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Growing community: A case for hybrid landscapes

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Abstract

Hybrid landscapes are community landscapes. They are generated by combining two place-making processes: the ways that traditional public parks and streets are designed and maintained, and the acts of small-scale appropriation and embellishment that lead to the diversity and richness of front and backyards in residential neighbourhoods. Hybrid landscapes facilitate environmental communication between the community and individuals, and strengthen community sentiment by serving as mechanisms for the propagation of valued neighbourhood qualities that are threatened by redevelopment. In that context, the paper discusses neighbourhoods as familiar, restorative, memorable and beautiful environments. A community greenway, a model hybrid landscape, is described as an example, and rules for making such landscapes are explained. © 1997 Elsevier Science B.V.

Keywords: Urban landscape; Greenway; Community landscape

1. Introduction

The root of the word community is the Latin word *communis* which means common in the sense of sharing equally or together with others. A more recent notion is common in the sense of ordinary, widespread or not special. This way, togetherness is widespread, community is common.

The word communication has the same origin, it means to make common and thus known.

Who communicates with whom, how, when, where, and in what context and situation is an important way in which communication and the built environment are related. Environments both reflect communication and modulate it, channel it, control it, facilitate it, inhibit it (p. 181 of Rapoport, 1982).

The same is true for the urban landscape. Streets, lanes, front and backyards participate in this communication. Two messages are most important to communicate. The first one tells that indeed there is community, a measure of sharing or togetherness between the residents of a neighbourhood. The second one is more personal, stating that within the community there are distinct individuals. Both messages, affirmations of belonging to a group and being recognizable within the group, are increasingly difficult to communicate in the urban landscape. The urban landscape is becoming more anonymous and less livable in the process.

A strong dialectical relationship exists between the urban landscape and a sense of community. The urban landscape can function as a growing medium for the community; it can be a culture for commu-

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nity. A brief look at research on community attachment, community satisfaction, and place identity expands on the nature of that relationship.

Several characteristics of urban landscapes conducive to positive community sentiment are analyzed in greater detail by looking at an everyday neighbourhood as a familiar and restorative environment, rich in memories and activities that establish a sense of belonging, and full of beauty. These qualities are threatened by redevelopment but can be cultivated in a new form of public landscape called the *hybrid landscape* because it integrates the two diverse place making processes that traditionally generate public spaces and individually shaped private ones. The result is a landscape that has communally accepted structure and rules while displaying the richness and diversity that only comes from the creativity of many individuals. The hybrid landscape is further discussed in a potential form and its rules of making.

2. Community and landscape

"Communities and landscapes have always been organized into patterns..." (Jackson, 1960 in Meinig, 1979, p. 220). These patterns, often made up of the "ordinary run-of-the-mill things that humans have created and put upon the earth" (p. 15 of Meinig, 1979), are at the core of the hybrid landscape. The study of these social, cultural and physical patterns is a point of departure for understanding the culture of the hybrid landscape. They surface in the discussion of community sentiment, and later in the analysis of neighbourhood qualities.

Some aspects of the relationship between a sense of community and the urban landscape can be found in pp. 253–278 of the overview of research made by Hummon (1992) in connection to community sentiment, including community satisfaction, community attachment, and place identity. He discusses human feelings about place as a complex phenomenon arising "from locales that are at once ecological, built, social, and symbolic environments." For the purpose of this paper, only findings that address the urban landscape in a specific way have been considered.

Fried (1982) found that the strongest predictors for community satisfaction are: "objective housing quality, objective neighbourhood quality, ease of access to nature, and home ownership.... At the same time, the absence of local social interaction as an important factor contributing to residential satisfaction is clear" (p. 117). Other studies have presented a greater emphasis on the social environment, ranking friendliness, privacy and personal safety alongside with aspects of the physical environment like condition of housing, visual attractiveness, cleanliness and noise level (Herting and Guest, 1985). The landscape image evoked by this research seems hygienic and instrumental. It describes a well-maintained neighbourhood with few neighbours who smile from afar. It is a landscape of social distance; not surprisingly, larger residences and cul-de-sacs also figure prominently (Guest and Lee, 1983). The link between a sense of community and the urban landscape seems weak in the discussion of community satisfaction.

