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The uses of city neighborhoods

Neighborhood is a word that has come to sound like a Valentine. As a sentimental concept, “neighborhood” is harmful to city planning. It leads to attempts at warping city life into imitations of town or suburban life. Sentimentality plays with sweet intentions in place of good sense.

A successful city neighborhood is a place that keeps sufficiently abreast of its problems so it is not destroyed by them. An unsuccessful neighborhood is a place that is overwhelmed by its defects and problems and is progressively more helpless before them. Our cities contain all degrees of success and failure. But on the whole we Americans are poor at handling city neighborhoods, as can be seen by the long accumulations of failures in our great gray belts on the one hand, and by the Turfs of rebuilt city on the other hand.

It is fashionable to suppose that certain touchstones of the good life will create good neighborhoods—schools, parks, clean hous-

ing and the like. How easy life would be if this were so! How charming to control a complicated and ornery society by bestowing upon it rather simple physical goodies. In real life, cause and effect are not so simple. Thus a Pittsburgh study, undertaken to show the supposed clear correlation between better housing and improved social conditions, compared delinquency records in still uncleared slums to delinquency records in new housing projects, and came to the embarrassing discovery that the delinquency was higher in the improved housing. Does this mean improved shelter increases delinquency? Not at all. It means other things may be more important than housing, however, and it means also that there is no direct, simple relationship between good housing and good behavior, a fact which the whole tale of the Western world's history, the whole collection of our literature, and the whole fund of observation open to any of us should long since have made evident. Good shelter is a useful good in itself, as shelter. When we try to justify good shelter instead on the pretentious grounds that it will work social or family miracles we fool ourselves. Reinhold Niebuhr has called this particular self-deception, "The doctrine of salvation by bricks."

It is even the same with schools. Important as good schools are, they prove totally undependable at rescuing bad neighborhoods and at creating good neighborhoods. Nor does a good school building guarantee a good education. Schools, like parks, are apt to be volatile creatures of their neighborhoods (as well as being creatures of larger policy). In bad neighborhoods, schools are brought to ruination, physically and socially; while successful neighborhoods improve their schools by fighting for them.

Nor can we conclude, either, that middle-class families or upper-class families build good neighborhoods, and poor families

In the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a badly failed area where social disintegration has been compounded by ruthless bulldozing, project building and shoving people around, annual pupil turnover in schools was more than 50 percent in 1959-60. In 16 schools, it reached an average of 92 percent. It is ludicrous to think that with any amount of effort, official or unofficial, even a tolerable school is possible in a neighborhood of such extreme instability. Good schools are impossible in any unstable neighborhoods with high pupil turnover rates, and this includes unstable neighborhoods which *also* have good housing.

fail to. For example, within the poverty of the North End in Boston, within the poverty of the West Greenwich Village waterfront neighborhoods, within the poverty of the slaughterhouse district in Chicago (three areas, incidentally, that were all written off as hopeless by their cities' planners), good neighborhoods were created: neighborhoods whose internal problems have grown less with time instead of greater. Meantime, within the once upper-class grace and serenity of Baltimore's beautiful Eutaw Place, within the one-time upper-class solidity of Boston's South End, within the culturally privileged purlieus of New York's Morningside Heights, within miles upon miles of dull, respectable middle-class gray area, bad neighborhoods were created, neighborhoods whose apathy and internal failure grew greater with time instead of less.

To hunt for city neighborhood touchstones of success in high standards of physical facilities, or in supposedly competent and nonproblem populations, or in nostalgic memories of town life, is a waste of time. It evades the meat of the question, which is the problem of what city neighborhoods do, if anything, that may be socially and economically useful in cities themselves, and how they do it.

We shall have something solid to chew on if we think of city neighborhoods as mundane organs of self-government. Our failures with city neighborhoods are, ultimately, failures in localized self-government. And our successes are successes at localized self-government. I am using self-government in its broadest sense, meaning both the informal and formal self-management of society.

Both the demands on self-government and the techniques for it differ in big cities from the demands and techniques in smaller places. For instance, there is the problem of all those strangers. To think of city neighborhoods as organs of city self-government or self-management, we must first jettison some orthodox but irrelevant notions about neighborhoods which may apply to communities in smaller settlements but not in cities. We must first of all drop any ideal of neighborhoods as self-contained or introverted units.

Unfortunately orthodox planning theory is deeply committed to

the ideal of supposedly cozy, inward-turned city neighborhoods. In its pure form, the ideal is a neighborhood composed of about 7,000 persons, a unit supposedly of sufficient size to populate an elementary school and to support convenience shopping and a community center. This unit is then further rationalized into smaller groupings of a size scaled to the play and supposed management of children and the chitchat of housewives. Although the "ideal" is seldom literally reproduced, it is the point of departure for nearly all neighborhood renewal plans, for all project building, for much modern zoning, and also for the practice work done by today's architectural-planning students, who will be inflicting their adaptations of it on cities tomorrow. In New York City alone, by 1959, more than half a million people were already living in adaptations of this vision of planned neighborhoods. This "ideal" of the city neighborhood as an island, turned inward on itself, is an important factor in our lives nowadays.

To see why it is a silly and even harmful "ideal" for cities, we must recognize a basic difference between these concoctions grafted into cities, and town life. In a town of 5,000 or 10,000 population, if you go to Main Street (analogous to the consolidated commercial facilities or community center for a planned neighborhood), you run into people you also know at work, or went to school with, or see at church, or people who are your children's teachers, or who have sold or given you professional or artisan's services, or whom you know to be friends of your casual acquaintances, or whom you know by reputation. Within the limits of a town or village, the connections among its people keep crossing and recrossing and this can make workable and essentially cohesive communities out of even larger towns than those of 7,000 population, and to some extent out of little cities.

But a population of 5,000 or 10,000 residents in a big city has no such innate degree of natural cross-connections within itself, except under the most extraordinary circumstances. Nor can city neighborhood planning, no matter how cozy in intent, change this fact. If it could, the price would be destruction of a city by converting it into a parcel of towns. As it is, the price of trying, and not even succeeding at a misguided aim is conversion of a city into a parcel of mutually suspicious and hostile Turfs. There

are many other flaws in this "ideal" of the planned neighborhood and its various adaptations.

