollution and the Brain: Subchronic diesel exhaust exposure causes neuroinflammation and elevates early markers of neurodegenerative disease," *Journal of Neuroinflammation* 8, no. 105 (August 24, 2011); Douglas W. Dockery and Peter H. Stone, "Cardiovascular Risks from Fine Particulate Air Pollution," *New England Journal of Medicine* 356 (February 1, 2007): 511–13; Robin C. Puett et al., "Are Particulate Matter Exposures Associated with Risk of Type 2 Diabetes?" *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 3 (March 2011): 384–89; Dan L. Crouse et al., "Postmenopausal Breast Cancer Is Associated with Exposure to Traffic-Related Air Pollution in Montreal, Canada: A Case–Control Study," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 118, no. 11 (November 2010): 1578–83; Julie Von Behren et al., "Residential Traffic Density and Childhood Leukemia Risk," *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* 17, no. 9 (September 2008): 2298–2301; Beate Ritz et al., "Ambient Air Pollution and Risk of Birth Defects in Southern California," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 155, no. 1 (2002): 17–25.

[5] Lilian Calderón-Garcidueñas et al., "Air Pollution, Cognitive Deficits and Brain Abnormalities: A pilot study with children and dogs," *Brain and Cognition* 68, no. 2 (November 2008): 117–27; Carmen Freire et al., "Association of Traffic-Related Air Pollution with Cognitive Development in Children," *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 64, no. 3 (May 2, 2009): 223–28.

[6] Roger Wakefield, "What is Autism?" *Ian & Lynn Langtree's Disabled World* (October 30, 2007), http://www.disabled-world.com/ (Accessed September 5, 2011); Dr. David Amaral, head of the Autism Phenome Project at the University of California, reports: "One worry is that anything from pesticides to other kinds of agents that we introduce into the environment may actually be causing

reports that autism rates are double among those who live along highways. And early life exposure to gas appliances is also associated with worse cognitive performance and attention behavior.[7]

The built environment also presents hazards to health. Fragmented urbanism and a lack of safe places to walk or recreate not only puts more cars on the road, damaging air quality, but also hampers physical as well as community health.

And in fact, people "are more likely to be physically active when they live in neighborhoods with better resources for exercise, such as parks and walking or jogging trails; with less litter, vandalism and graffiti; and with street patterns that present fewer pedestrian obstacles."[8] Lack of access to these resources contributes to sedentary lifestyles which "lead to poor health outcomes such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some types of cancer."[9] In *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv attributes the considerable reduction of time children spend outdoors in recent years to less access to open space, along with a growing addiction to electronic media and parental fear of natural and human predators. Richard Louv correlates this reduced time outdoors with childhood obesity, ADD, stress, depression, and anxiety. He prescribes "thoughtful exposure of youngsters to nature [as] a powerful form of therapy for attention-deficit disorder and other maladies."[10]

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or at least may be exacerbating the causes of autism – 55 percent of the risk for having autism in this study was attributed to shared environmental factors." See: David Weber, "Study Moves Towards Unlocking Autism Mystery," *774 ABC Melbourne,* September 8, 2011.

[7] Heather E. Volk et al., "Residential Proximity to Freeways and Autism in the CHARGE Study," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 6 (December 13, 2010): 873; Eva Morales et al., "Association of Early-life Exposure to Household Gas Appliances and Indoor Nitrogen Dioxide with Cognition and Attention Behavior in Preschoolers," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 169, no. 11 (2009): 1327–36.

