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How to build a community. New Urbanism and its critics

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Abstract

The focus of the following article will be New Urbanism, an urbanistic movement which originated in the United States and advocated the establishment and reinforcing of communities through planning activities. Its proponents claim that the proper design of space leads to the development of a local community. The article will discuss the main principles of the New Urbanism approach, such as its social doctrine and the concept of neighbourhood. Possible benefits of New Urbanism and critical arguments regarding it will also be analysed.

Introduction

Numerous social researchers note that modern societies are characterised by a weakening or even disappearance of communities and communal aspects of life (Etzioni 1993; Putnam 2001; Etzioni 2004; Putnam 2004; Bellah 2007). Individualism and the erosion of communal ties bring negative effects in the socio-political domain: alienated individuals do not get involved in social or political activity. That is why many theoretical approaches emphasise the necessity of community rebuilding, and the search for factors which could foster it.

The focus of the following article will be New Urbanism, an urbanistic movement which originated in the United States and advocates the establishment and reinforcing of communities through planning activities. Its proponents claim that the proper design of space leads to the development of a local community. As K. Falconer Al-Hindi and K. Till (2001: 189) observe, 'New Urbanism is a complex planning paradigm and social movement that has recently become influential in planning, residential development, and government housing circles'. K. Day (2003: 83) adds that 'through comprehensive urban design and planning, New Urbanism seeks to foster place identity, sense of community, and environmental sustainability'. The existing literature on the New Urbanism approach is often one-sided, presenting either its advantages or disadvantages. This article will contribute to research on the topic by discussing both the possible benefits of New Urbanism, as well as the critical arguments regarding it.

The New Urbanism movement has been developing since the 1980s. In 1993, Andres Duany, Peter Calthrope, and Peter Katz – together with other architects and journalists – created the so-called Congress for New Urbanism, institutionalising the developing movement on the basis of twenty-seven rules presented in the Charter of the New Urbanism (*The Charter of the New Urbanism* n.d., Fulton 1996: 10; Day 2003: 84). Since then, it has spread from the United States to other countries[1]. For example, as J. L. Grant (2007) notes, it has had a considerable impact on urban planning and design in Canada. P. M. Cozens (2008: 430) emphasises the influence of New Urbanism on policy making and government programmes in Australia. Many authors list and describe examples of planned communities built according to the principles of New Urbanism (Etzioni 1993: 129; Fulton 1996; Falconer Al-Hindi & Till 2001: 190; Grant 2007; Andreescu & Besel 2013; Besel & Cherubin 2013; Vick & Perkins 2013).

1. The article presents New Urbanism mostly from the American and Western European perspectives. The movement has also been affecting urbanistic policies in numerous Eastern European and Asian countries, however, its influence has not been that great.

Postmodernism in the background

Placing itself within the postmodernist approach, New Urbanism criticises the architectural and urbanistic modernism which is its direct predecessor. Modernism was the ideological and cultural paradigm of the 19th and 20th centuries and became popular based on the ideas of linear progress and increased efficiency through the development of technology and science. Formal order, discipline, and hierarchy as well as grand, universal styles, solutions and formulas were to become 'recipes' for the betterment of humanity; the world was to become predictable and safe (Hirt 2009: 250).

Within the areas of architecture and urban studies, modernism created, among other features, two 'products': downtowns in Le Corbusier's style, and sprawling suburban areas. Despite the differences, they were both based on similar premises: cities are too dense and too chaotic, so they need to be decentralised and ordered. What is needed is regulation of the flow of cars, and more orderly, separate utilisation of different types of space. It was assumed that the new urbanistic forms are better than the old ones, and that universal rules exist for urban planning and universal architectural styles. 'Such planning adhered to modernist ideals (and Fordist economic and technological conditions) of progress, order, economies of scale, and mass production' (Hirt 2009: 251).