Lately a few planners, notably Reginald Isaacs of Harvard, have daringly begun to question whether the conception of neighborhood in big cities has any meaning at all. Isaacs points out that city people are mobile. They can and do pick and choose from the entire city (and beyond) for everything from a job, a dentist, recreation, or friends, to shops, entertainment, or even in some cases their children's schools. City people, says Isaacs, are not stuck with the provincialism of a neighborhood, and why should they be? Isn't wide choice and rich opportunity the point of cities?

This is indeed the point of cities. Furthermore, this very fluidity of use and choice among city people is precisely the foundation underlying most city cultural activities and special enterprises of all kinds. Because these can draw skills, materials, customers or clienteles from a great pool, they can exist in extraordinary variety, and not only downtown but in other city districts that develop specialties and characters of their own. And in drawing upon the great pool of the city in this way, city enterprises increase, in turn, the choices available to city people for jobs, goods, entertainment, ideas, contacts, services.

Even the old reason for settling on an ideal population of about 7,000—sufficient to populate an elementary school—is silly the moment it is applied to big cities, as we discover if we merely ask the question: Which school? In many American cities, parochial-school enrollment rivals or surpasses public-school enrollment. Does this mean there should be two schools as presumed neighborhood glue, and the population should be twice as large? Or is the population right, and should the schools be half as large? And why the elementary school? If school is to be the touchstone of scale, why not the junior high school, an institution typically far more troublesome in our cities than the elementary school? The question "Which school?" is never asked because this vision is based on no more realism about schools than about anything else. The school is a plausible, and usually abstract, excuse for defining *some* size for a unit that comes out of dreams about imaginary cities. It is necessary as a formal framework, to preserve designers from intellectual chaos, and it has no other reason for being. Ebenezer Howard's model towns are the ancestors of the idea, to be sure, but its durability comes from the need to fill an intellectual vacuum.

Whatever city neighborhoods may be, or may not be, and whatever usefulness they may have, or may be coaxed into having, their qualities cannot work at cross-purposes to thoroughgoing city mobility and fluidity of *use*, without economically weakening the city of which they are a part. The lack of either economic or social self-containment is natural and necessary to city neighborhoods—simply because they are parts of cities. Isaacs is right when he implies that the conception of neighborhood in cities is meaningless—so long as we think of neighborhoods as being self-contained units to any significant degree, modeled upon town neighborhoods.

But for all the innate extroversion of city neighborhoods, it fails to follow that city people can therefore get along magically without neighborhoods. Even the most urbane citizen does care about the atmosphere of the street and district where he lives, no matter how much choice he has of pursuits outside it; and the common run of city people do depend greatly on their neighborhoods for the kind of everyday lives they lead.

Let us assume (as is often the case) that city neighbors have nothing more fundamental in common with each other than that they share a fragment of geography. Even so, if they fail at managing that fragment decently, the fragment will fail. There exists no inconceivably energetic and all-wise "They" to take over and substitute for localized self-management. Neighborhoods in cities need not supply for their people an artificial town or village life, and to aim at this is both silly and destructive. But neighborhoods in cities do need to supply some means for civilized self-government. This is the problem.

Looking at city neighborhoods as organs of self-government, I can see evidence that only three kinds of neighborhoods are useful: (1) the city as a whole; (2) street neighborhoods; (and 3) districts of large, subcity size, composed of 100,000 people or more in the case of the largest cities.

Each of these kinds of neighborhoods has different functions, but the three supplement each other in complex fashion. It is impossible to say that one is more important than the others. For success with staying power at any spot, all three are necessary.

But I think that other neighborhoods than these three kinds just get in the way, and make successful self-government difficult or impossible.

The most obvious of the three, although it is seldom called a neighborhood, is the city as a whole. We must never forget or minimize this parent community while thinking of a city's smaller parts. This is the source from which most public money flows, even when it comes ultimately from the federal or state coffers. This is where most administrative and policy decisions are made, for good or ill. This is where general welfare often comes into direst conflict, open or hidden, with illegal or other destructive interests.

Moreover, up on this plane we find vital special-interest communities and pressure groups. The neighborhood of the entire city is where people especially interested in the theater or in music or in other arts find one another and get together, no matter where they may live. This is where people immersed in specific professions or businesses or concerned about particular problems exchange ideas and sometimes start action. Professor P. Sargent Florence, a British specialist on urban economics, has written, "My own experience is that, apart from the special habitat of intellectuals like Oxford or Cambridge, a city of a million is required to give me, say, the twenty or thirty congenial friends I require!" This sounds rather snooty, to be sure, but Professor Florence has an important truth here. Presumably he likes his friends to know what he is talking about. When William Kirk of Union Settlement and Helen Hall of Henry Street Settlement, miles apart in New York City, get together with *Consumers' Union*, a magazine located still other miles away, and with researchers from Columbia University, and with the trustees of a foundation, to consider the personal and community ruin wrought by loan shark-installment peddlers in low-income projects, they know what each is talking about and, what is more, can put their peculiar kinds of knowledge together with a special kind of money to learn more about the trouble and find ways to fight it. When my sister, Betty, a housewife, helps devise a scheme in the Manhattan public school which one of her children attends, whereby parents who know English give homework help to the

children of parents who do not, and the scheme works, this knowledge filters into a special-interest neighborhood of the city as a whole; as a result, one evening Betty finds herself away over in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, telling a district group of ten P-TA presidents there how the scheme works, and learning some new things herself.

A city's very wholeness in bringing together people with communities of interest is one of its greatest assets, possibly the greatest. And, in turn, one of the assets a city district needs is people with access to the political, the administrative, and the special-interest communities of the city as a whole.