[8] Catherine Cubbin, Veronica Pedregon, Susan Egerter, and Paula Braveman, "Where We Live Matters for Our Health: Neighborhoods and Health," *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Issue Brief 3* (September 2008): 3. Available from

[9] National Center for Environmental Health, "Impact of the Built Environment on Health," *Healthy Places Fact Sheet Series* (Jun 2011). For a pdf version, visit: http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/factsheets.htm (13 Sept 2011)

[10] Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2005). For other research finding that exposure to nature can be restorative for children, see: Rachel Kaplan "Adolescents and the Natural Environment," in *Children and Nature,* ed. Kahn and Kellert (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 227–57; John Davis, "Psychological Benefits of Nature Experiences," Naropa University and School of Lost Borders, July 2004; Frances E. Kuo and Andrea Faber Taylor, "A Potential Natural treatment for

Along with the lack of safe places for recreation, the general lack of quality public spaces—outdoors as well as indoor cultural institutions and gathering places[11]—impede healthy and spontaneous social interaction. People rely upon pleasant public spaces to develop "social capital," the neighborliness and trust among people that reduces social isolation and provides a supportive network, setting in place a dynamic and self-adjusting feedback mechanism which effectively monitors places, introducing change when needed. The Robert Wood Johnson Commission reports that: "[n]eighborhoods in which residents express mutual trust and share a willingness to intervene for the public good have been linked with lower homicide rates . . . and greater degrees of social disorder have been related to anxiety and depression."[12] And according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report *Healthy People* in 2010, "A healthy community . . . is one that continuously creates and improves both its physical and social environments, helping people to support one another in aspects of daily life and to develop to their fullest potential."[13]

Deficient quality public space leads to those common contemporary complaints of no "sense of place," no "sense of community," and no "there, there" (Gertrude Stein's assessment of Oakland, CA in the 1930s).[14] Fueled by fear and anxiety, retreat to the private realm only exacerbates these through imbibing increased amounts of mass media, learning about social life virtually through social media, and the deprivation of true civic life.[15]

Along with what is not there, certain elements of places are in fact deleterious to health. Living healthy lives can be more difficult for those residing in neighborhoods where, as the Robert Wood Johnson Commission describes, "intensive tobacco and alcohol advertising targets poorer and minority youth" along

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Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder," *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 9 (September 2004): 1580–86.

[11] Ray Oldenburg describes these informal public gathering places as a type of "third place," after home and work (1999). See: Ray Oldenburg, "The Character of Third Places" in *Urban Design Reader*, ed. Matthew Carmona and Steven Tiesdell (Oxford: The Architectural Press, 2007), 163–69. Originally published in *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and the Other Great Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1999).

[12] Cubbin et al., "Where We Live," 3.

[13] "About Healthy Places," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (October 15, 2009), http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/about.htm (Accessed September 5, 2011).

[14] Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York, NY: Random House, 1937).

[15] Nan Ellin, "Life Support: Nacirema Redux," *Journal of Urbanism: International Journal of Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 1, no. 1 (March 2008): 47–55.

with "concentrated exposure and ready access to fast food outlets and liquor stores."[16] (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
Easily accessible fast-food outlet
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture[17]

[16] Cubbin et al., "Where We Live," 2.

[17] https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2018/07/24/what-drives-consumers-purchase-convenience-foods

Furthermore, "proximity to supermarkets (fresh produce) has been linked with less obesity, while proximity to small convenience stores (which generally do not sell fresh produce) has been linked with more obesity and smoking."[18] The contemporary "obesity epidemic" is also the result of the aforementioned lack of walkability as well as safely accessible (which typically sell places for exercise, such that today, approximately three-quarters of Americans were overweight, including 43% who were obese, in 2020.[19] (See Figure 2.)