The postmodernist critique of this approach assumes contradictory principles: multiplicity of ideas, eclecticism, choice, as well as the acceptance of unpredictability and the spontaneity of the world. Postmodernism, rejecting simple hierarchies and dichotomies, emphasises multiplicity and difference, not unity. Sometimes postmodernism is described as the heritage of Romanticism, with its search for spontaneity and originality and its nostalgia for the past (Hirt 2009: 250–251).

New Urbanism refers directly to the ideological and aesthetic principles of postmodernism, such as the importance of historical traditions, emphasis on the local and the particular, nostalgia for the past, but also the need for environmental care (Hirt 2009: 250). New Urbanism presents premodernity in an idyllic way; its proponents claim that present and future problems might be solved by drawing inspirations from the past.

Social doctrine: community building

New Urbanism presumes a specific social doctrine: certain architectural and urbanistic solutions directly influence people's behaviour (Talen 1999: 1363–1365, Vick & Perkins 2013). Interactions among inhabitants, as well as a sense of community, might be strengthened by a proper organisation of space; such a principle is described as 'spatial determinism' (Talen 1999: 1364). Through

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proper spatial planning, a local community can be created, which is manifested in a sense of community and the communal spirit of its inhabitants. It is assumed here that the variables related to spatial environment influence the frequency and the quality of social contacts, and that increased frequency of interactions among people fosters the development of social ties. The creation and the functioning of communities can be stimulated by passive social contact and by the physical proximity of people. Therefore, a space should be designed in a specific way, to make such contacts possible.

J. Vick and D. Perkins (2013: 92) note: 'When comparing urban and suburban developments, several studies found a significantly higher sense of community in those areas with new urbanist characteristics'. Numerous research results show the relation between physical elements of people's environment (such as the arrangement of windows and doors in residential buildings, the accessibility of a particular place and how easy/difficult it is to be reached, the presence of common spaces, etc.) and strengthening the ties among the inhabitants. Other studies look for environmental factors (such as proper utilisation of a public space, shopping facilities, outdoor public meeting space, etc.), which are positively correlated with some aspects of the sense of community, for example, sense of security (Talen 1999: 1365; Vick & Perkins 2013).

The social doctrine of New Urbanism might be summarised as follows: 'Its promoters stress the conviction that the built environment can create a "sense of community", grounded in the idea that private communication networks are simply no substitute for real neighbourhoods, and that a reformulated philosophy about how we build communities will overcome our current civic deficits, build social capital and revive a community spirit which is currently lost' (Talen 1999: 1361).

The concept of neighbourhood

Without sprawl and nostalgic

The concept of neighbourhood presented by new urbanists begins with their critique of so-called urban sprawl. Urban sprawl means an urbanistic phenomenon in urban and suburban areas characterised by low-density housing and widely spread out developments (drivable sub-urban growth; Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Speck 2000; Ganapati 2008; Leinberger 2008). In many American and European cities, this sprawl is fostered by zoning regulations which require the separation of commercial, industrial, and residential districts (Lamer 2004). By such separation, zoning was supposed to improve the quality of life (because of health and safety issues); however, 'what started out as a noble

intention to protect the health of citizens (…) in the urban environment may have done just the opposite by fostering the sprawling pattern of today's cities' (Lamer 2004: 4).

Although spread out developments have some benefits for inhabitants (e.g. owning a plot of land, privacy, perceived safety, abundant free parking), they also bring about many negative consequences (Leinberger 2008). The sprawl often leads to environmental destruction and pollution, to the loss of nature and agricultural areas, as well as to the homogenisation of the suburbs, which all begin to look the same. The development of the suburbs also leads to the spatial segregation of inhabitants, usually based on race and income, and therefore generates concentration of poverty. As Ch. B. Leinberger (2008: 39) notes, 'racial, ethnic, and class concentrations existed before drivable sub-urbanism appeared on the scene, but not to the extent possible in the late twentieth century' (Leinberger 2008: 39). The sprawl also causes people's excessive dependence on their cars, exclusion of non-drivers from society, and the separation of inhabitants from active, communal life. Houses are spaced out inhibiting the development of neighbourhood relations; anonymity replaces direct contacts. All of this weakens neighbourhood community (Ganapati 2008: 387–388; Leinberger 2008: 63–85).