In most big cities, we Americans do reasonably well at creating useful neighborhoods belonging to the whole city. People with similar and supplementing interests do find each other fairly well. Indeed, they typically do so most efficiently in the largest cities (except for Los Angeles which does miserably at this, and Boston which is pretty pathetic). Moreover, big-city governments, as Seymour Freedgood of *Fortune* magazine so well documented in *The Exploding Metropolis*, are able and energetic at the top in many instances, more so than one would surmise from looking at social and economic affairs in the endless failed neighborhoods of the same cities. Whatever our disastrous weakness may be, it is hardly sheer incapability for forming neighborhoods at the top, out of cities as a whole.

At the other end of the scale are a city's streets, and the minuscule neighborhoods they form, like our neighborhood of Hudson Street for example.

In the first several chapters of this book I have dwelt heavily upon the self-government functions of city streets: to weave webs of public surveillance and thus to protect strangers as well as themselves; to grow networks of small-scale, everyday public life and thus of trust and social control; and to help assimilate children into reasonably responsible and tolerant city life.

The street neighborhoods of a city have still another function in self-government, however, and a vital one: they must draw effectively on help when trouble comes along that is too big for the street to handle. This help must sometimes come from the

city as a whole, at the other end of the scale. This is a loose end I shall leave hanging, but ask you to remember.

The self-government functions of streets are all humble, but they are indispensable. In spite of much experiment, planned and unplanned, there exists no substitute for lively streets.

How large is a city street neighborhood that functions capably? If we look at successful street-neighborhood networks in real life, we find this is a meaningless question, because wherever they work best, street neighborhoods have no beginnings and ends setting them apart as distinct units. The size even differs for different people from the same spot, because some people range farther, or hang around more, or extend their street acquaintance farther than others. Indeed, a great part of the success of these neighborhoods of the streets depends on their overlapping and interweaving, turning the corners. This is one means by which they become capable of economic and visual variation for their users. Residential Park Avenue in New York appears to be an extreme example of neighborhood monotony, and so it would be if it were an isolated strip of street neighborhood. But the street neighborhood of a Park Avenue resident only begins on Park, quickly turns a corner off it, and then another corner. It is part of a set of interweaving neighborhoods containing great diversity, not a strip.

Isolated street neighborhoods that do have definite boundaries can be found in plenty, to be sure. They are typically associated with long blocks (and hence with infrequent streets), because long blocks tend almost always to be physically self-isolating. Distinctly separate street neighborhoods are nothing to aim for; they are generally characteristic of failure. Describing the troubles of an area of long, monotonous, self-isolating blocks on Manhattan's West Side, Dr. Dan W. Dodson of New York University's Center for Human Relations Studies, notes: "Each [street] appears to be a separate world of its own with a separate culture. Many of those interviewed had no conception of the neighborhood other than the street on which they resided."

Summing up the incompetence of the area, Dr. Dodson comments, "The present state of the neighborhood indicates that the people there have lost the capacity for collective action, or else

they would long since have pressured the city government and the social agencies into correcting some of the problems of community living." These two observations by Dr. Dodson on street isolation and incompetence are closely related.

Successful street neighborhoods, in short, are not discrete units. They are physical, social and economic continuities—small scale to be sure, but small scale in the sense that the lengths of fibers making up a rope are small scale.

Where our city streets do have sufficient frequency of commerce, general liveliness, use and interest, to cultivate continuities of public street life, we Americans do prove fairly capable at street self-government. This capability is most often noticed and commented on in districts of poor, or one-time poor people. But casual street neighborhoods, good at their functions, are also characteristic of high-income areas that maintain a persistent popularity—rather than ephemeral fashion—such as Manhattan's East Side from the Fifties to the Eighties, or the Rittenhouse Square district in Philadelphia, for example.

To be sure, our cities lack sufficient streets equipped for city life. We have too much area afflicted with the Great Blight of Dullness instead. But many, many city streets perform their humble jobs well and command loyalty too, unless and until they are destroyed by the impingement of city problems too big for them, or by neglect for too long a time of facilities that can be supplied only from the city as a whole, or by deliberate planning policies that the people of the neighborhood are too weak to defeat.

And here we come to the third kind of city neighborhood that is useful for self-government: the district. This, I think, is where we are typically most weak and fail most disastrously. We have plenty of city districts in name. We have few that function.

The chief function of a successful district is to mediate between the indispensable, but inherently politically powerless, street neighborhoods, and the inherently powerful city as a whole.

Among those responsible for cities, at the top, there is much ignorance. This is inescapable, because big cities are just too big

and too complex to be comprehended in detail from any vantage point—even if this vantage point is at the top—or to be comprehended by any human; yet detail is of the essence. A district citizens' group from East Harlem, in anticipation of a meeting it had arranged with the Mayor and his commissioners, prepared a document recounting the devastation wrought in the district by remote decisions (most of them well meant, of course), and they added this comment: "We must state how often we find that those of us who live or work in East Harlem, coming into daily contact with it, see it quite differently from . . . the people who only ride through on their way to work, or read about it in their daily papers or, too often, we believe, make decisions about it from desks downtown." I have heard almost these same words in Boston, in Chicago, in Cincinnati, in St. Louis. It is a complaint that echoes and re-echoes in all our big cities.

Districts have to help bring the resources of a city down to where they are needed by street neighborhoods, and they have to help translate the experiences of real life, in street neighborhoods, into policies and purposes of their city as a whole. And they have to help maintain an area that is usable, in a civilized way, not only for its own residents but for other users—workers, customers, visitors—from the city as a whole.

To accomplish these functions, an effective district has to be large enough to count as a force in the life of the city as a whole. The "ideal" neighborhood of planning theory is useless for such a role. A district has to be big and powerful enough to fight city hall. Nothing less is to any purpose. To be sure, fighting city hall is not a district's only function, or necessarily the most important. Nevertheless, this is a good definition of size, in functional terms, because sometimes a district has to do exactly this, and also because a district lacking the power and will to fight city hall—and to win—when its people feel deeply threatened, is unlikely to possess the power and will to contend with other serious problems.

