New Urbanism:

a counter movement of architects, urban planners, and public health officials against urban sprawl and suburbanization. New Urbanists present both a theory for strong community development and an architectural planning program for moving towards sustainable urban environments. They argue neighborhoods should be compact, pedestrian-friendly, with mixed-use of housing and activities, and public spaces. These design elements foster and encourage social interaction among residents which creates and enforces neighborhood capital (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1993).

My findings will offer some insight into quality of life and sustainability questions regarding the effects of Las Vegas neighborhood designs and how people experience their neighborhood.

One major design principle of New Urbanism is that people’s living spaces should be within walking distance of their daily needs, such as work, school, retail, recreational, and transit system. New Urbanists define “walking distance” as about one quarter of a mile or the average distance of a five minute walk or bicycle ride (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1993).

Residents who walk or bicycle to places are much more likely to have the sort of “casual encounters” that anchor community attachments than those forced to drive (Leyden 2003:9).

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Social Survey (LVMASS) captured residents’ attitudes on quality of life, neighbors, and the environment. The survey was administered at the neighborhood level.

LVMASS neighborhoods are defined as area within census blocks where contiguous residences exist with no major separation such as major roadways, drainage areas, walls, gates, or other obstacles to prevent easy pedestrian access to other residences.

Methods:

My project focuses on the following elements of New Urbanism: the neighborhood, the block, the street, and the building. I will base neighborhood profiles on facilities available, street topography, ethnographic fieldwork, and classification schemes. Profiles and LVMASS data will be compared using descriptive statistics.

I will develop six neighborhood profiles by randomly selecting two neighborhoods from each neighborhood category from LVMASS – urban core, suburban, and urban fringe. I will assign a center point to each neighborhood and focus on design characteristics in a one mile radius from the center point, highlighting features within three distance intervals: one quarter of a mile (five minute walk), one half a mile (ten minute walk), and one mile (twenty minute walk). In each neighborhood I will use several quantitative and qualitative measures to determine the presence or absence of New Urbanist design principles and the relationship between those principles and residents’ experiences as indicated in LVMASS.

Summary of Neighborhood Profile Measurements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definiments</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Mixed usage: diversity of surrounding activities and building</td>
<td>Crime rate, job rate, median income earnings, high and low density</td>
<td>Housing, income, education, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>Public access: available public spaces</td>
<td>Through ethnographic fieldwork, analysis of public spaces, and building</td>
<td>Public spaces, parks, community centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks</td>
<td>Proximity: the street should be accessible to the neighborhood</td>
<td>Through ethnographic fieldwork, analysis of public spaces, and building</td>
<td>Public spaces, parks, community centers</td>
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<td>Public spaces, parks, community centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street walls: size and location</td>
<td>Ethnographic fieldwork</td>
<td>Are there 10 feet tall walls, blocking pedestrians walking into a store?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Ethnographic fieldwork</td>
<td>Do the sidewalks from house, work, etc.</td>
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</table>

Expected Results

Urban Core

I predict that the urban core neighborhood designation employed in LVMASS reflects Kevin M. Leydon’s definition of City Center/Near City Center Neighborhoods which is a mixed-use of buildings and activities, pedestrian environment built in a grid, street networks (2002). According to New Urbanism theory, the urban Core should have the highest neighborhood capital than the other types of the neighborhoods because of its traditional style.

Suburban

I also predict that the suburban neighborhood designation reflects Leydon’s definition of Civic, Mixed-Use, Suburbs which have some aspects of the traditional neighborhoods (i.e. located near few schools and corner stores) and suburban characteristics (i.e. quiet) (2003).

Urban Fringe

Likewise, the urban fringe neighborhood designation is similar to Leydon’s definition of Modern, Automobile-Dependent Suburbs which most of the activities are car oriented and locations are far apart (2003). These places do not have many sidewalks or parks.

References


