

The role of neighborhoods in the success of cities

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Introduction

I approach the topic in terms of the field of Environment-Behavior Studies (EBS). That field is concerned with the interaction of people and physical environments and the mechanisms that are involved. The concern is with the congruence of environments with people's wants which, in turn, are related to their bio-social, psychological and cultural characteristics. I have repeatedly argued that EBS is best understood in terms of what I call "the three basic questions" (RAPOPORT, 2000a). The second of these is especially relevant here and bears on the notion of "success" of cities.

Question 2 asks: What effects do which environments have on which groups of people, under what circumstances and why? I have argued that the principal influence of the environment on people is habitat selection – they choose certain environments and reject others (RAPOPORT, 1980 and 1983a). Choice (and the ability to choose) also modifies (and, often moderates) other specific effects of environments on people. In other words, people choose settings which they evaluate as having positive environmental quality (RAPOPORT, 1995a (1990)). Successful cities then are those that are *chosen* by people who have choice.¹ In discussing successful cities we are thus concerned with how and why people evaluate cities positively or negatively.

Constancy and change

In the last few years much has been said about the "New Millennium," "New Century," "new economy" and new everything. More generally, for quite some time now, the emphasis has been on novelty, i.e. *change*. Moreover, regarding human behavior (including culture) the emphasis has been on its extreme variability and apparent malleability. At the moment, however, in a number of human sciences, there is an ongoing, and major revival of an interest in, and emphasis on constancy – although that is still rejected by much mainstream social science. (See discussion and references in RAPOPORT, 2000a, cf. LOPREATO and CRIPPEN, 1999).

One can discuss constancy regarding both *people* and *environments*.

Constancy and change – People

Regarding people (anthropos), findings from a number of sciences – sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, behavior ecology, behavior genetics, cognitive neuroscience, cognitive genetics and others – increasingly show constant aspects of human behavior. It is paradoxical that science, changing ever more rapidly, is rediscovering constancy. All this adds up to a revival of the existence of *human nature* (e.g. WILSON, 1998, 2000 and 2001; PINKER, 1997; KONNER, 2002, among many others). It would then follow that both positive (supportive) and negative (inhibiting, destructive) aspects of environment may be related to such human constants. Research is continuing, e.g. on the possible continuity of humans and other animals (including animal architecture), the evolution of and constraints on culture and related topics. Clearly, research is urgently needed on constancy and change, variability and invariance, the range of variability in various domains, the size of groups, constraints on human nature and, especially on environmental consequences.

It follows, both regarding people and environments, that in order to understand the present (and the future) one needs to know the past – what there was, how it was and how we got where we are now (MITHEN, 1996; RAPOPORT, 1990a).

If we look at some mechanisms of Environment-Behavior Relations – EBR (the third of the three basic questions of EBS) – then it can be suggested that perception is basically unchanged since human origins and constant, cognition is more variable but more constant than had been thought (e.g. the beginning of cognitive genetics) whereas evaluation and preference are more variable and changeable, although even here there are arguments for constancy (ORIANI and HEERWAGEN, 1992; KAPLAN, 1992; WILSON, 1984). There may even be some constancy with regard to meaning – often con-