One can be satisfied with a neighbourhood without being attached to it, and vice versa. Mobile, affluent residents may be satisfied with their neighbourhood without forming attachment, having alternative places of residence or simply seeing the house as a temporary home. Lower-income inner-city residents often form strong attachment to the neighbourhood while being thoroughly dissatisfied with their living conditions. Community satisfaction and community attachment are not correlated. Accordingly, research on community attachment, a deeper emotional tie to place, demonstrates a weaker connection to community size, density or type (Hummon, 1992). Instead, long-term residency (Sampson, 1988) with its development of networks of friendly social relations and its accumulation of significant life memories connected to places in the neighbourhood and social involvement in the neighbourhood (St. John et al., 1986) are strongly related to community attachment. The objective quality and the subjective perception of the neighbourhood, proximity to local landmarks, and life-cycle stage are less influential.

Attachment, more than satisfaction, is influenced by the psychology of the community. It is therefore a more complex phenomenon, and less readily isolated and measured. Greater emphasis is placed on the value of interactions among people in the neighbourhood. The research on community attachment begins to paint an image of the urban landscape with people that one knows and places that one remembers. Such

a neighbourhood is familiar, communicates a sense of belonging and is full of memories.

Place identity as a third component of community sentiment opens the discussion to a host of related disciplines, such as humanist geography and environmental psychology. These disciplines seek to investigate the meaning of place to human experience. Place identity consists of "cognitions about the physical world," including "memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behaviour and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being" (Proshansky et al., 1983). In short, "attachment to the landscape is not simple. It is a complex set of threads woven through one's life" (p. 18 of Riley, 1992), made more challenging by the complexity of the human mind, searching to understand how the "life-long striving to achieve coherence for one's self" (p. 242 of Korpela, 1989) figures in person–place relations. The landscape becomes the setting and the "stuff of an ever-changing interior drama" (p. 18 of Riley, 1992).

The concept of place identity, or sense of place, as a comprehensive view of the ties between humans and the places they inhabit, brings a different language into the discussion. Learning "to see with the soul of the eye" (p. 28 of Relph, 1979) we discover "treasured wastes" (p. 64 of Stilgoe, 1987), remember fondly childhood places "unappealing or even repugnant to usual adult sensitivities" (p. 14 of Riley, 1979), and discover a world "passing strange and wonderful" (Tuan, 1993). As the language loses its grey instrumentality, the landscape emerging from these writings comes alive. It finally is a landscape that we know, full of beauty and the potential to restore.

3. Characteristics of a neighbourhood

Our understanding of community is simple. It is the people who come to us and claim that they are a community. Occasionally, they are localized communities with members from many neighbourhoods who are concerned about the fate of a specific place. Mostly, however, they are local communities sharing area of residence. To them, the neighbourhood is where community, quite literally, takes place.

These neighbourhoods are commonly residential, of low to medium density, well-established and often targeted for densification. Although outsiders may consider them bland, residents value these neighbourhoods greatly. They are familiar and restorative environments, a source of belonging and fond memories, and places of beauty.

Familiarity is acquired over time. To an extent, familiarity is consciously knowing what is where. Routes, important place features and places of remembered events can be recalled at will. The cognitive map of the neighbourhood becomes increasingly dense, more information is stored, and richer emotions and imaginations are attached to places. Familiarity is a thick brew of cognitions that have meaning.

A part of the cognitive map, however, is not known consciously, cannot be recalled at will. It simply forms a grey background against which small changes stand out. One may not recall the previous colour of the neighbour's entrance door but may register that it has been repainted in a different shade. The change is noticeable to people who are familiar with the previous condition.

Familiarity thus differentiates between the members of a community and others. It imbues the urban landscape with meaning, and it serves as a source of stability and order, all the while reinforcing the identity of individuals and of community.

Everyday environments are familiar. To competently navigate them, unless there are uncommon threats, requires little voluntary or directed attention. The eye simply surveys the familiar ground for small changes, the routine path is taken and the mind is free to wander. The environmental stimuli are mildly interesting, attractive enough for a gaze but posing no mental challenges. In short, they fulfill the definition made by Kaplan (1993) on soft fascination. Accordingly, passing through one's everyday environment allows the mind to rest and restore directed attention, to relieve stress by freeing up mental processing capacity to deal with the day's unfinished business. A walk around the block, like a walk in the park, can help the individual clear the mind and come to one's senses.