New urbanist ideas are a direct reaction to such problems. At the beginning of its development, New Urbanism mostly proposed greenfield activities, aimed at suburban areas, but more and more often its principles are adapted to the revitalisation of brownfield areas within existing cities (Talen 1999: 1361; Day 2003: 83; Helbrecht & Dirksmeier 2012). A neighbourhood, as a new – or 'renewed' – type of community, becomes an important concept: 'due to the spatial determinism embedded in new urbanism based on the assumption that proper design will "save" American cities and provide a new moral order, the neighbourhood becomes equivalent to the community in new urbanism' (Toker 2007: 321).

New Urbanism is also referred to as 'traditional neighbourhood design' or 'neo-traditional design', making references to the past and valuing the nostalgic elements and the romantic character of old, small towns (e.g. picket fences, front porches, etc.; Ganapati 2008: 387; Vick & Perkins 2013). 'Adherents to NU claim to pay attention to region-specific vernacular architectural styles and are especially inspired by the small towns of the 1920s (…). Local history is considered to be present in town layouts (…), the colours used for buildings, landscape and environmental design, and place and street names' (Falconer Al-Hindi & Till 2001: 191). Individualisation of housing projects (within certain parameters) is suggested to avoid the creation of almost identical suburbs (Talen 1999: 1363).

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Small, ecological and walkable

According to the New Urbanism approach, the small scale of the neighbourhood community is crucial for its 'renewal'. It helps to naturally create a clearly defined centre and the boundaries of a community. When the small scale is connected with growing density of housing, the frequency of direct relations among people also increases. High density of housing has an environmental aspect: it limits the spread of built-up areas and reduces people's reliance on their cars. Ch. B. Leinberger (2008: 10) emphasises such environmental benefits of new urbanist developments: 'walkable urban places are far more environmentally sustainable because the number of cars required per household and the number of miles they are driven are substantially reduced'.

The concept of New Urbanism is therefore based on the idea of an urban village: a compact, self-sustaining neighbourhood, where people can walk or bike everywhere, without using cars (Fulton 1996: 16–17; Ganapati 2008: 387; Besel & Vick 2013: 39). 'When possible most streets should be narrow and cater toward the safety of the pedestrian' (Lamer 2004: 8). The preferred street pattern is a grid system, with short blocks, implying that parking spaces are hidden from view (often in rear lanes). Interconnected networks of streets allow permeability and promote social interactions (Cozens 2008: 432).

Ch. B. Leinberger (2008) refers to New Urbanism as 'walkable urbanism': one should be able to satisfy most everyday needs within walking distance or transit of one's home. 'Walking distance is generally defined as a 1,500 – to 3,000-foot radius – a quarter to a half mile [ca. 0.5 – 1 km] – which means densities must be relatively high to have all those options available so close by' (Leinberger 2008: 3). Encouraging transit ridership, New Urbanism proposes maximising access to public transport. Therefore, new urbanist projects should be organised around public transportation hubs: the concepts of the 'pedestrian pocket' on the neighbourhood scale and 'transportation-oriented designs' on the regional scale are important for the movement (Falconer Al-Hindi & Till 2001: 191).

'Walkable urbanism' is contrasted with 'drivable sub-urbanism', typical for the suburbs and parts of existing cities, as described by Leinberger (2008) with reference to the United States. Drivable sub-urbanism is characterised by low-density developments and car dependence. For a long time, in the post-war period, it was a manifestation of the American Dream: the dream 'of one's family living in a detached house on one's own plot of land with increased privacy, a car to drive there, and superhighways to commute to work' (Leinberger 2008: 21). According to this author, since the 1990s, a new version of the American Dream has been emerging, manifested in the revival of many American downtowns, the development of walkable places in some suburban town centres and around transit stations, as well as New Urbanism developments built from scratch on greenfield sites.