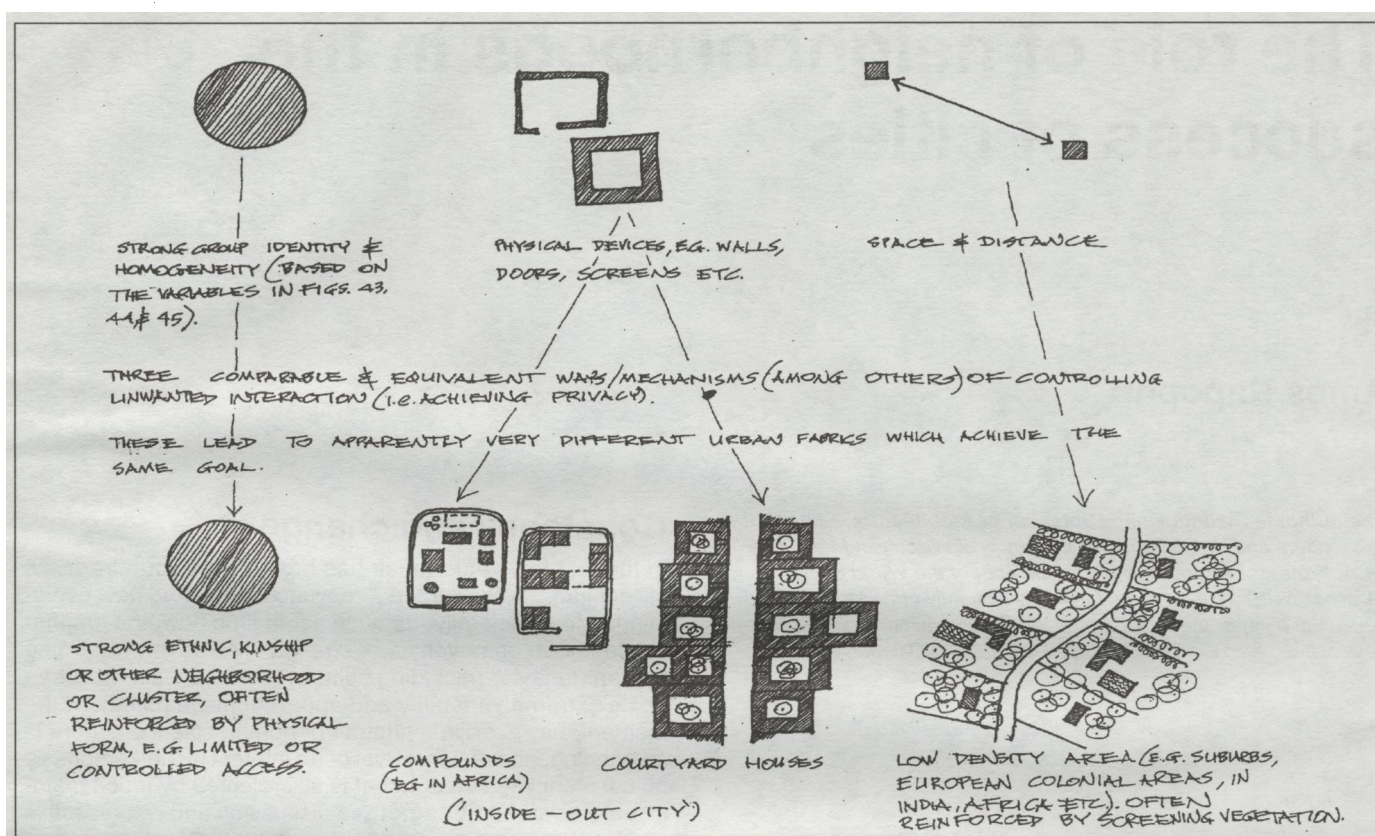


Fig. 1: Different specific expressions of a cultural universal – the need to control unwanted interaction (i.e. achieve privacy). (In press, fig. 40, based partly on Rapoport, 1977, figs. 6.1, p. 337 and 6.2, p. 339; cf. pp. 289-298).

sidered to be most variable (RAPOPORT, 1990a and 1990b; CHERULNIK and WILDERMAN, 1986).

It is also possible that there can be cross-culturally different responses to invariants and wants and even universals, such as the need for privacy (RAPOPORT, 1977, fig. 6.1, p. 337 and fig. 6.2, p. 339; cf. pp. 289-298; in press fig. 40) – see fig. 1. When groups are homogenous and the "grain" of the environment fine, these different responses can co-exist and people can choose among them. This relates to my discussion below about constancy in environments and the topic of this paper. At this point, in concluding this section, it should be pointed out that the discussion above means that, in effect, it becomes possible to dismantle, operationalize and "flesh out" the extremely broad and abstract term "anthropos" (RAPOPORT, 1998, especially figs. 4, 5 and 6, pp. 7-12; 2000a and 2000b; in press, especially figs. 43, 44 and 45) – see figures 2, 3 and 4.