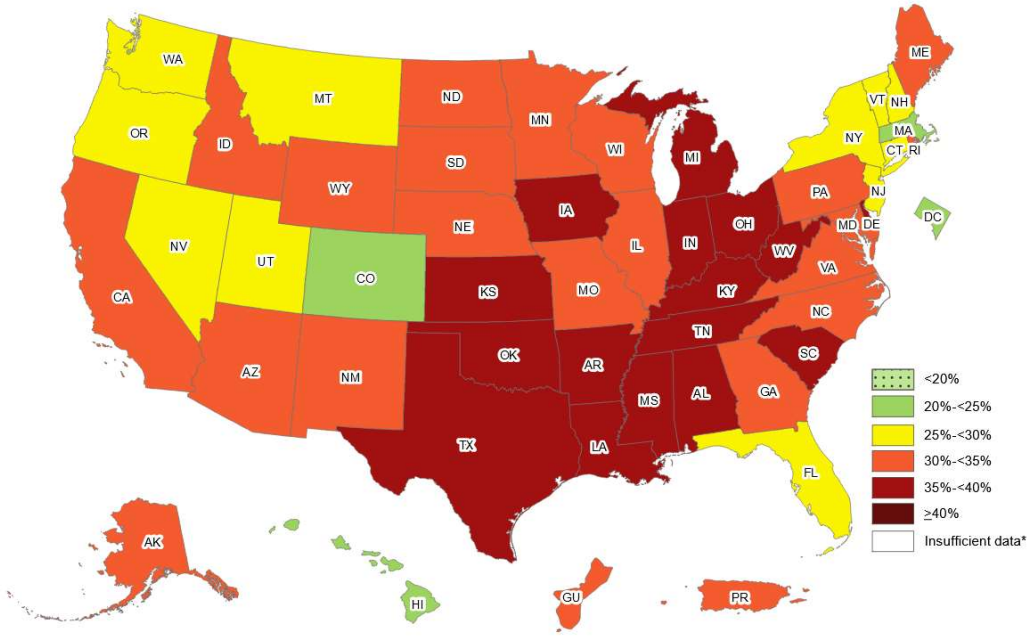

Figure 2
Adult Obesity Prevalence Map
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[20]

[18] Ibid., 3.

[19] "About 74 percent of adults in the U.S. are overweight, according to the CDC," Washington Post,12.18.20, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/most-american-adults-are-overweight/2020/12/18/faefa834-408d-11eb-9453-fc36ba051781_story.html

[20] https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/prevalence-maps.html

These severe and far-reaching urban and environmental hazards to our health amount to what might be described as a Place-Deficit Disorder (PDD). Impacting people around the globe of all ages, ethnicities and walks of life, PDD is a prime contributor to physical and mental illness, accidents, crime, social isolation and weak community bonds.

PLACE-DEFICIT DISORDER

Over the last several decades, great strides have been made toward understanding habitat hazards by environmentalists, physicians, community and public health experts, social workers, psychologists, and urban planners. Nonetheless, PDD is not being addressed as consistently, expeditiously and thoroughly as it could and should. Why not?

Place-Deficit Disorder can be a Catch-22 because the anxiety and stress produced by habitat hazards elicit coping mechanisms that prevent addressing them directly and effectively; in particular, denial, deflection and distraction. In addition, living in deficient places can hamper the ability to understand the true sources of dissatisfaction and thereby address them.

Efforts that *are* made to address habitat hazards related to the built environment are often compromised or counterproductive. For instance, in search of an authenticity of place, we may turn to branders—usually from another city or even country—who ironically stamp similar marks of "distinction" (brands) wherever they go. Seeking to enhance quality of life, we commission starchitects, often more interested in prestige, profit, and power than with serving the greater good. In search of urban vitality, made-to-order "lifestyle centers" are plopped onto greenfield sites (see Figure 3). Stakeholder meetings are convened to obtain buy-in, rather than feedback. And so on.

Treating place deficits in isolation from one another and the larger context also contributes to an array of counterproductive actions related to urban development and environmental protection. As Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley of the Brookings Institution emphasize:

> Federal mortgage-interest and property-tax deductions give people a subtle incentive to buy bigger houses on bigger lots, which almost by definition are found in the suburbs. States also spend more money building new roads—which make new housing developments and strip malls not only accessible but financially feasible—than they do repairing existing roads. Environmental regulations make building offices and factories on abandoned urban industrial sites complicated and time-consuming, and thus render untouched suburban land particularly appealing … New development, spawned by highways, will necessitate expensive state-funded infrastructure,

such as sewer systems, water pipes and new side roads. Meanwhile, existing roads, pipes and sewers, which already cost taxpayers plenty of money, are either not used to the full or starved of funds for repair.[21]

Figure 3
The Shops at Arbor Lakes, a lifestyle center in Maple Grove, Minnesota
Source: Mgwiki/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA

No one, Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley contend, "stopped to consider how these rules, taken together, would affect the places where people live and work. The rules are simply the implacable results of seemingly disparate policies, each with unintended consequences." This failure to take an integrated approach means that

[21] Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley, "Divided We Sprawl," *The Atlantic Monthly Online* (December 1999), http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/99dec/9912katz.htm (Accessed September 5, 2011).