Let us go back to the street neighborhoods for a moment, and pick up a loose end I left dangling: the job, incumbent upon

good street neighborhoods, to get help when too big a problem comes along.

Nothing is more helpless than a city street alone, when its problems exceed its powers. Consider, as an illustration, what happened with respect to a case of narcotics pushing on a street in uptown West Side Manhattan in 1955. The street on which this case occurred had residents who worked all over the city and had friends and acquaintances outside the street as well as on it. On the street itself they had a reasonably flourishing public life centered around the stoops, but they had no neighborhood stores and no regular public characters. They also had no connection with a district neighborhood; indeed, their area has no such thing, except in name.

When heroin began to be sold from one of the apartments, a stream of drug addicts filtered into the street—not to live, but to make their connections. They needed money to buy the drugs. An epidemic of holdups and robberies on the street was one answer. People became afraid to come home with their pay on Fridays. Sometimes at night terrible screaming terrorized the residents. They were ashamed to have friends visit them. Some of the adolescents on the street were addicts, and more were becoming so.

The residents, most of whom were conscientious and respectable, did what they could. They called the police many times. Some individuals took the initiative of finding that the responsible outfit to talk with was the Narcotics Squad. They told the detectives of the squad where the heroin was being sold, and by whom, and when, and what days supplies seemed to come.

Nothing happened—except that things continued to get worse.

Nothing much ever happens when one helpless little street fights alone some of the most serious problems of a great city.

Had the police been bribed? How is anybody to know?

Lacking a district neighborhood, lacking knowledge of any other persons who cared about this problem in this place and could bring weight to bear on it, the residents had gone as far as they knew how to go. Why didn't they at least call their local assemblyman, or get in touch with the political club? Nobody

on the street knew those people (an assemblyman has about 115,000 constituents) or knew anybody who did know them. In short, this street simply had no connections of any kind with a district neighborhood, let alone effective connections with an effective district neighborhood. Those on the street who could possibly manage it moved away when they saw that the street's situation was evidently hopeless. The street plunged into thorough chaos and barbarism.

New York had an able and energetic police commissioner during these events, but he could not be reached by everyone. Without effective intelligence from the streets and pressure from districts, he too must become to a degree helpless. Because of this gap, so much good intent at the top comes to so little purpose at the bottom, and vice-versa.

Sometimes the city is not the potential helper, but the antagonist of a street, and again, unless the street contains extraordinarily influential citizens, it is usually helpless alone. On Hudson Street we recently had this problem. The Manhattan Borough engineers decided to cut ten feet off our sidewalks. This was part of a mindless, routinized city program of vehicular road widening.

We people on the street did what we could. The job printer stopped his press, took off of it work on which he had an urgent deadline, and printed emergency petitions on a Saturday morning so the children, out of school, could help get them around. People from overlapping street neighborhoods took petitions and spread them farther. The two parochial schools, Episcopal and Catholic, sent petitions home with their children. We gathered about a thousand signatures from the street and the tributaries off it; these signatures must have represented most of the adults directly affected. Many businessmen and residents wrote letters, and a representative group formed a delegation to visit the Borough President, the elected official responsible.

But by ourselves, we would still hardly have had a chance. We were up against a sanctified general policy on street treatment, and were opposing a construction job that would mean a lot of money for somebody, on which arrangements were already far advanced. We had learned of the plan in advance of the dem-

olition purely by luck. No public hearing was required, for technically this was merely an adjustment in the curb line.

We were told at first that the plans would not be changed; the sidewalk must go. We needed power to back up our pipsqueak protest. This power came from our district—Greenwich Village. Indeed, a main purpose of our petitions, although not an ostensible purpose, was to dramatize to the district at large that an issue had erupted. The swift resolutions passed by district-wide organizations counted more for us than the street-neighborhood expressions of opinion. The man who got our delegation its appointment, Anthony Dapolito, the president of the citizens' Greenwich Village Association, and the people on our delegation who swung the most weight were from other streets than ours entirely; some from the other side of the district. They swung weight precisely because they represented opinion, and opinion makers, at district scale. With their help, we won.

Without the possibility of such support, most city streets hardly try to fight back—whether their troubles emanate from city hall or from other drawbacks of the human condition. Nobody likes to practice futility.

The help we got puts some individuals on our street under obligation, of course, to help other streets or aid more general district causes when help is wanted. If we neglect this, we may not get help next time we need it.

Districts effective at carrying the intelligence from the streets upward sometimes help translate it into city policy. There is no end to such examples, but this will do for illustration: As this is written, New York City is supposedly somewhat reforming its treatment for drug addicts, and simultaneously city hall is pressuring the federal government to expand and reform its treatment work, and to increase its efforts at blocking narcotics smuggling from abroad. The study and agitation that have helped push these moves did not originate with some mysterious "They." The first public agitation for reform and expansion of treatment was stirred not by officials at all, but by district pressure groups from districts like East Harlem and Greenwich Village. The disgraceful way in which arrest rolls are padded with victims while sellers operate openly and untouched is exposed and

publicized by just these pressure groups, not by officials and least of all by the police. These pressure groups studied the problem and have pressed for changes and will continue to, precisely because they are in direct touch with experiences in street neighborhoods. The experience of an orphaned street like that on the Upper West Side, on the other hand, never teaches anybody anything—except to get the hell out.

It is tempting to suppose that districts can be formed federally out of distinct separate neighborhoods. The Lower East Side of New York is attempting to form an effective district today, on this pattern, and has received large philanthropic grants for the purpose. The formalized federation system seems to work fairly well for purposes on which virtually everyone is agreed, such as applying pressure for a new hospital. But many vital questions in local city life turn out to be controversial. In the Lower East Side, for example, the federated district organizational structure includes, as this is written, people trying to defend their homes and neighborhoods from obliteration by the bulldozers; and it also contains the developers of cooperative projects and various other business interests who wish the governmental powers of condemnation to be used to wipe out these residents. These are genuine conflicts of interest—in this case, the ancient conflict between predator and prey. The people trying to save themselves spend much of their effort, futilely, trying to get resolutions adopted and letters approved by boards of directors that contain their chief enemies!