Constancy and change – Environments

This also applies to the *environment* (which, of course, also needs to be dismantled (RAPOPORT, 1998; 2000a and 2000b; in press)). This follows from my argument that it is possible to learn from the past, from traditional settlements (RAPOPORT, 1987, 1995 (1986) and 2000b). I point out that past environments are an incredible resource, a laboratory, a repertoire and lexicon of solutions to recurring problems. Such environments must, of course, include pre-literate and vernacular environments and spontaneous settlements so as to provide the largest and most varied body of evidence. This is also essential since one needs to consider the whole cultural landscape – and cities are cultural landscapes *par excellence*. Those are not "designed" nor planned in the usual meaning of the word (RAPOPORT, 1992).²

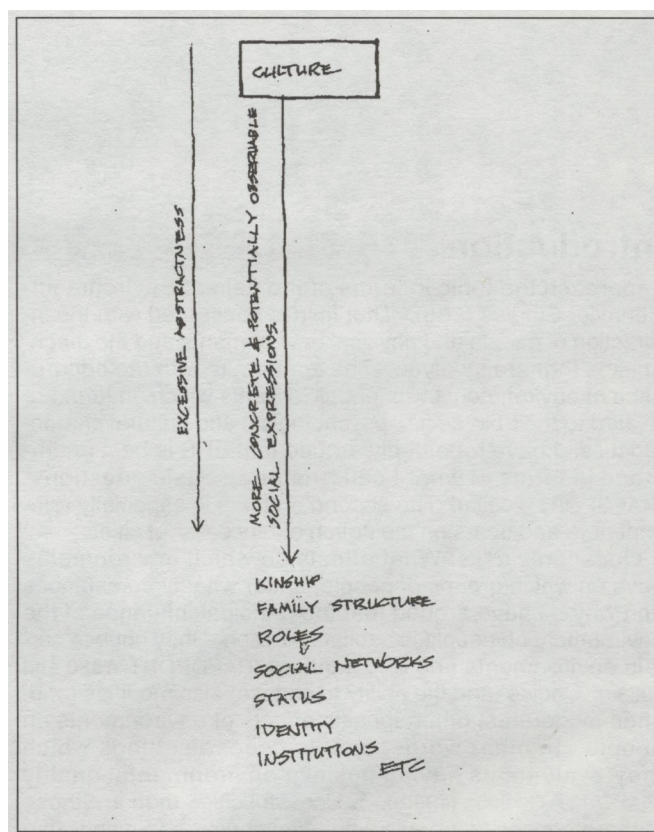


Fig. 2: Dismantling "culture" in response to the problem of excessive abstractness. (In press, fig. 43, based on Rapoport, 1998, fig. 4, p. 8).

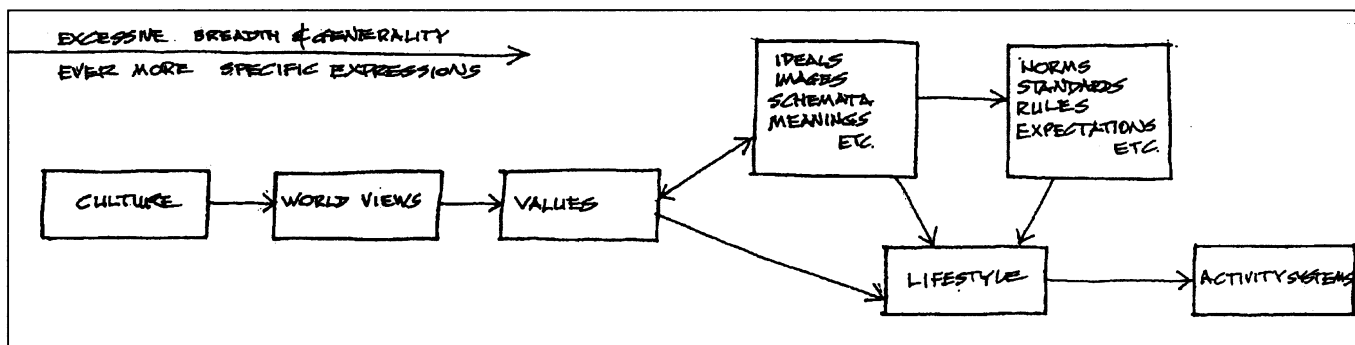


Fig. 3: Dismantling "culture" in response to the problem of excessive breadth and generality. (In press, fig. 44, based on Rapoport, 1998, fig. 5, p. 9).