There is another reason why the neighbourhood has great potential to be restorative. Residents can make it so. Homes and yards are already extensively

modified to be restful havens, places to unwind and relax. By extension, the same can be true for the neighbourhood. While adverse conditions like heavy traffic, crime, environmental degradation or lack of control may impact negatively, those issues within the power of residents can be directed towards creating a more restorative environment. Even though many intentions are in potential conflict with nest-making, such as wanting to display status or to maximize real estate value, the desire to reduce environmental stress is strong.

The act of making things and shaping places may be more important than the finished product. Yards and houses are places for creative tinkering, often serving as the objects being tinkered with. Gardening and its attendant psychological benefits of peacefulness and quiet take place in and create "micro-restorative environments" (p. 243 of Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990). Home-based workshops and tool sheds, even garages, are other examples. They are not merely functional repair and storage places, but are set-ups for having enjoyable experiences that are self-directed, that challenge and extend skills, and that fascinate without requiring voluntary attention. In short, these environments have great potential to facilitate the experience of flow, a state of deep enjoyment and satisfaction (Csikszentmihalhy, 1990).

In the neighbourhood, tinkering, gardening, and fixing up, if seen from the public street, are activities that draw comments, sometimes unwanted advice, helpful hints or nosy questions. People feel encouraged to talk to each other when there is something obvious to talk about. Raking leaves or clearing snow off the sidewalk are communal activities often commented on by passersby. Words of support make the person doing the work feel valued as part of a social group; their role as an appreciated member of the community is affirmed. Sidewalks that need sweeping, cars that need fixing and lawns that need mowing are important opportunities for showing a sense of community.

"Ordinary people view the environment as a social medium." (p. 144 of Appleyard, 1979) They read the neighbourhood as "evidence of the actions and presence of others, and as reflection of self" (p. 150 of Appleyard, 1979). Unlike the anonymous big city environment and unlike the typical park, plaza or freeway, the neighbourhood is always populated because people are always present in their environmental works. For insiders, the neighbourhood has a face that consists of many faces, each identifiable as an individual and as a member of the community. Again, time is important. Michel Peraldi describes the making of landscape as a "dialectical exchange" between "making a place comply with some universalistic code" and an "unending success of personal, microcosmic interventions" (p. 138 of Conan, 1994). These personal manipulations accumulate over time, they pile up, and get erased again. If change is slow, and if those universalistic codes are applied over time, and subsequently *territorialized* by individuals or groups, then an environment continues to have a distinct identity that can be read. If radical changes take place, and if the resulting environment is difficult to leave an impression on, then facelessness is the outcome. Worse, "an environment that cannot be changed invites its own destruction" (p. 241 of Lynch, 1990).

The meaning of a landscape reveals itself in an emotional response to the sensory input. Without this response, landscapes are meaningless. Obviously, the intensity of this experience varies in people, depending on personality, memory, imagination, and the richness of the landscape itself. This richness includes historic layers or traces of past events of a personal or communal nature. "We remember landscapes where good things happened to us" (p. 19 of Riley, 1992). Communities and individuals leave markers of memorable events, they "fix aids for memory in the environment" (p. 251 of Korpela, 1989). These markers create a context larger than the moment; they expand the horizon beyond lifetime or locale. Established neighbourhoods are warehouses of memories where an individual life takes meaning and where the neighbourhood is a microcosm in which the larger world is contained.

Indeed, this larger world can be contained in a single creation such as the front yard that has been transformed into an "intimate mythical statement" (p. 135 of Conan, 1994). Some neighbourhoods feature extraordinary gardens of ingenuity in which the creators reuse found objects, passionately assemble strangely attractive icons, exuberantly scatter riotous colour schemes, and search for their own meaning in plain view of the community. "We may laugh at the virgin in her bathtub grotto or the plastic duck

behind a chain-link fence, but we should be uneasy about that derision, for the constellation before us affirms that someone engages selectively with a real but inexplicable world'' (p. 152 of Shepard, 1990). Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder as well as the eyes of the maker. In a society increasingly flooded by mass-produced items, these idiosyncratic gardens, houses, entrances or window boxes speak of an individual's desire to shape a piece of the world. Occasionally, the outcome is flamboyant extravagance, usually, the projects are more modest in scale and ambition. Wherever a project is located on the spectrum, whatever the critical evaluation of the passerby, it is always an attempt at beauty. It is not important to preserve these fleeting creations past their time, only to ensure their continued making.