Lively and safe

The inhabitants of such neighbourhoods and villages are encouraged to enter into social relations by the proper design of space. This should invite them to leave their private spaces readily, to enter into the public space, and to initiate contacts with their neighbours. This is connected with the shrinking of the private sphere: houses are built close to one another and near to the streets, porches face the streets. Buildings are constructed around yards and near the streets, with their windows placed low and directed towards the streets, overlooking public areas.

Such solutions increase the level of social control and neighbours' supervision over the streets, which enhances safety: 'In order to discourage crime, a street space must be watched over by buildings with doors and windows facing it. Walls, fences, and padlocks are less effective at deterring crime than a simple lit window' (Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Speck 2000: 73). Such natural surveillance is referred to as 'eyes on the street' (Grant 2007: 485). Therefore, new urbanist projects are supposed to 'make strangers feel noticed and potentially unwelcome' (Grant 2007: 489).

With mixed uses of land and heterogeneous populations

Another important principle of New Urbanism is mixed land use within neighbourhoods and integration of different places: 'Higher density development is more efficient for the developer since every market segment can be served through the construction of a single mixed-use area, thus limiting the infrastructure. Subsequently, high density neighbourhoods include "starter", "move-up", "family", and "retirement" style homes' (Besel & Vick 2013: 40). Places of work and leisure, and shopping areas should be located close to houses and apartment buildings (Talen 1999: 1364; Besel & Vick 2013: 38–41). Proximity of all types of infrastructure and the development of public transportation limit inhabitants' use of cars (Day 2003: 84). The development of services and local shops leads more and more people to work close to their place of residence. The closeness of all kinds of public institutions and offices also influences the strengthening of the local community (Etzioni 1993: 129; Lees 2012: 26).

Different types of buildings (with different prices, quality standards, and forms of property) should be

constructed within the same community, so that groups of different socioeconomic characteristics live close to one another. 'A mixture of housing types (…) encourages random personal contact between people of different social classes' (Talen 1999: 1364). This creates an internal heterogeneity of the neighbourhood community (Day 2003: 84) and fosters integration of social groups of different incomes, ages, and races. Therefore, architectural and urbanistic differentiation should lead to the differentiation of communities, preventing the creation of homogenous and closed enclaves.

With developed public space

Within New Urbanism developments, special importance should be attributed to public space. Its revitalisation is seen as a condition for the revival of communities. Public space facilities are created in places where people meet informally: 'Traditionally, these facilities have included streets, sidewalks, parks[2], public squares, and plazas where people have routine access and practice free communication as part of everyday life. (…) Civic spaces encourage civic engagement in general. The community halls, libraries, and schools are places for civic engagement and education. Arts and museums that are educational in nature nurture the civic spirit' (Ganapati 2008: 392).

Public space is crucial for community building, because it influences the development of informal ties. Places where people gather become the 'heart' of the community. Different forms of public space (such as parks and promenades) can become community symbols and ensure the feeling of connection with a place. Therefore, the proper arrangement of such places, fostering their utilisation, is of crucial importance here (Falconer Al-Hindi & Till 2001: 191; Ganapati 2008: 392).

In the concept of New Urbanism, streets also have a 'social character'. They should be built in a way that encourages street life; increase in activities of pedestrians fosters communal ties and emotional relations with a particular place (Talen 1999: 1364). J. Gehl (2012) points out that even though there is a large amount of data on car traffic and traffic policies in cities, this is not accompanied by data collection referring to pedestrians. The users of the city are often overlooked. Therefore, this author stresses that, 'if lively, attractive and safe cities with active streets, squares and parks are to be realized in the 21st century, then good provision for pedestrian activities is vital' (Gehl 2012: 41).

2. Detailed suggestions on how to create an urban park following the principles of New Urbanism are presented by P. Katz (1998: 183).