If these arguments are valid, then there will be constancy and hence lessons from the past (RAPOPORT, 1983b). In any case, however, as in the case of humans, the extent, roles, interplay, relative importance in any given case of constancy and change are *empirical questions*. These, as already pointed out, urgently need research since they have been neglected.

In the case of built environments it can be suggested that *scale* may play a role in the degree of constancy. In fact, the Ekistic Grid could play a useful role in relating scale and the degree of constancy and in EBS generally.

I would suggest that, in general, smaller scale elements are more constant than large-scale elements. Although my topic is neighborhoods, it is important to emphasize that this constancy may be even more marked at even smaller scales.

One example is pedestrian streets (RAPOPORT, 1990a). Another is some traditional houses which, except for certain services, are still more than acceptable (RAPOPORT, 1969). During the conference a newspaper story dealing with Pompeii indirectly supported this; photographs of villas showed dwellings that could have been contemporary (BARTETZKO, 2001).

In connection with cities, Hans Blumenfeld (1953) argued that "Metropolis" was the first new urban form in 2000 years, implying that smaller settlements are more constant. During the 1950s and 1960s Jean Gottmann proposed another new urban form – Megalopolis. In fact, Ekistics is commonly associated with an emphasis on change – not just Metropolis and Megalopolis, but Doxiadis' concept of *Ecumenopolis*.