"urban *and* suburban communities lose out as a result of voracious growth in undeveloped areas and slower growth or absolute decline in older places."[22]

Without looking at the big picture and the long-term, it is difficult to garner investment in initiatives that require significant funding early on and yield long-term savings, rather than those requiring smaller up-front costs that continue to escalate over time. It is also difficult to invest in initiatives that may exact savings and value that are non-monetary, or that may translate into monetary savings, such as reducing the costs of healthcare or infrastructure construction and maintenance (Social Return on Investment, or SROI). For these reasons, there is a typical lethargy in the United States with regard to adopting policies and instituting regulatory practices that raise national ambient air quality standards, improve the quality of school playgrounds and lunch programs, facilitate urban agriculture, support adaptive reuse of existing properties and local businesses, improve bike and pedestrian transit opportunities, and other means to treat PDD.

A large taproot of this failure to take an integrated approach may derive from the Western separation of people from nature, along with related efforts to control or harness nature for human ends.[23] The modern urban ideal of the functional city with its separation of uses, emphasis on figure rather than figure-plus-field, and *tabula rasa* master planning only exacerbated the environmental devastation, social isolation, lack of urban vitality and resulting range of physical and mental health issues described above.[24] Today, a plethora of urban prescriptions and self-help books promise to heal what ails us, rarely recognizing the obvious, yet oddly overlooked inextricability of people and place.[25]

Due at least in part to PDD, the quest to improve places for all people is too often estranged from the places and communities themselves. Consequently, an untold number of excellent proposals are never realized, or are unfortunately compromised, while many suboptimal plans are implemented. As a result, valuable

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[22] Ibid.

[23] As Charlene Spretnak maintains, "Perhaps the most significant feature of the modern worldview is its forceful intensification of three core discontinuities present in Western thought since the era of classical Greek philosophy: That there is a radical break between humans and nature, body and mind, and self and the world." See: Spretnak, "The Resurgence of the Real: How a new perception of body, nature, and place is transforming the world," *Utne Reader* (July/August 1997).

[24] See: Nan Ellin, *Integral Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[25] Symptomatic of and supporting this oversight, research and practice silos typically separate people (social/behavioral sciences and "helping" professions) from place (planning and design).

resources—human, economic, political, environmental—are squandered, and our towns, cities and regions suffer the consequences.

While the more sensitive/vulnerable inhabitants—including the very young, very old, physically challenged, and hyper-aware—are often canaries in the coal mines, their call is rarely heeded. Those able to compensate for place deficits typically attribute canary calls to individual frailties. While not necessarily unsympathetic, their failure to understand them as red alerts to larger structural issues that deeply impact everyone hampers the effective treatment of PDD.

As psychologist James Hillman has pointed out, a great many complaints registered by individuals seeking therapy derive from actual challenges in their physical environments. It is often, he recounts, those who are most in-tune with their surroundings—and its discontents—who turn to psychotherapy for relief. Yet it is not therapy they need, or medication, Hillman contends, but better places.[26] The places themselves are in need of therapy, and it is helpful for people to be engaged. As Hillman advises: "To improve yourself, you improve your city."[27] The inverse, that people's actions can negatively impact places, goes without saying. So clearly, healing our selves and our places go hand-in-hand.

To restore health to places and people, the deep mutual impacts between them must be recognized and tended to more fully. As long as we disaggregate them, our landscapes and lives also become fragmented, challenging a sense of wholeness and severely impairing our ability to link cause and effect, in a vicious downward spiral. How to reverse the spiral?

HABITAT HEALING AND PLACE THERAPY

We use strong words when we talk about places, often proclaiming our "love" or "hate" for a city, neighborhood, house or other building. Indeed, we probably use these words more often with regard to place than people. Needless to say, the places we love support us, while places we hate strain us. How can we make places that are more livable and lovable?