The critical perspective

Centralised regulation

S. A. Hirt (2009: 249) observes that New Urbanism, as an approach referring to the principles of premodern urban planning, can only be superficially associated with the postmodern paradigm. In-depth analysis shows that the ideas of New Urbanism can only be implemented by utilisation of strongly centralised regulatory mechanisms, which refer back to modernist planning, and oppose the postmodernist ideals of pluralism and variety. 'An inherent challenge for the new urbanist planners is how to create premodern-looking urban forms within current economic and technological conditions. This challenge is resolved by embracing modernist-type controls' (Hirt 2009: 249). R. G. Holcombe (2004: 294–295) claims that the rules of spatial planning proposed by New Urbanism are similar to the Soviet-style central planning rules.

Premodern towns (in medieval Europe or in the early stages of the development of the United States) developed spontaneously, in an organic way, long before 19th-century modernist planning. 'The admired features of "old towns" – compactness, density, walkability, mixture, unique aesthetics – were the result of economic and technological inevitability. They existed out of necessity: not because the "old-town" residents found them charming or ecologically responsible, but because this is how they could build' (Hirt 2009: 267). Lively community life which had its sources in traditional, premodern urban forms was to some extent enforced by certain shortages: lack of financial resources and cars led to the necessity of social encounters, recreation, and entertainment within a neighbourhood. Only the creation of surplus wealth made it possible to build suburbs, spreading further and further away from cities.

As A. J. Saab points out (2007: 195), although New Urbanism refers to premodern ideals, it proposes their implementation through certain regulations, e.g. limitations on the size of cities and height of buildings, strict descriptions of the architectural details (porches, windows, doors) and the materials used. The premodern charm of small towns is to be recreated by the utilisation of proper regulations. Therefore, urban planning in the spirit of New Urbanism means the creation of a precisely controlled environment.

Referring to the examples of the implementation of the principles of New Urbanism, S. A. Hirt (2009: 265–266) wonders if the charm of 'old towns', with their main streets and pedestrian – and inhabitant-friendly atmosphere, has been successfully recreated in these places. These settlements, following the premises of New

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Urbanism, are large-scale projects, all built intentionally according to some pattern, which contrasts with the much more differentiated patterns of development in earlier historical periods when there were combinations of scales, styles, and uses.

Paradoxically then, New Urbanism projects are examples of a Fordist-style, mass-produced urbanism, despite their creators' efforts to create something new. 'The new urbanist plurality of styles and uses has an almost paradoxical quality to it. It is required, yet restrained. Regulations are put in place to mandate it, but also to control it. Design codes postulate it, yet limit it to a few acceptable styles; zoning codes ordain it, yet prevent it from spreading beyond the few preselected areas. The outcome (…) is premised on rejecting modernist homogeneity, but reflects a modernist dedication to certainty and predictability' (Hirt 2009: 267).

Incompatibility with the free market

According to R. G. Holcombe (2004), the limitation of urban sprawl, which is advocated by New Urbanism, is incompatible with free market processes. The growth of society's wealth usually means that people use their cars more and more often, because it gives them more convenience and flexibility. Urban sprawl is therefore the result of a calculation: it becomes necessary to spend more time in the car going to work or going shopping, but instead people get more space. Under free market conditions, people appreciate space and are ready to pay for it. If they make a choice to live in the suburbs, that means that this is what they need (Holcombe 2004: 292). 'Thus, as areas become more prosperous, declining population density is a natural by-product of prosperity' (Holcombe 2004: 291).

New Urbanism planners often demand legal instruments in order to prevent sprawl, which shows that the public is not against suburban development (Grant 2007). Also, 'given the rapid spread of gated developments, it appears that chance and consumer behaviour favour the enclaves' (Grant 2007: 496). The goals of New Urbanism are contradictory to market trends; it is very unlikely that its projects will ever become implemented on a large scale. Planners show a lot of enthusiasm for New Urbanism, as a solution to the many problems of modern cities. But they 'cannot afford to ignore the message conveyed by the interest in enclave development and the persistence of conventional suburbs. (…) Unexamined faith in an ideology will not produce the same results as careful analyses of the way our communities work' (Grant 2007: 497).