Also, in 1963/64, Melvin Webber published two influential

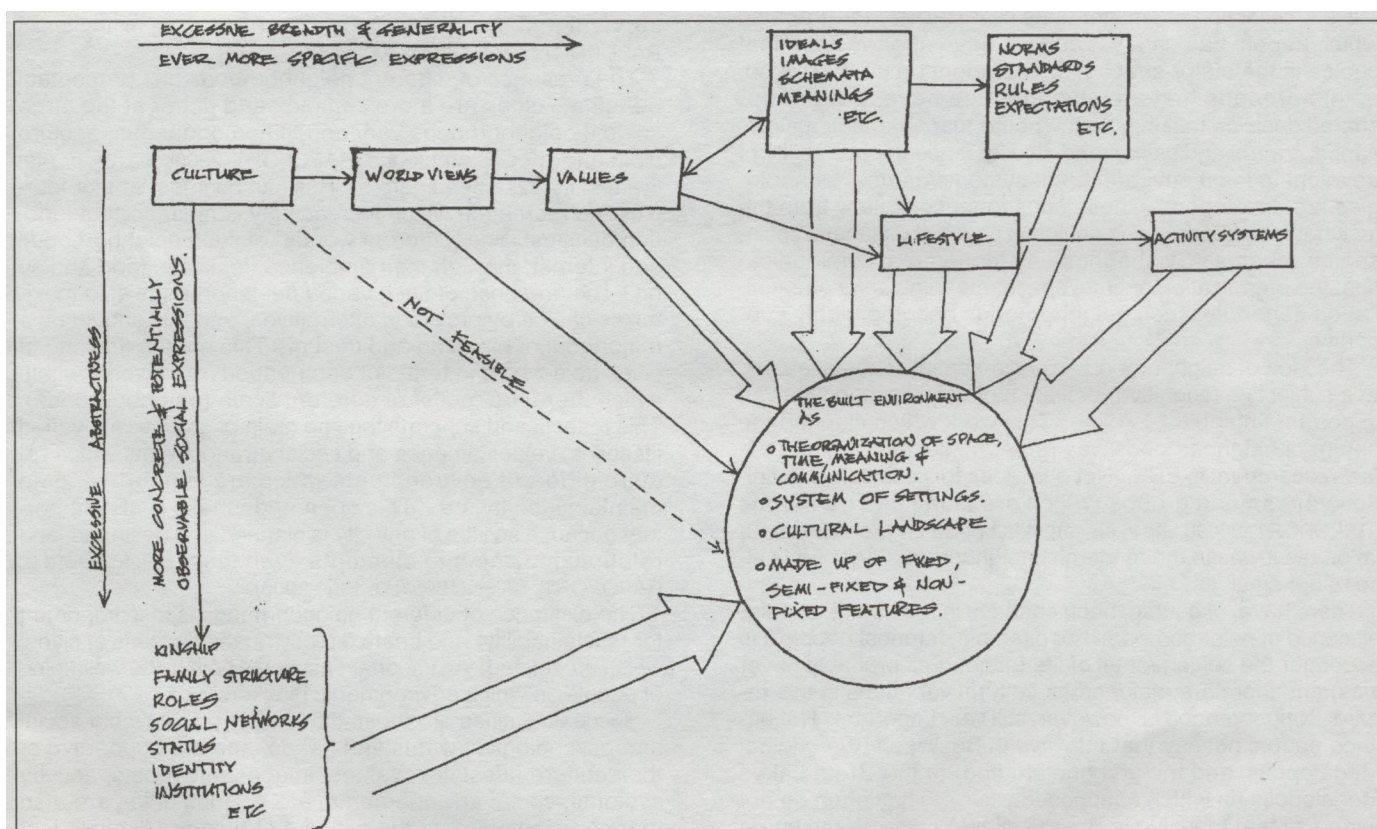


Fig. 4: Combined diagram of the two dismantlings of "culture," relating its expressions to the built environment (e.g. housing). The width of the arrows corresponds approximately to the feasibility and ease of relating the various elements. (In press, fig. 45, Rapoport, 2000b, fig. 4, p. 149; Rapoport, 2000a, fig. 2, p. 129).

papers on the increasing irrelevance of locality and neighborhood (WEBBER, 1963 and 1964). I made the point at the time that it was people like Webber, in places like Berkeley, California (where he was based), who were most active in defending *their* neighborhood against freeways, protecting trees, etc. Similar arguments, both for and against the importance of locality, are now heard about the world wide web, the Internet, etc. Again, research is needed, and the new field of social network analysis, which treats all types of networks as one, could help discover *which* networks will change and which will not (McMAHON et al., 2001).

Not as well known as the work discussed above is another study done by the Athens Center of Ekistics. This bears on this question of scale/constancy relationships in the urban environment. I refer to the HUCO-Human Community studies that were published in 1980 but available earlier (ATHENS CENTER OF EKISTICS, 1980).³ This study made a very important point which, however, was neither picked up nor developed. I interpret it as saying that at smaller scales, *specifically the neighborhood*, there was *much more constancy* than at larger scales. I used this insight in my work (e.g. RAPOPORT, 1978; 1983b and 1997). I argued that people experientially do not live in Megalopolis or Metropolis, or even in cities – they live in *neighborhoods*, as will be discussed below.

Neighborhoods

It should be emphasized that “neighborhood” does not necessarily involve *neighboring*, as is often suggested. In fact, however, there often is in some, and there needs to be a range of neighborhoods of different sorts. Some will be local and intensive, others extensive; some homogeneous, others heterogeneous (RAPOPORT, 1977 and 1997). The city as a whole, however, is always and is increasingly heterogeneous – it is a collection of smaller units (RAPOPORT, 1981) among which people can choose, and we have already seen that choice is the major effect of environment on people. Also, neighborhoods that are chosen often have “bottom-up” shared decision making, hence better management, maintenance, control and safety, and also increase the possibility of developing local environmental systems as new technologies are developed.⁴ These consequences follow from the fact that “neighborhood” is not just a physical unit, but a socio-spatial schema. By sharing rules, non-verbal communication, the organization of time, space, meaning and communication generally, such neighborhoods become highly supportive.

The idea of neighborhood as socio-spatial schema leading to a subjective (cognitive) definition of neighborhood was an important finding (LEE, 1968). This work which clarified the nature of neighborhoods was rather neglected, except by a few researchers in EBS. Not only does this subjective definition vary among groups (which are small and numerous (RAPOPORT, 2000b and in press)), it is based on area *not* population (as it was in the modernist neighborhood unit) – it is also rather small.