As both Martin Heidegger and Karsten Harries have suggested, we need to know how to live in order to design for life.[28] Knowing how to live comes in large

[26] James Hillman, personal communication with author, 2008; James Hillman, "'Man is by Nature a Political Animal': Patient as Citizen," (1990) in *City and Soul*, ed. Robert J. Leaver (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2006), 52–53.

[27] James Hillman, *City and Soul*, 115.

[28] See: Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (NY: Harper and Row, 1971); Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

part from living with people and in places that provide models of civility, respect, and dignity—the original meaning of the word "urbanity."[29] These places typically weave vital urban cores and corridors into the natural landscape, instilling it with a sense of humility, wonder, awe, and serenity. In the public spaces, we may observe strangers greeting one another, people of all ages and incomes, families, friends and couples walking arm-in-arm or holding hands, periodic public displays of affection, music, art, water, smiling, laughter—and limited mobile phone usage, as well as eating and drinking on the run. Feeling good, people tend to look good, another sign of good places.

People raised in such places are fortunate. But what about those who are not? Like breaking a familial cycle of poverty, abuse or neglect, people living in impoverished, abused and neglected places have to break the cycle, or reverse the spiral. They can do this by following a "Path toward Prosperity" consisting of six steps: Prospect, Polish, Propose, Prototype, Promote and Present illustrated in Figure 4. Anyone can walk this path—professionals in the field of urbanism and others alike. The only precondition is a willingness to let the path take us someplace we've never been before. The role of professionals engaged in improving places is to direct communities to this path and guide them along it.

The first step along the pathway is an excavation to **prospect** for buried gems, by listening to self, others and places. Listening to self, or personal prospecting, begins with self-reflection and the expression of these initial thoughts and ideas through words and images. This step recognizes important hunches that might otherwise be overlooked, honoring individual perspectives and intuitions.[30] Personal prospecting is also essential because, left buried, an inner voice may grow so loud so that it is impossible to hear anything else, including the voices of others or of significant research findings. Just as flight attendants advise us to secure our own oxygen masks before assisting others, it is important we listen to ourselves so we can be receptive to others. To breathe life into our places, we must first breathe well ourselves.

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[29] The Oxford English Dictionary defines urbanity as "courtesy, refinement or elegance of manner," in use since 1825, as well as "life in a city," since 1898.

[30] This process corrects the tendency to erase our own personal histories and preferences. Leonie Sandercock describes this problem with regard to students of urban planning: "Students have been constituted as targets for a one-directional flow of skills and knowledge, without the interference of gender, race, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation; and they have been expected to sever the connections between personal and professional worlds as they learn to subordinate their other identities to the task of becoming a professional." Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 200.