J. E. Gyourko and W. Rybczynski (2000: 739) point to the limited number of market studies on consumer demand for New Urbanism developments. The authors also stress (2000: 734) that the development of new urbanist projects is often blocked by the perceived risk of such investments expressed by investors and developers, and it is highest for suburban greenfield projects. 'The hostility of many private sector capital sources to suburban greenfield NU projects suggests that the future of these developments may lie in some type of intervention from the public sector (…). Any sound economic argument for such public sector intervention will have to rest on these projects' having a social benefit that is not obtained by standard suburban development' (Gyourko & Rybczynski 2000: 737).

Spatial planning and community development: ambiguous results

E. Talen (1999) analyses the issue of the relationship between spatial planning and community building. In her opinion, 'the theoretical and empirical support for the notion that sense of community (…) can be created via physical design factors is ambiguous at best' (Talen 1999: 1374). On the one hand, the author refers to numerous research results showing the correlations between different variables referring to spatial planning and the creation of community. Traditional districts, with their tree-lined streets, the classical appearance of houses, and the differentiated age structure of the population, give people a feeling of continuity in an era of fast social change and high mobility. Proximity to the town (district) centre is negatively associated with such variables as satisfaction from community services and psychological well-being, whereas the age of the neighbourhood is positively associated with these variables (Talen 1999: 1366). Many analyses also show that the distinctiveness of a particular place, the feeling of belonging to it and local identity increase the social cohesion of the particular group.

On the other hand, E. Talen (1999: 1369) notes that 'it would be difficult to conclude that new urbanists' claims to foster a sense of community via neighbourhood form are substantiated by social science research'. In such interpretations, the relationship between spatial planning and community creation is missing an empirical basis, and the research is not sufficient (Talen 1999: 1362–1367). The very idea of a community – as an idealistic, utopian, and backward concept – is criticised more and more often. First, the importance of physical space in the creation and functioning of communities is seen as being overstated. A community should be 'liberated' from territorial limitations, because the lives of individuals become spatially dispersed to a greater and greater extent. Second, 'communities of interest' (Talen 1999: 1367) become the most important type of community – which leads to the rejection of a concept of neighbourhood as fulfilling the

need for attachment. People look for affiliations with homogenous groups, consisting of individuals similar to themselves, and avoid social interactions with those who are clearly different. Interactions among inhabitants are therefore based on similarities between them, referring to, for example, socio-economic status, age, gender, shared values, and class affiliation (Talen 1999: 1367–1368). The creation of a sense of community is most likely to happen within homogenous suburbs, not because of the spatial proximity of inhabitants, but because of similarities between them. 'And in fact, social and economic homogeneity are prevalent characteristics of actual (as opposed to theoretical) new urbanist development' (Talen 1999: 1372).

E. Talen adds that a community can be created and implemented through mechanisms different from those suggested by New Urbanism. 'Town design may not build sense of community by deterministically bringing people together on the basis of street layout and the provision of public spaces, but it may stimulate other factors which work to build sense of community' (Talen 1999: 1372). Therefore, the spatial design does not have to create the sense of community, but it may increase its probability. E. Thanel refers to this as 'environmental probabilism', as opposed to the 'spatial determinism' of new urbanists (Talen 1999: 1374).

The ambiguity of the research on the relations between urban design and the creation of community is also discussed by S. Ganapati (2008: 390). He argues that a great deal of research based on specific empirical cases shows that proper spatial planning makes it possible to transform neighbourhoods lacking a sense of community into places with a high level of social integrity and cohesion. However, another part of the research on the topic shows the elitist character of New Urbanism projects, which can lead to the creation of enclaves, not communities. Shared values and membership can be exclusive and give an elitist character to the group. The lack of diversity in spatial development and the failure to take into account the needs of low-income inhabitants are the basic objections to New Urbanism (Ganapati 2008: 391).

When summarising different research results, J. Vick and D. Perkins state: 'in general, it appears that there may be some merit to the new urbanists' claim that urban neighbourhoods foster a stronger sense of community than typical suburban neighbourhoods, but more research is needed to support and clarify this assertion' (Vick & Perkins 2013: 92–93). They point to the possibility of 'self-selection bias': community-friendly developments are chosen by people who are more 'community-minded', and therefore, they *a priori* have a stronger sense of community (Vick & Perkins 2013: 102–103).