Familiarity, restoration, belonging, sense of place and beauty are qualities of older working neighbourhoods that participate in the communication of a sense of community and the place of the individual in it. Both messages are important: a shared vision of togetherness and, within the agreed-upon rules of the community, an opportunity for individual expression. Both are critical in the formation of community attachment and place identity. However, as urban land use intensifies in North America, these nostalgic neighbourhoods with time on their hands and space to waste may become a thing of the past. Possibly, there is a different way of urban life evolving that has no need for place-bound community. Yet, residents say this is not so; they insist that a sense of community rooted in the neighbourhood is essential to their well-being (City of Vancouver, 1993).

A newly configured urban landscape of higher density with less individually owned land threatens the environmental communication of these important community values. Residents are afraid that densification will change the neighbourhood beyond recognition, make it less familiar, less restorative, more nondescript and simply less beautiful. They fear not to feel at home anymore with neither place nor people. Change in the urban landscape, as inevitable as it may be, needs to take into consideration the processes described above to avoid the thoughtless propagation of anonymity and resulting anomie, the ''confusion individuals and society feel about how to act toward their community and landscape'' (p. 4 of Hester, 1995).

We postulate a public urban landscape that has the capacity for the neighbourhood qualities described above, brought forth in a way that communicates how the community feels about itself, and how individuals take their place within it. Because this new landscape is a hybrid of the processes that generate the traditional public and the private landscape, we call it the hybrid landscape. Already, some existing landscape types exhibit hybrid characteristics consisting of a set of rules, by written or unwritten agreement of the community, and individual exploration of these rules.

4. The culture of the hybrid landscape

The beach is an example of a transient hybrid landscape. On a sunny summer day, the beach is overlaid with numerous private landscapes, miniature lots marked by blankets and towels, furnished with umbrellas and coolers, occasionally elaborated into sandcastles. Territory is claimed and modified to suit people's needs under a somewhat flexible code of appropriate actions. The beach, in that sense, is a strongly participatory landscape. At the end of the day, it reverts to a more anonymous state. When the tide comes in, little trace is left of the day's activities. Conversely, in a true hybrid landscape the traces would remain.

Community gardens and cemeteries share these hybrid qualities, but in a more permanent and more structured form. Individual plots within a given public formal structure are shaped and maintained according to personal interpretations of rules and traditions in light of aesthetic and other intentions. The essence of these landscape types is the interplay between the common and the individual, contributing to a landscape gestalt that has qualities superior to the sum of its parts.

The same dialectic is at work in residential neighbourhoods, played out in private front and backyards. Front yards are typically of the ''nurtured pedigree'' kind (p. 6 of Hough, 1984) with lawns and dwarf evergreens, well maintained in strict formality. They have ''high value in the public mind as an expression of care, aesthetic value and civic

spirit'' (p. 7 of Hough, 1984). In them, home owners reaffirm their membership in the community and acknowledge those of others (Jackson, 1987). The city does likewise with civic parks and streets that are programmed and maintained to exhibit the societal valuing of tidiness, control and pride of place—just like the traditional front yard where mostly unwritten rules and occasional municipal bylaws regulate the adherence to established patterns.

Backyards, in contrast, house a less controlled, less limited array of forms, plants, and activities. They may be part of the ''fortuitous landscape of naturalized urban plants'' (p. 6 of Hough, 1984) or the 'cultural vernacular' (p. 7 of Hough, 1984), the production zones of organic produce and ethnic vegetables not available at the local market. In backyards anything goes, short of keeping livestock, holding bonfires or firing guns. One can barbecue burgers, play, store amazing amounts of potentially reusable building materials, build useful or utterly useless items, frolic about, or do nothing at all. The front yard is all formal civic virtue; the backyard provides the more flexible, more innovative and more personal environment.