There have, of course, been changes in the nature and significance of neighborhood. For example, for most people it is no longer the setting for all of life (although it probably never was) and there are major cross-cultural variations in this regard. Neighborhood is, however, still very important. Not only do people not say that they live in BosWash (the original Megalopolis, and the first one studied) or the Great Lakes Megalopolis (in which I supposedly live). They often do not even say that they live in Boston, New York or Washington (except, possibly, while traveling). Rather, they live in Brookline or Newton Massachusetts; Chelsea or the Upper East Side of New York (which is only Manhattan to most people in the first

place), Dupont or Adams Morgan in Washington DC.

Given the nature of neighborhood as described above one could argue that, as cities get larger, merge into Megalopolises, become urban regions with “Edge Cities,” and so on, neighborhoods may well become *more important* (RAPOPORT, 1977 and 1997). They may become the environmental analogue of the social science concept of intermediate institutions/intermediate structures which also become more important as the scale of societies grows. On this view, they become the figure against the blurred ground of larger urban systems. They become a secure “base” from which one ventures out and to which one returns. This one knows, there one feels familiar and comfortable. One identifies with the size of the neighborhood found by Lee and subsequent work, and even micro-neighborhood (as discussed below in the case of Milwaukee).⁵ Recent evidence supports these arguments (see RAPOPORT, 1997 and references therein). I begin that paper with Webber (1963 and 1964) and also conclude with Webber (1996) where he admits that he was wrong. Arguments in their strong form about effects of the internet/web are also likely to be wrong due to the role of human nature (discussed earlier). As already suggested, some social networks will change (to different degrees), others not; constancy *and* change both play a role.

The growing importance of neighborhoods is due not only for the reasons already given. Their importance also increases because cities are becoming much more heterogeneous, diverse and multicultural. This is due to immigration patterns and the multiplicity of lifestyle groups (RAPOPORT, 2000b and in press). Given this, some (although not all) members of such groups are seeking some measure of homogeneity (also subjectively defined) both in developing and developed countries. This is for reasons of supportiveness; maintaining appropriate institutions and identity; for cultural survival and syncretism (RAPOPORT, 1983c, examples in RAPOPORT, 1977, 1997, 2000b, and in press).

The presence of different neighborhoods has perceptual benefits – cities are more complex and richer at the large scale if neighborhoods vary and, if homogeneous, acquire clear and specific ambience (RAPOPORT, 2000b, fig. 21, p. 149; in press, fig. 42) – see figure 5. This can be important for tourism and recreation which increasingly is an important function of cities. The “different worlds” of such neighborhoods add interest, through their ambience, festivals, food and so on. The presence of such varied neighborhoods also maximizes choice by providing alternatives, and this should be a major goal of planning and design. This means thinking of cities as a whole in terms of open-ended frameworks within which there are “cells” of different scale (neighborhoods). This reflects and supports the fine grain of groups with varied lifestyles, values, images and social arrangements which require different environments which are supportive, help maintain identity, etc. This open-endedness is also important because so little of any city is planned and designed, and relationships among elements even less (see footnote 2; RAPOPORT, 1995c (1990/91), 1999-2000).

The existence of different neighborhoods is also important for “sustainability” and bears directly on the success of cities, which are related. An important aspect of both is the well-being of people, in which environments play a role.

Successful cities are those that satisfy people’s bio-social and psychological wants and needs, and are supportive of their culture (lifestyles, values, images and ideals, activity systems, social arrangements, etc.). Such cities are also more “sustainable”⁶ in the sense that they are likely to last longer, do not become obsolete as quickly, needing to be rebuilt. This is especially the case because these attributes are mainly (although not entirely) relative to neighborhoods. As