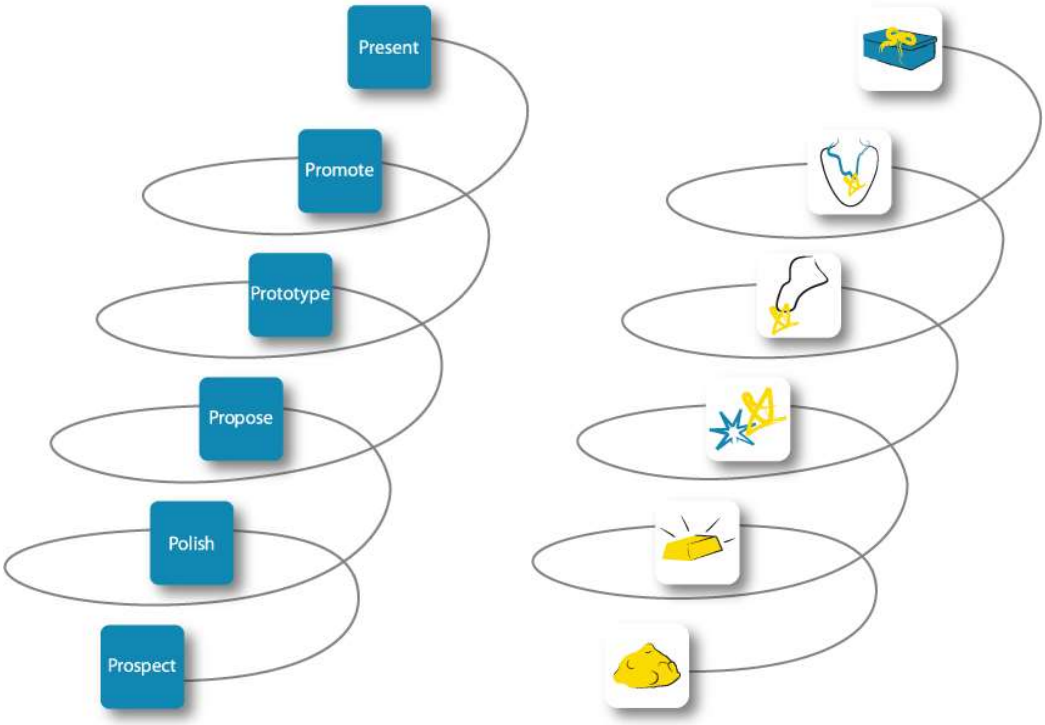

Figure 4
Path toward Prosperity from bottom to top:
Prospect → Polish → Propose → Prototype → Promote → Present

Once personal gems are revealed, the next step is collective prospecting which involves sharing with others to obtain feedback and learn about their uncovered gems. At the same time, place prospecting begins, as gems related to the specific locale are extracted through research into the place (historical, geographical, political, economic, cultural) along with creative community engagement. Then, additional research is undertaken into best practices and other topics relevant to the project. All of this information contributes to **polishing** the gems. The next step is to envision best possibilities and **propose** plans, policies and designs for crafting polished nuggets into jewels that add economic, social, aesthetic and environmental value to places. At this point, the proposal may be **prototyped** for testing and additional feedback. Finally, the concept is **promoted** to a larger public to obtain even more input and build support. Well-taken, these steps generate the resources required to implement the project along the way.

Ultimately, the project is **presented** to trustworthy partners capable of realizing the vision on an ongoing basis, and the initial catalyst may move on to catalyze other projects. Neither mountains (large interventions imposed on a place) nor pebbles strewn about (too small to have a collective impact), these jewels are graciously endowed to adorn and enrich places and communities.

Pursuing the path to prosperity ignites sparks of creativity that animate places so they ring true to all, become the pride of communities who maintain and adapt them over time, and have an enduring positive impact. This is because the path applies "salutogenesis," an approach to healing that "focuses on factors that support human health and well-being rather than on factors that cause disease."[31] In community development, this is described as ABCD, or Asset-Based Community Development.[32] Rather than focus on what isn't working (the litany of habitat hazards above), the path toward prosperity considers habitat holistically and builds on what *is* working. This process activates under-utilized resources while attracting new ones, increasing resiliency against problems when they arise and sometimes even transforming problems into solutions.

SIDEWAYS URBANISM

Historically, visionary planning and urban design were essentially top-down. The reaction since the 1960s was emphatically bottom-up. In recent decades, diluted versions of both have characterized most efforts with for the most part mixed or underwhelming results. Neither top-down, nor bottom-up, the path toward prosperity is a *sideways urbanism* that can be initiated by political leaders, planners, architects, urban designers, landscape architects, artists, developers, philanthropic organizations, cultural institutions or interested community members who quickly invite all stakeholders to join them in refining and realizing the vision.

Instead of diminishing the power of those in charge, sideways urbanism actually empowers them because they have enabled or at least sanctioned it to occur, and via co-creation the process delivers a product that has been polished by the interested parties who have already taken ownership of the project, invested in making it happen, and take pride in seeing it accomplished. Indeed, so much has already been done by the time a project reaches the final decision-makers, this process greatly reduces the huge investment typically needed to get an idea

[31] Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, 2007), 469.