Public parks, ''conceived as pieces of nature for people's recreation, are dead things and immoral'' (p. 38 of Alexander, 1977). The land is fertile ground. A hybrid landscape can grow a stronger sense of community if it has structure and proper rules agreed upon by the community at large while at the same time encouraging small-scale manipulation at the pleasure of individuals.

We see an opportunity for virtue and wild imagination or nonchalance to coexist in public places. To illustrate the breadth of possibilities we will describe one specific hybrid landscape that is on our minds. Others may be different. The backbone of this hybrid landscape is a greenway, a pedestrian broadway through a neighbourhood, linking the locales of everyday needs: homes, places of work and play, shops, and transit stops. Ideally, this greenway takes a position central in location and in the life of the community like the village or town square used to do.

The greenway is lined with trees forming a linear arboretum of native species, an orchard of heritage fruit trees or a sanctuary for refugee trees displaced by development elsewhere in the city. Along the greenway are pockets of activity, most importantly informal places of various sizes to gather and sit around. One space has to be large enough to hold a small market, a community meeting, pumpkin sales at Halloween. Other spaces are small enough for intimate conversations, for family picnics or for solitary contemplation. The greenway and adjacent spaces are well maintained but not uptight.

Around the core are messy areas to temper the orderliness of the typical public landscape. A modicum of messiness is necessary to remove the deadening stiffness so typical of most urban green spaces. It also lures people into more natural areas, like children, bird-watchers, or seekers of solitude. Messiness has benefits. It lowers the threshold to manipulate the place, to take ownership and to give a face to an area. It also sponsors discovery, adventure and imagination. In the spirit of temperance, hybrid landscape messiness must resist crossing the border into neglect.

The fringes of the hybrid landscape respond to adjacent land use. A school might have an environmental demonstration yard, a day care center might build a children's exploration garden or adventure playground, a apartment building might sponsor a tenant community garden or a senior citizen home might provide an outdoor gathering place under shade trees. In each case, the use of these areas would not be exclusive to a particular group of people, but open to all while taking special consideration of the needs of those close by.

Away from the main pedestrian traffic, but not out of sight, are tool sheds and covered work areas for craft projects too large or too dirty for apartments: stripping paint off old furniture, building soap box cars or fixing up cars. There could be potting sheds next to a seedling nursery for balcony produce, a large granite table for sessions of the neighbourhood council, pavement chess sets, roller hockey rinks, bocce courts, maybe a rose garden or just thickets of blackberries.

This hybrid landscape has a greenway as a clear structure that takes its cues from the existing urban fabric, fringes that respond to the neighbouring land use, and more flexible spaces in between. Overlaid are numerous environmental works produced by volunteers sending messages from one to another, some ephemeral, some more persistent.

5. The rules of making

The rules that govern the making of a hybrid landscape are simple. The first rule is that control over this portion of the public realm is gradually transferred from municipal agencies to the community itself. The speed of transferral is determined by the community. The price of gaining control is accepting "responsibility: those who control a place should have the motives, information, and power to do it well, a commitment to the place and to the needs of other persons and creatures in it, a willingness to accept failure and to correct it" (p. 211 of Lynch, 1984).

Neighbourhood empowerment initiatives are on the rise (Berry et al., 1993; Robin, 1990). The powers that be, in the perception of the communities, have not dealt adequately with local issues. The hybrid landscape is based on the premise that more direct, more participatory and more democratic decision-making is needed. A transferral of power is necessary, but at the leisure of the community. It takes time to build up organizational structures that allow many individuals to take responsibility. A period of trial and error, of experiment, with a gradual growing into a new role and into new strengths is needed.

Transferral of power requires the willing participation of all involved. Street engineers and park managers assume new roles as expert advisers, as teachers of the community. A solid base of knowledge on the community level has to be built. Quite possibly, handing over control is not a linear process. The community may fail in maintaining a steadily rising level of commitment and energy. A certain amount of flexibility, of give and take, is necessary. It is important to establish a fall-back position from the start. Not just the implementation process, but also the design of the landscape has to incorporate a measure of resilience that tolerates a wavering of community support. Connecting the hybrid landscape securely to community programs can assist in times of low levels of commitment. Indeed, it is conceivable to design the public realm for the mere potential of evolving into a hybrid landscape. Probably, every public space should be designed this way.