Both sides in hot fights on important local questions need to bring their full, consolidated, district-scale strength (nothing less is effective) to bear on the city policy they want to shape or the decisions they want to influence. They have to fight it out with each other, and with officials, on the plane where the effective decisions are made, because this is what counts in winning. Anything that diverts such contenders into fragmenting their power and watering their efforts by going through “decision-making” motions with hierarchies and boards at ineffectual levels where no responsible government powers of decision reside, vitiates political life, citizen effectiveness and self-government. This becomes play at self-government, not the real thing.

When Greenwich Village fought to prevent its park, Washington Square, from being bisected by a highway, for example, majority opinion was overwhelmingly against the highway. But not unanimous opinion; among those for the highway were numerous people of prominence, with leadership positions in smaller sections of the district. Naturally they tried to keep the battle on a level of sectional organization, and so did the city government. Majority opinion would have frittered itself away in these tactics, instead of winning. Indeed, it was frittering itself away until this truth was pointed out by Raymond Rubinow, a man who happened to work in the district, but did not live there. Rubinow helped form a *Joint Emergency Committee*, a true district organization cutting through other organizational lines. Effective districts operate as Things in their own right, and most particularly must their citizens who are in agreement with each other on controversial questions act together at district scale, or they get nowhere. Districts are not groups of petty principalities, working in federation. If they work, they work as integral units of power and opinion, large enough to count.

Our cities possess many islandlike neighborhoods too small to work as districts, and these include not only the project neighborhoods inflicted by planning, but also many unplanned neighborhoods. These unplanned, too small units have grown up historically, and often are enclaves of distinctive ethnic groups. They frequently perform well and strongly the neighborhood functions of streets and thus keep marvelously in hand the kinds of neighborhood social problems and rot that develop from within. But also, just such too small neighborhoods are helpless, in the same way streets are helpless, against the problems and rot that develop from without. They are shortchanged on public improvements and services because they lack power to get them. They are helpless to reverse the slow-death warrants of area credit-blacklisting by mortgage lenders, a problem terribly difficult to fight even with impressive district power. If they develop conflicts with people in adjoining neighborhoods, both they and the adjoining people are apt to be helpless at improving relationships. Indeed, insularity makes these relationships deteriorate further.

Sometimes, to be sure, a neighborhood too small to function as a district gets the benefit of power through possessing an exceptionally influential citizen or an important institution. But the citizens of such a neighborhood pay for their "free" gift of power when the day comes that their interests run counter to those of Papa Bigwheel or Papa Institution. They are helpless to defeat Papa in the government offices, up where the decisions are made, *and therefore they are helpless also to teach him or influence him.* Citizens of neighborhoods that include a university, for example, are often in this helpless fix.

Whether a district of sufficient potential power does become effective and useful as an organ of democratic self-government depends much on whether the insularity of too small neighborhoods within it is overcome. This is principally a social and political problem for a district and the contenders within it, but it is also a physical problem. To plan deliberately, and physically, on the premise that separated city neighborhoods of less than district size are a worthy ideal, is to subvert self-government; that the motives are sentimental or paternalistic is no help. When the physical isolation of too small neighborhoods is abetted by blatant social distinctions, as in projects whose populations are price-tagged, the policy is savagely destructive to effective self-government and self-management in cities.

The value of city districts that swing real power (but in which street neighborhoods are not lost as infinitesimal units) is no discovery of mine. Their value is rediscovered and demonstrated empirically over and over. Nearly every large city has at least one such effective district. Many more areas struggle sporadically to function like districts in time of crisis.

Not surprisingly, a reasonably effective district usually accrues to itself, with time, considerable political power. It eventually generates, too, whole series of individuals able to operate simultaneously at street scale and district scale, and on district scale and in neighborhoods of the city as a whole.

To correct our general disastrous failure to develop functional districts is in great part a problem of city administrative change, which we need not go into at this point. But we also need, among other things, to abandon conventional planning ideas about city

neighborhoods. The "ideal" neighborhood of planning and zoning theory, too large in scale to possess any competence or meaning as a street neighborhood, is at the same time too small in scale to operate as a district. It is unfit for anything. It will not serve as even a point of departure. Like the belief in medical bloodletting, it was a wrong turn in the search for understanding.

If the only kinds of city neighborhoods that demonstrate useful functions in real-life self-government are the city as a whole, streets, and districts, then effective neighborhood physical planning for cities should aim at these purposes:

First, to foster lively and interesting streets.

Second, to make the fabric of these streets as continuous a network as possible *throughout* a district of potential subcity size and power.

Third, to use parks and squares and public buildings as part of this street fabric; use them to intensify and knit together the fabric's complexity and multiple use. They should not be used to island off different uses from each other, or to island off subdistrict neighborhoods.

Fourth, to emphasize the functional identity of areas large enough to work as districts.

If the first three aims are well pursued, the fourth will follow. Here is why: Few people, unless they live in a world of paper maps, can identify with an abstraction called a district, or care much about it. Most of us identify with a place in the city because we use it, and get to know it reasonably intimately. We take our two feet and move around in it and come to count on it. The only reason anyone does this much is that useful or interesting or convenient differences fairly near by exert an attraction.

Almost nobody travels willingly from sameness to sameness and repetition to repetition, even if the physical effort required is trivial.

Thus it was discovered in Jefferson Houses, in East Harlem, that many people who had lived in the project four years had never laid eyes on the community center. It is at the dead end of the project (dead end, in the sense that no city life, only more park, lies beyond). People from other portions of the project had no normal reason for traveling to it from their

Differences, *not duplications*, make for cross-use and hence for a person's identification with an area greater than his immediate street network. Monotony is the enemy of cross-use and hence of functional unity. As for Turf, planned or unplanned, nobody outside the Turf can possibly feel a natural identity of interest with it or with what it contains.