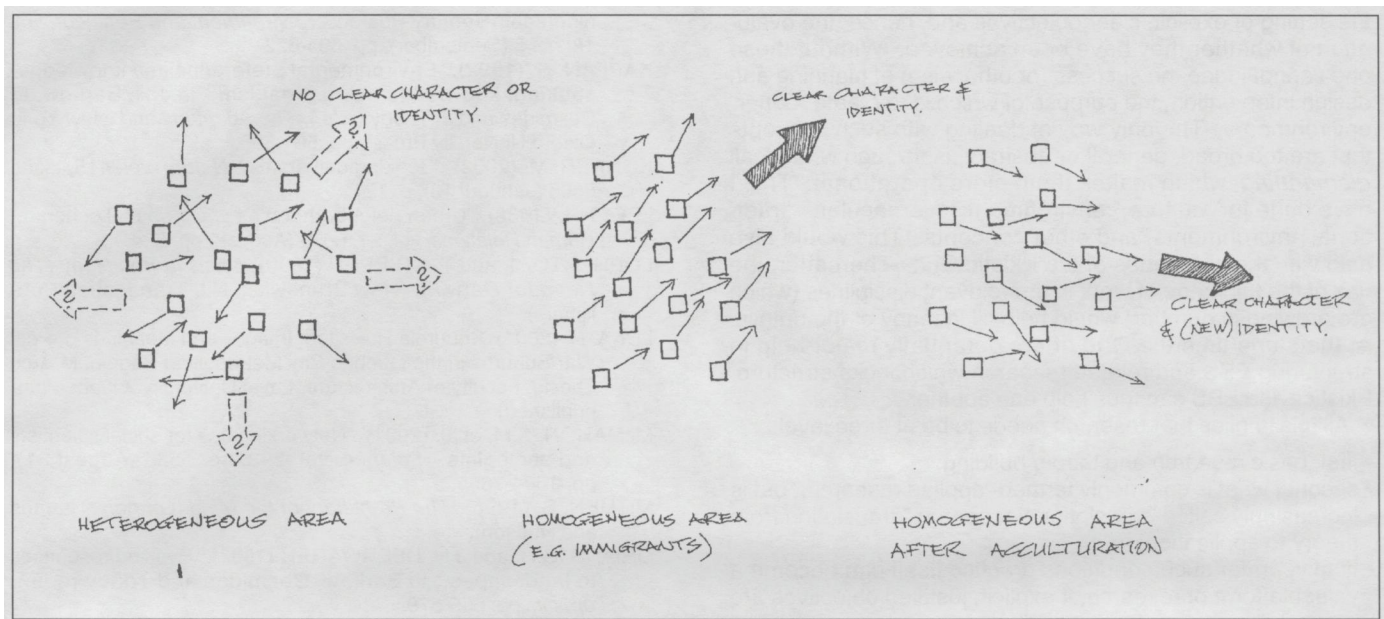


Fig. 5: Personalization in heterogeneous and homogeneous areas. (In press, fig. 42, based partly on Rapoport, 1990b, fig. 21, p. 138).

already suggested, successful cities are those in which people with choice choose to live, and that choice is most frequently of a neighborhood.

It is also the case that environments with which one identifies tend to be preserved. Moreover, the HUCO Study (ATHENS CENTER OF EKISTICS, 1980) shows the energy and other ecological implications of certain neighborhood patterns from which one can learn (RAPOPORT, 1987 and 1995b (1986)). In deriving such lessons, and judging their feasibility, a knowledge of human nature is also necessary; that also offers an important basis for evaluating environment. It is important to note that residence, services and business in most urban regions take place mainly in suburbs. Note that the definition of "suburb" is not self-evident, and there are at least four definitions – based on location, physical form, social and demographic characteristics or political boundaries (RAPOPORT, 1980). It is also the case that suburbs are becoming varied, are not uniform and are developing, subdividing, differentiating in many and complex ways. In effect suburbs also are becoming collections of varied neighborhoods (BLAKE and ARREOLA, 1996). These then acquire different and suitable services (LUKA, 2001) as they become what have been called "edge cities," with neighborhoods, some of which may be traditional whereas others show completely new characteristics (BAUMGARTNER, 1988).

An interesting example (among others) of the growing relevance and importance of neighborhoods is shown by recent developments in Milwaukee. These I have discussed and illustrated in Rapoport (1997). In brief, the Department of City Development has divided the city into 189 named neighborhoods. These names, and logos, are on numerous signs in those areas, attached to lightposts and the like. I suggested, on the basis of the work on the subjective cognitive definition of neighborhood discussed earlier, that these were too large. I predicted that these would subdivide and this is now happening more and more with these smaller areas displaying signs with their own names and logos. After this paper was finished, the day I left for Berlin, there was a newspaper item in the Milwaukee newspaper which fits and supports my argument. This points out that the most important need in Milwaukee in the 21st century is the safety and quality of neigh-

borhoods and that "people want to feel safe and proud, and have a sense of ownership in their neighborhood" (PABST, 2001).