Ecological consequences

As described above, New Urbanism is a critical reaction to urban sprawl. To a great extent, this criticism is based on the negative ecological consequences of this process: devastation of the natural environment, sacrificing green and agricultural areas in the name of urban development, wasting energy and other natural resources, increased car traffic, and social problems related to the isolation of suburban areas. However, some researchers do not agree with such criticism.

Analysing the case of the United States, R. G. Holcombe (2004: 286–290) claims that new urbanist accusations against suburban development are wrong. In his opinion, urban sprawl does not pose a threat to natural areas in the United States. Most of the land remains unused, so there is no danger that sprawl will 'take over' the space or that it will threaten the natural environment. The invasion of sprawl into agricultural lands is not taking place; the area of such lands is decreasing anyhow, because of the increasing efficiency of existing farms.

The proponents of New Urbanism claim that the sprawl directly and negatively influences environmental pollution, mainly because it increases car usage. However, a more in-depth analysis shows that suburbanisation might be more environmentally friendly than the compact development of towns and suburbs suggested by New Urbanism (Holcombe 2004: 288). The level of environmental pollution increases with growing population density; when people spread out in a certain area, they live in less polluted and healthier surroundings. Lower density of population also means that there are more natural ways of waste management.

Based on everyday observations, it would seem that the development of suburbs increases the intensity of car traffic: the need for commuting to work would make people spend more time in their cars. However, such observations are not confirmed by statistics. R. G. Holcombe (2004: 290) suggests an explanation of this phenomenon: when there is urban development of new areas – opposed by new urbanists – car traffic stretches out to different thoroughfares; the roads are therefore less 'clogged' and the time for driving to work is reduced.

Idealisation of (past) communities

According to A. J. Saab (2007: 196), the proponents of New Urbanism do not notice any imperfections in the traditions they refer to and suffer from historical amnesia: 'Their emphasis on the "re" (reintegration, revitalisation) presumes the existence of an integrated and vital community life in the past. In many instances, however, new urbanist plans overlook the flaws within the traditions they are evoking, positing instead

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a nostalgic vision of the past'. The cited author claims that it is nostalgia for a myth, something that has never existed. In a similar way, S. A. Hirt (2009: 249) argues that the referring to the past typical of New Urbanism is based on a complicated and selective interpretation of history: problems of social exclusion are ignored, and the reconstruction of the past is made from the point of view of a higher class. Therefore, nostalgia for the good old pre-modern times, expressed by new urbanists, can hardly be made into a realistic vision of a better life in the future.

A. J. Saab (2007) describes the town of Baxter, South Carolina (USA), which follows the urbanistic requirements of New Urbanism. In her opinion, community life in Baxter has many benefits, but at the same time it 'is overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, and middle class in a traditionally poor, black state' (Saab 2007: 194). J. L. Grant (2007: 482) compares new urbanist developments with gated communities (in Canada), and discovers that – apart from many differences in planning principles – 'they tend to occur in the same general areas and (…) they create residential environments with a great deal in common'. They are both a response to the perceived loss of a sense of community in modern cities, and to dangerous and placeless urban forms. The developments of New Urbanism – just like gated communities – are for 'the successful', who can choose the kind of place they want to live in. Such developments generally fail to generate the diversity desired: 'observations indicate a considerable degree of class and social homogeneity in project populations, as might be expected with a narrow price range of offerings' (Grant 2007: 491).