Centers of use grow up in lively, diverse districts, just as centers of use occur on a smaller scale in parks, and such centers count especially in district identification if they contain also a landmark that comes to stand for the place symbolically and, in a way, for the district. But centers cannot carry the load of district identification by themselves; differing commercial and cultural facilities, and different-looking scenes, must crop up all through. Within this fabric, physical barriers, such as huge traffic arteries, too large parks, big institutional groupings, are functionally destructive because they block cross-use.

How big, in absolute terms, must an effective district be? I have given a functional definition of size: big enough to fight city hall, but not so big that street neighborhoods are unable to draw district attention and to count.

In absolute terms, this means different sizes in different cities, depending partly on the size of the city as a whole. In Boston, when the North End had a population upward of 30,000 people, it was strong in district power. Now its population is about half that, partly from the salutary process of uncrowding its dwellings as its people have unslummed, and partly from the unsalutary process of being ruthlessly amputated by a new highway. Cohesive though the North End is, it has lost an important sum of district power. In a city like Boston, Pittsburgh or possibly even Philadelphia, as few as 30,000 people may be sufficient to form

portions and every normal reason not to. It looked, over there, like more of the same. A settlement-house director in the Lower East Side, Dora Tannenbaum of Grand Street Settlement, says of people in different building groupings of an adjacent project: "These people cannot seem to get the idea they have anything in common with one another. They act as if the other parts of the project were on a different planet." Visually these projects are units. Functionally they are no such thing. The appearance tells a lie.

a district. In New York or Chicago, however, a district as small as 30,000 amounts to nothing. Chicago's most effective district, the Back-of-the-Yards, embraces about 100,000 people, according to the director of the district Council, and is building up its population further. In New York, Greenwich Village is on the small side for an effective district, but is viable because it manages to make up for this with other advantages. It contains approximately 80,000 residents, along with a working population (perhaps a sixth of them the same people) of approximately 125,000. East Harlem and the Lower East Side of New York, both struggling to create effective districts, each contain about 200,000 residents, and need them.

Of course other qualities than sheer population size count in effectiveness—especially good communication and good morale. But population size is vital because it represents, if most of the time only by implication, votes. There are only two ultimate public powers in shaping and running American cities: votes and control of the money. To sound nicer, we may call these "public opinion" and "disbursement of funds," but they are still votes and money. An effective district—and through its mediation, the street neighborhoods—possesses one of these powers: the power of votes. Through this, and this alone, can it effectively influence the power brought to bear on it, for good or for ill, by public money.

Robert Moses, whose genius at getting things done largely consists in understanding this, has made an art of using control of public money to get his way with those whom the voters elect and depend on to represent their frequently opposing interests. This is, of course, in other guises, an old, sad story of democratic government. The art of negating the power of votes with the power of money can be practiced just as effectively by honest public administrators as by dishonest representatives of purely private interests. Either way, seduction or subversion of the elected is easiest when the electorate is fragmented into ineffectual units of power.

On the maximum side, I know of no district larger than 200,000 which operates like a district. Geographical size imposes empirical population limits in any case. In real life, the maximum size of

naturally evolved, effective districts seems to be roughly about a mile and a half square. Probably this is because anything larger gets too inconvenient for sufficient local cross-use and for the functional identity that underlies district political identity. In a very big city, populations must therefore be dense to achieve successful districts; otherwise, sufficient political power is never reconciled with viable geographic identity.

This point on geographic size does not mean a city can be mapped out in segments of about a square mile, the segments defined with boundaries, and districts thereby brought to life. It is not boundaries that make a district, but the cross-use and life. The point in considering the physical size and limits of a district is this: the kinds of objects, natural or man-made, that form physical barriers to easy cross-use must be somewhere. It is better that they be at the edges of areas large enough to work as districts than that they cut into the continuity of otherwise feasible districts. The fact of a district lies in what it *is* internally, and in the internal continuity and overlapping with which it is used, not in the way it ends or in how it looks in an air view. Indeed, in many cases very popular city districts spontaneously extend their edges, unless prevented from doing so by physical barriers. A district too thoroughly buffered off also runs the danger of losing economically stimulating visitors from other parts of the city.

Neighborhood planning units that are significantly defined only by their fabric and the life and intricate cross-use they generate, rather than by formalistic boundaries, are of course at odds with orthodox planning conceptions. The difference is the difference between dealing with living, complex organisms, capable of shaping their own destinies, and dealing with fixed and inert settlements, capable merely of custodial care (if that) of what has been bestowed upon them.

In dwelling on the necessity for districts, I do not want to give the impression that an effective city district is self-contained either

The Back-of-the-Yards in Chicago is the only significant exception to this rule that I know of. It is an exception with perhaps useful implications in some cases, which need not concern us here but will be dealt with later in this book as an administrative question.

economically, politically or socially. Of course it is not and cannot be, any more than a street can be. Nor can districts be duplicates of one another; they differ immensely, and should. A city is not a collection of repetitious towns. An interesting district has a character of its own and specialties of its own. It draws users from outside (it has little truly urban economic variety unless it does), and its own people go forth.

Nor is there necessity for district self-containment. In Chicago's Back-of-the-Yards, most of the breadwinners used to work, until the 1940's, at the slaughterhouses within the district. This did have a bearing on district formation in this case, because district organization here was a sequel to labor union organization. But as these residents and their children have graduated from the slaughterhouse jobs, they have moved into the working life and public life of the greater city. Most, other than teen-agers with after-school jobs, now work outside the district. This movement has not weakened the district; coincident with it, the district has grown stronger.

The constructive factor that has been operating here meanwhile is time. Time, in cities, is the substitute for self-containment. Time, in cities, is indispensable.

The cross-links that enable a district to function as a Thing are neither vague nor mysterious. They consist of working relationships among specific people, many of them without much else in common than that they share a fragment of geography.

The first relationships to form in city areas, given any neighborhood stability, are those in street neighborhoods and those among people who do have something else in common and belong to organizations with one another—churches, P-TA's, businessmen's associations, political clubs, local civic leagues, fund-raising committees for health campaigns or other public causes, sons of such-and-such a village (common clubs among Puerto Ricans today, as they have been with Italians), property owners' associations, block improvement associations, protesters against injustices, and so on, ad infinitum.