[32] ABCD is a methodology that seeks to uncover the strengths within communities as a means for sustainable development. The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, established by John McKnight and John Kretzmann is based at Northwestern University.

approved, allocate resources for its implementation and obtain the general public's support. Without this process, these necessary steps are unreliable at best. With it, the project has already been put into action and the simple rubber stamp of decision-makers (now in the supporting role of true civil servants and community leaders) ensures their popularity and continued support from the community. Plus, afterwards, they can claim bragging rights to a highly successful transformation in their city or town.

FROM SCARE-CITY TO ABUNDANCE

Reversing the spiral of place-deficit disorder begins with taking the first step of personal prospecting and place prospecting with others. No matter how small, taking that first step is also taking responsibility for making a positive difference.

While at times, it may seem that taking one step forward brings us two steps back, once on the path, we can be assured we are moving toward healing and restoration. Pursuing the path toward prosperity initiates a community-building process that, in turn, makes prospecting and each subsequent step much easier. This is because the sense of self-worth which derives from community allows a freedom of expression without fear of retribution or exclusion. Community gives us courage (from the Old French *corage,* meaning from/with heart) to be true to self by providing "a structure of belonging."[33] Instead of feeling shame and ascribing blame, the comfort of community also allows us to trust others, feel compassion, have hope and express generosity.

The clear vision that comes from being true to ourselves, neither myopia nor tunnel vision, also enables us to listen to others as well as places so that collective envisioning transpires. By means of collective envisioning, we produce good places and take care of them. Individually, everyone has personal insecurities and professional limitations. Lack of community exacerbates these, whereas the presence of community provides a security blanket which encourages all to be calmer, happier, more productive, wiser. The path toward prosperity is a collective spiral upwards, rather than a downward spiral of resentment, competition, and fear. Assuming responsibility together, we transform what Peter Block describes as a "retributive society" into a "restorative society."[34]

Rather than cope with poor-quality places by way of denial, deflection or distraction, the path toward prosperity applies two kinds of vision: the ability to see

[33] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008).

[34] Id. Peter Block, *Community*.

things clearly and a vision for a better future. It entails listening to self, others, and places to grow in awareness and understanding, engaging in conversations that paint a vision of what could be, and energizing all to implement that vision. Building upon individual and collective strengths, we can build upon the assets of our places too so they, in turn, support us. Collectively envisioning better futures, we can sustain—rather than strain—life by maintaining healthy bodies, relationships, communities, and places. In the process, we restore those connections severed between people and nature, body, and soul, and among people.

SLOW, FLOW, LOW AND LOCAL

We are already making significant headway toward treating place-deficit disorder. Recently, new developments and many older suburbs and urban cores have introduced transit and pedestrian-oriented development, park networks, permaculture, neighborhood business districts and other strategies to enhance livability. Performance-based guidelines that encourage walkability and integrate nature into the city are replacing regulations that focus on traffic flow and risk mitigation. Overall, we have seen concerted efforts toward environmental protection; conservation of historic urban fabrics; urban and suburban revitalization; emphasis on bioregions and regional governance; attention to "smart growth" and sustainability; interest in creating quality public spaces and public transit systems; attention toward urban infill along with brownfield and greyfield conversions; form-based coding rather than land-use zoning; and the exponential growth of neighborhood associations and community gardens along with the establishment of community land trusts.[35] The American Planning Association (e.g. *Resource Guide for Healthy Community Planning*[36]), American Institute of Architects (e.g. *Blueprint for Better Cities*[37]), and numerous other organizations[38] have become powerful allies and advocates for creating healthy, livable places.[39]

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[35] See Ellin, *Integral Urbanism*.

[36] https://www.washington-apa.org/assets/docs/2015/Ten_Big_Ideas/October_Revisions/aparesourceguide_final_10.15.15.pdf

[37] https://www.aia.org/resources/205971-blueprint-for-better-cities

[38] For instance, https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/environmental-health/healthy-community-design and https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/step_it_up.htm

[39] Most significant are The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (www.rwjf.org/), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/) and the American Planning Association (http://planninghealthycommunities.webs.com/). Rapidly proliferating interdisciplinary organizations are also playing an important role, including the Center for Ecoliteracy (www.ecoliteracy.org), Design for Health (www.designforhealth.net), Shaping Footprints (www.sfpinc.org), Active Living by Design (www.activelivingbydesign.org), Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org), Walkable Communities (www.walkablecommunities.org), Well Community Association and Foundation (www.wellcommunity.org), The Urbal Institute

These significant efforts are redefining urbanity, with programmatic density (horizontal and vertical mixed-use) emerging in suburban areas and small towns while agriculture is increasingly appearing in urban cores.