Conclusion

There will of course be changes, but these changes will be different in different neighborhoods. Moreover, both constancy and change need to be considered and research is needed because the balance between these two is an empirical question. Constancy *and* change, variability *and* invariance both regarding humans and environments need to be considered in planning and environmental design, i.e. in future new areas of cities. One important reason that needs re-emphasis is the need for greater choice among a greater variety of intermediate (neighborhood) scale environments to match the increased number of different groups that co-exist in urban areas. Note that I am not advocating neighborhoods as such, but urging that the potential role of neighborhoods, and of constancy in general, be considered. Whatever the specifics, and whether I am right or wrong about those, and whatever the form and structure of cities and urban regions, the role of neighborhoods must be considered. Without such considerations cities cannot succeed. This, then, requires a *major* research effort regarding neighborhoods. Research is needed on the size, cultural characteristics and variability of groups, the sizes of neighborhoods, ways of helping clear cognitive definition of such areas, the services needed and so on.

In such research, it may be useful to consider the possible linkages and mutual relationships between EBS and Ekistics with a view to eventual integration and synthesis. For one thing, in Ekistics there are aspects not considered. To give just one example, the importance of latent functions, especially meaning, is not considered (RAPOPORT, 1990b). A first step might be to reconsider the Ekistic Grid. That was developed some time ago, so that EBS and new related research in other disciplines (RAPOPORT, 2000a) are missing. Such research, however, could help clarify, "flesh out" and operationalize the often too broad, vague and general terms in the Grid (e.g. "man," "society," "nature," etc.). These do not allow

the setting of explicit, clear objectives and, hence, the evaluation of whether they have been achieved. Without those one cannot judge the success (or otherwise) of planning and design intervention, the purpose of which is to create "better" environments. The only way of dealing with such concepts that are too broad, general or abstract, is through what I call *dismantling*, which makes them more operational. This I have done for "culture," environment, "vernacular," "traditional environments" and other concepts. This would also help with the categories of the Ekistic Grid. Thereafter, the use of the full range of work in the relevant disciplines (which are growing in number) would help fill in many of the details. At the same time the Grid offers potentially major help in structuring EBS and related research which lacks structure. Ekistics and EBS can thus help one another.

All this implies that research needs to be at three levels:

- first, basic research and theory building;
- second, what is commonly termed "applied research," but is increasingly called "translational research," translation from theory to application; and,
- finally, under such conditions practice itself can become a valuable form of research, if explicit, justified objectives are set and rigorous evaluation carried out.

Only then will we know whether our efforts have led to "successful cities."

Notes

1. Note that blocked choice is a major problem, and exacerbates negative effects of the environment on people.
2. Although this is not the topic here, it should be pointed out that this implies a need for open-endedness, the design of *frameworks*, within which cultural landscapes (including spontaneous settlements and their equivalents) can develop.
3. This whole issue of *Ekistics* was devoted to neighborhoods (as, of course, have many since).
4. This has implications for sustainability as does the fact that most of the built environment is already in place. This makes it a major resource and it will survive. The more of it survives, the more resources are conserved. It is thus important to strengthen, preserve and revitalize neighborhoods.
5. A criticism of this position and that on homogeneity is that it amounts to segregation or ghettoization. However, this is only the case if it is imposed rather than chosen. Second, counter-intuitively, people interact more if they have a "safe," secure home base, and may then be more tolerant of group differences, i.e. may be *less* prejudiced. Clearly it is also a matter of scale, so that neighborhoods need to be small. There must also be provision for interaction. This occurs best in what I call "neutral places," which also vary with culture (RAPOPORT, 1977 and 1997). Here, once again, research is urgently needed.
6. There are however problems with "urban sustainability" as a concept (RAPOPORT, 1994).

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