To look into almost any relatively established area of a big city turns up so many organizations, mostly little, as to make one's head swim. Mrs. Goldie Hoffman, one of the commissioners of

Philadelphia's redevelopment agency, decided to try the experiment of casing the organizations, if any, and the institutions in a drear little Philadelphia section of about ten thousand people, which was up for renewal. To her astonishment and everyone else's, she found nineteen. Small organizations and special-interest organizations grow in our cities like leaves on the trees, and in their own way are just as awesome a manifestation of the persistence and doggedness of life.

The crucial stage in the formation of an effective district goes much beyond this, however. An interweaving, but different, set of relationships must grow up; these are working relationships among people, usually leaders, who enlarge their local public life beyond the neighborhoods of streets and specific organizations or institutions and form relationships with people whose roots and backgrounds are in entirely different constituencies, so to speak. These hop-and-skip relationships are more fortuitous in cities than are the analogous, almost enforced, hop-and-skip links among people from different small groupings within self-contained settlements. Perhaps because we are typically more advanced at forming whole-city neighborhoods of interest than at forming districts, hop-skip district relationships sometimes originate fortuitously among people from a district who meet in a special-interest neighborhood of the whole city, and then carry over this relationship into their district. Many district networks in New York, for instance, start in this fashion.

It takes surprisingly few hop-skip people, relative to a whole population, to weld a district into a real Thing. A hundred or so people do it in a population a thousand times their size. But these people must have time to find each other, time to try expedient cooperation—as well as time to have rooted themselves, too, in various smaller neighborhoods of place or special interest.

When my sister and I first came to New York from a small city, we used to amuse ourselves with a game we called Messages. I suppose we were trying, in a dim way, to get a grip on the great, bewildering world into which we had come from our cocoon. The idea was to pick two wildly dissimilar individuals—say a headhunter in the Solomon Islands and a cobbler in Rock Island, Illinois—and assume that one had to get a message to the other by

word of mouth; then we would each silently figure out a plausible, or at least possible, chain of persons through whom the message could go. The one who could make the shortest plausible chain of messengers won. The headhunter would speak to the headman of his village, who would speak to the trader who came to buy copra, who would speak to the Australian patrol officer when he came through, who would tell the man who was next slated to go to Melbourne on leave, etc. Down at the other end, the cobbler would hear from his priest, who got it from the mayor, who got it from a state senator, who got it from the governor, etc. We soon had these close-to-home messengers down to a routine for almost everybody we could conjure up, but we would get tangled in long chains at the middle until we began employing Mrs. Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt made it suddenly possible to skip whole chains of intermediate connections. She knew the most unlikely people. The world shrank remarkably. It shrank us right out of our game, which became too cut and dried.

A city district requires a small quota of its own Mrs. Roosevelts —people who know unlikely people, and therefore eliminate the necessity for long chains of communication (which in real life would not occur at all).

Settlement-house directors are often the ones who begin such systems of district hop-skip links, but they can only begin them and work at opportune ways to extend them; they cannot carry the load. These links require the growth of trust, the growth of cooperation that is, at least at first, apt to be happenstance and tentative; and they require people who have considerable self-confidence, or sufficient concern about local public problems to stand them in the stead of self-confidence. In East Harlem, where, after terrible disruption and population turnover, an effective district is slowly re-forming against great odds, fifty-two organizations participated in a 1960 pressure meeting to tell the Mayor and fourteen of his commissioners what the district wants. The organizations included P-TA's, churches, settlements and welfare groups, civic clubs, tenant associations, businessmen's associations, political clubs, and the local congressman, assemblyman and councilman. Fifty-eight individuals had specific responsibilities in getting up the meeting and setting its policy; they included people of

all sorts of talents and occupations, and a great ethnic range—Negroes, Italians, Puerto Ricans, and undefinables. This represents a lot of hop-skip district links. It has taken years and skill on the part of half a dozen people to achieve this amount of network, and the process is only starting to reach the stage of being effective.

Once a good, strong network of these hop-skip links does get going in a city district, the net can enlarge relatively swiftly and weave all kinds of resilient new patterns. One sign that it is doing so, sometimes, is the growth of a new kind of organization, more or less district-wide, but impermanent, formed specifically for *ad hoc* purposes.* But to get going, a district network needs these three requisites: a start of some kind; a physical area with which sufficient people can identify as users; and Time.

The people who form hop-skip links, like the people who form the smaller links in streets and special-interest organizations, are not at all the statistics that are presumed to represent people in planning and housing schemes. Statistical people are a fiction for many reasons, one of which is that they are treated as if infinitely interchangeable. Real people are unique, they invest years of their lives in significant relationships with other unique people, and are not interchangeable in the least. Severed from their relationships, they are destroyed as effective social beings—sometimes for a little while, sometimes forever.

In city neighborhoods, whether streets or districts, if too many slowly grown public relationships are disrupted at once, all kinds of havoc can occur—so much havoc, instability and helplessness,

In Greenwich Village, these frequently run to long, explicit names: e.g., the Joint Emergency Committee to Close Washington Square Park to All but Emergency Traffic; the Cellar Dwellers' Tenant Emergency Committee; the Committee of Neighbors to Get the Clock on Jefferson Market Courthouse Started, the Joint Village Committee to Defeat the West Village Proposal and Get a Proper One.

† There are people who seemingly can behave like interchangeable statistics and take up in a different place exactly where they left off, but they must belong to one of our fairly homogeneous and ingrown nomad societies, like Beatniks, or Regular Army officers and their families, or the peripatetic junior executive families of suburbia, described by William H. Whyte, Jr., in *The Organization Man*.

that it sometimes seems time will never again get in its licks.

Harrison Salisbury, in a series of *New York Times* articles, "The Shook-Up Generation," put well this vital point about city relationships and their disruption.