Recurrent themes of these efforts are Slow, Flow, Low and Local. Placing a brake on rapid change and the havoc it can wreak, **slow**ness is apparent in the Slow City and Slow Food Movements, recalling Mae West's observation that "anything worth doing is worth doing slowly." Slowness is also apparent in appeals for incremental urbanism.[40] The evolved contextualism of these efforts finds existing **flow**s, then honors them and/or unblocks them to clear physical as well as social blockages and bring urban and economic revitalization.[41] The most simple, elegant and efficient urban and environmental solutions are often **low**-impact and low-tech, for instance, the use of swales, cisterns and grey water instead of sewers and municipal water, along with urban agriculture replacing nonproductive rights-of-way, grass lawns and the purchase of produce from grocery stores. The mantra of the moment is to grow, eat, shop and hire local (see Figure 5).

Increasingly, practitioners of planning, urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture are regarding human habitat as part of nature rather than a machine for living. Increasing numbers are working toward place prosperity, rather than aiming principally for power, prestige, and profits. Practitioners are engaging with local communities in a more meaningful way, rendering the planning and development process more inclusive, accountable, and effective. For instance, the Community-Based Planning Task Force of the Municipal Arts Society Planning Center recently produced the paper "Planning for All New Yorkers" to encourage wider involvement in revising New York's land use process.[42] Practitioners are also

(www.turnstone.tv/theurbalinstitut.html), Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institute (www.brookings.edu/metro.aspx), Project for Livable Communities (www.projectlivablecommunities.org), Low Impact Development Center (http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/) and the Slow Cities Movement (www.cittaslow.net).

[40] See: Wayne Attoe and Donn Logan, *American Urban Architecture: Catalysts in the Design of Cities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989); Daniel Kemmis, *The Good City and the Good Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

[41] As defined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1990), flow is the intense experience situated between boredom and overstimulation, characterized by immersion, awareness and a sense of harmony, meaning and purpose. While generally intended for enhancing individual performance such as in athletics, it is also useful to consider how places might be "in flow." For a discussion of applying this concept of flow to urbanism, see Ellin, *Integral Urbanism*, 5–7.

[42] The Campaign for Community Based Planning, "Planning for All New Yorkers: A 21st Century Upgrade for New York's Planning Process" (Municipal Arts Society Planning Center, 2010). For a pdf version, visit: http://prattcenter.net/planning-future (Accessed September 6, 2011).

developing more effective tools for creative engagement, unleashed by ubiquitous, interactive mobile technologies.[43]

Figure 5
In front of a Whole Foods store where local food vendors are championed
Source: Nan Ellin

Amidst the economic and social upheavals of the Great Depression in 1930, the economist John Maynard Keynes perhaps presaged the current economic climate, writing: "I look forward … to the greatest change which has ever occurred in the material environment of life for human beings in the

[43] See Diane Scearce, "Connected Citizens: The Power, Peril and Potential of Networks," in *Knight Foundation and Monitor Institute Report* (Spring 2011). An electronic version of this report can be found at: https://knight.box.net/shared/ng70lqn9hb (Accessed September 6, 2011).

aggregate … We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful."[44] Until then, Keynes suggested:

> For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.[45]

Approaching the centenary of Keynes's prophesy, a significant shift has been underway, apparent in broad-based efforts to enhance the quality of places. Now, we need only ensure and accelerate the upward spiral toward place prosperity by training our sights on the whole, rather than on fragments, to recognize assets as well as deficits, and the deep mutual impacts of our cities and ourselves.

[44] John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren (1930)," in *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W. W.Norton, 1963), 358–73.

[45] Ibid.