If gaining community control is the first rule, then openness is the second rule. Again, Lynch offers a seductive list of meanings, *open* as in: "free to be entered or used, unobstructed, unrestricted, accessible, available, exposed, extended, candid, undetermined, loose, disengaged, responsive, ready to hear or see as in open heart, open eyes, open hand, open mind, open house, open city" (p. 397 of Lynch, 1984). Openness is at the centre of the hybrid landscape.

In a society trained to bargain by stating maximum positions, openness is difficult to achieve in a community process. One's own interests appear to outweigh concerns for the rights of others. However, communities can change more easily than other scales of government. In the community, after all, the individual has a human face.

The first two rules contain the seed for conflict. Control and freedom frequently collide. Consequently, the hybrid landscape has to be a field of negotiation. There is a continuous stream of formal or informal bargaining sessions. Depending on the nature of the conflict, some may require a process of mediation conducted by the community itself. Some may be resolved simply by talking to one another. That way, the hybrid landscape becomes a thoroughly social environment for anybody willing to participate. It is a place for constructive cooperation.

Conventional wisdom holds that the relation between the landscape and a sense of community lies in the making of the landscape. Communal tree plantings, environmental clean-up efforts, or the building of playgrounds have proven to raise community spirit, and lead to additional community initiatives. In that sense, the field of negotiation applies not only to discussions, but also to the making and remaking of the landscape. No great plans are needed, projects can evolve just by being communal efforts benefitting from the knowledge of self-professed experts.

The third and last rule follows directly from the first two. It is the rule of taking small steps only. Smallness is important so that frequent re evaluations can be made, and the course of procedure redirected, if necessary. A clear goal in sight is not essential. Instead, the journey has to be satisfactory and enjoyable. The "whole is unpredictable. When it starts coming into being, it is not yet clear how it will continue, or where it will end, because only the interaction of the growth, with the whole's own

laws, can suggest its continuation and its end'' (p. 14 of Alexander, 1987).

This incremental thinking is a challenge because travels into the unknown are uncommon in organizations like park planning departments. Incremental processes are in contradiction to the organizational structures of planning agencies who require clear goals. However, the hybrid landscape has no goals that result in a precise formal vision of an intended end-state, only a set of three rules to guide the process. In that sense, the goal of the hybrid landscape is to be never finished, but always complete.

6. Concluding remarks

Older, well-established neighbourhoods often have qualities that are dear to the residents. The neighbourhood landscape functions as a medium for the communication of these qualities, and thus contributes to a good balance between a basic sense of togetherness and a measure of individualism. When redevelopment densifies the neighbourhood and eliminates the places where this environmental communication occurs, the community suffers unless a way is found to re-establish this communication on public land. We call the resulting public realm the hybrid landscape. It is a hybrid of two processes: the setting of rules that manifest how a community wants to see itself, and the acts by which individuals assert themselves and take their place in the community. In the hybrid landscape, both processes lead to place making that manifests the old neighbourhood qualities, and thereby brings forth a greater sense of community.

The making of hybrid landscapes may not be easy because it challenges established notions about the function and appropriate demeanour of the public realm. In truth, there is little to lose. Boring, soulless, anonymous urban landscapes abound, a little experimentation can only have a positive effect on them.

Also, the hybrid landscape is not a cure-all for the prevalent loss of community. Other factors must fall into place. However, we feel that a comfortable, challenging and beautiful public landscape is an essential component. The beauty of hybrid landscapes is not the kind of art books, but a simpler one, less intended, more driven by local ecology, the availability of recycled materials, the spirit of individuals or the mood of the day. The hybrid landscape is a mirror of the people who live in the neighbourhood. It reflects the ingenuity of individuals and the togetherness of the group, acting as a barometer for community energy and a record of what the community was and is about. The community can find itself in the hybrid landscape, in its diversity, in its good attributes, and also in its weaker ones. It has, thus, a beauty of a very human nature.

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