L. Lees (2012) describes possible problems with the implementation of heterogeneous new urbanist projects, referring to the case of downtown Portland, Maine (USA). For example, there were tensions over diversity between young people and local businesses: 'quite simply the youth were seen to be undesirable bodies on the streets and in the public spaces of the new cultural and commercial spaces of downtown Portland' (Lees 2012: 28). The reaction of the local authorities was that youth was informally encouraged to move away to different parts of the city, and discouraged from spending time in particular areas. Therefore, the result of the conflict was the marginalisation of young people from public spaces; in other words, certain social groups were kept apart in the name of social order. L. Lees states that the idea of mixed uses of land is an 'utopian impulse' (2012: 33) and that 'we need to go beyond the optimistic hopes for a functional mix' (2012: 29).

Safety issues

Some of the principles of New Urbanism referring to safety issues have been challenged by environmental criminology (Cozens 2008). The main general objection is that New Urbanism is a utopian idea; within this approach, the issue of crime is not seen as a problem and is not sufficiently considered. P. M. Cozens (2008: 440) notes that, 'if New Urbanism is to represent a strategy for creating truly sustainable and liveable communities, it must at least consider the evidence relating to crime and the fear of crime in a more systematic manner (…). Environmental criminology can provide insights relating to crime risk associated with different types of developments and land-use patterns'. Referring to the data and statistics based on environmental criminology and to some scientific research, the cited author notes that property crimes are concentrated at or near places where people congregate, and burglaries happen more often in mixed-use sites – which contradicts new urbanists' claims that 'eyes on the street' can guarantee safety. Also, 'much car crime is linked to the location and proximity of parking areas to the property' (Cozens 2008: 435); hiding cars from view in rear alleyways, as advocated by New Urbanism, might increase the risk of such crime. In general, 'more permeable residential street networks are associated with higher levels of crime than less permeable configurations, such as cul-de-sacs' (Cozens 2008: 439). Therefore, easy access to streets and routes increases the possibility of crime – in contrast to New Urbanism's promotion of permeability.

Concluding remarks

To sum up, new urbanist ideas and developments are a response to the problems of modern cities, and to the loss of community. The concept of a walkable, ecological, lively and safe neighbourhood, advocated by new urbanists, is supposed to recreate the community feeling. It can also be fostered by mixed uses of land, heterogeneous populations, and the development of public space. Opposition to sprawl – drivable, anonymous suburban areas – is supposed to help people live in a better, more egalitarian and more pro-social environment.

However, a review of the critical approaches to new urbanist principles shows that in practice their implementation poses many problems. It may lead to centralised regulation and control over urbanistic projects. The social and ecological consequences of New Urbanism developments are ambiguous, and their compatibility with the free market logic is questionable. Numerous critics point to the idealised and utopian character of these projects and question the possibility of building safe and socially healthy communities based on the premises of New Urbanism.

Recommendations for further research would go in two directions. The first direction should focus on particular empirical case studies, which would be 'diagnosed' in the context of New Urbanism – accepted as a general framework, but with all its shortcomings. For example, A. Retana, C. Pena and L. M. Ortega (2014) propose an analysis of the city of Toluca (Mexico), which addresses all the critical points relating to New Urbanism, showing – on the practical level – possible solutions to them. The second direction for further research would concentrate on the possibilities of combining the principles of New Urbanism with other ideas and approaches, such as the environmental approach, urban activism, participatory democracy, etc. For example, Y. Shin and D.-H. Shin (2012) emphasise the need for collaboration between new urbanists and community informatics practitioners for a better community integration. They propose the use of information technologies for the improvement of community members' communication and

their participation in planning processes. Some other authors (Kelbaugh 2014; Heins 2015) suggest 'finding common ground' between New Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism, which could be helpful in addressing the issue of suburban sprawl and ecological problems. It is also possible to interpret the principles of New Urbanism in the context of New Regionalism. As T. Polmateer (2014: 1129) states, New Urbanism 'must realise the need to connect to the broader region and become part of a cohesive plan. This change might help address some of the social, economic, and environmental concerns that New Urbanism's critics discuss'.

Therefore, New Urbanism presents important suggestions for urbanistic development, but some of its principles have to be reconsidered and re-evaluated. Providing the theoretical directions, it has to adjust them to practice or combine its forces with some other ideas and approaches. Further research might improve the quality of implementation of projects of New Urbanism.

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