"Even a ghetto [he quoted a pastor as saying], after it has remained a ghetto for a period of time builds up its social structure and this makes for more stability, more leadership, more agencies for helping the solution of public problems."

But when slum clearance enters an area [Salisbury went on], it does not merely rip out slatternly houses. It uproots the people. It tears out the churches. It destroys the local business man. It sends the neighborhood lawyer to new offices downtown and it mangles the tight skein of community friendships and group relationships beyond repair.

It drives the old-timers from their broken-down flats or modest homes and forces them to find new and alien quarters. And it pours into a neighborhood hundreds and thousands of new faces . . .

Renewal planning, which is largely aimed at saving buildings, and incidentally some of the population, but at strewing the rest of a locality's population, has much the same result. So does too heavily concentrated private building, capitalizing in a rush on the high values created by a stable city neighborhood. From Yorkville, in New York, an estimated 15,000 families have been driven out between 1951 and 1960 by this means; virtually all of them left unwillingly. In Greenwich Village, the same thing is happening. Indeed, it is a miracle that our cities have any functioning districts, not that they have so few. In the first place, there is relatively little city territory at present which is, by luck, well suited physically to forming districts with good cross-use and identity. And within this, incipient or slightly too weak districts are forever being amputated, bisected and generally shaken up by misguided planning policies. The districts that are effective enough to defend themselves from planned disruption are eventually trampled in an unplanned gold rush by those who aim to get a cut of these rare social treasures.

To be sure, a good city neighborhood can absorb newcomers

into itself, both newcomers by choice and immigrants settling by expediency, and it can protect a reasonable amount of transient population too. But these increments or displacements have to be gradual. If self-government in the place is to work, underlying any float of population must be a continuity of people who have forged neighborhood networks. These networks are a city's irreplaceable social capital. Whenever the capital is lost, from whatever cause, the income from it disappears, never to return until and unless new capital is slowly and chancily accumulated.

Some observers of city life, noting that strong city neighborhoods are so frequently ethnic communities—especially communities of Italians, Poles, Jews or Irish—have speculated that a cohesive ethnic base is required for a city neighborhood that works as a social unit. In effect, this is to say that only hyphenated-Americans are capable of local self-government in big cities. I think this is absurd.

In the first place, these ethnically cohesive communities are not always as naturally cohesive as they may look to outsiders. Again citing the Back-of-the-Yards as an example, its backbone population is mainly Central European, but all kinds of Central European. It has, for example, literally dozens of national churches. The traditional enmities and rivalries among these groups were a most severe handicap. Greenwich Village's three main parts derive from an Italian community, an Irish community and a Henry Jamesian patrician community. Ethnic cohesiveness may have played a part in the formation of these sections, but it has been no help in welding district cross-links—a job that was begun many years ago by a remarkable settlement-house director, Mary K. Simkhovich. Today many streets in these old ethnic communities have assimilated into their neighborhoods a fantastic ethnic variety from almost the whole world. They have also assimilated a great sprinkling of middle-class professionals and their families, who prove to do very well at city street and district life, in spite of the planning myth that such people need protective islands of pseudosuburban “togetherness.” Some of the streets that functioned best in the Lower East Side (before they were wiped out) were loosely called “Jewish,” but contained, as people actually involved in the street neighborhoods, individuals of more than

forty differing ethnic origins. One of New York's most effective neighborhoods, with an internal communication that is a marvel, is the midtown East Side of predominately high-income people, utterly undefinable except as Americans.

In the second place, wherever ethnically cohesive neighborhoods develop and are stable, they possess another quality besides ethnic identity. They contain many individuals who stay put. This, I think, more than sheer ethnic identity, is the significant factor. It typically takes many years after such groups have settled in for time to work and for the inhabitants to attain stable, effective neighborhoods.

Here is a seeming paradox: To maintain in a neighborhood sufficient people who stay put, a city must have the very fluidity and mobility of use that Reginald Isaacs noted, as mentioned early in this chapter, when he speculated whether neighborhoods can therefore mean anything very significant to cities.

Over intervals of time, many people change their jobs and the locations of their jobs, shift or enlarge their outside friendships and interests, change their family sizes, change their incomes up or down, even change many of their tastes. In short they live, rather than just exist. If they live in diversified, rather than monotonous, districts—in districts, particularly, where many details of physical change can constantly be accommodated—and if they like the place, they can stay put despite changes in the locales or natures of their other pursuits or interests. Unlike the people who must move from a lower-middle to a middle-middle to an upper-middle suburb as their incomes and leisure activities change (or be very outré indeed), or the people of a little town who must move to another town or to a city to find different opportunities, city people need not pull up stakes for such reasons.

A city's collection of opportunities of all kinds, and the fluidity with which these opportunities and choices can be used, is an asset—not a detriment—for encouraging city-neighborhood stability.

However, this asset has to be capitalized upon. It is thrown away where districts are handicapped by sameness and are suitable, therefore, to only a narrow range of incomes, tastes and family

circumstances. Neighborhood accommodations for fixed, bodiless, statistical people are accommodations for instability. The people in them, as statistics, may stay the same. But the people in them, as people, do not. Such places are forever way stations.

In the first section of this book, of which this is the close, I have been emphasizing assets and strengths peculiar to big cities, and weaknesses peculiar to them also. Cities, like anything else, succeed only by making the most of their assets. I have tried to point out the kinds of places in cities that do this, and the way they work. My idea, however, is not that we should therefore try to reproduce, routinely and in a surface way, the streets and districts that do display strength and success as fragments of city life. This would be impossible, and sometimes would be an exercise in architectural antiquarianism. Moreover, even the best streets and districts can stand improvement, especially amenity.

But if we understand the principles behind the behavior of cities, we can build on potential assets and strengths, instead of acting at cross-purposes to them. First we have to know the general results we want—and know because of knowing how life in cities works. We have to know, for instance, that we want lively, well-used streets and other public spaces, and why we want them. But knowing what to want, although it is a first step, is far from enough. The next step is to examine some of the workings of cities at another level: the economic workings that produce those lively streets and districts for city users.