Week 1 Reflection

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According to Rohe (2009), neighborhoods are “where people live and spend most of their time” (p. 210). Based on my personal experience, I would define neighborhoods as places where people can contribute a sense of community and a sense of place through their social actions. I specifically thought of my urban neighborhood in Inchon, South Korea, where I was born and grew up most of the time of my childhood. It was a well-designed neighborhood, based on Perry’s (1929) neighborhood unit formula, as public schools were located at the center of the neighborhood, together with a wide array of small-scale urban nature parks in the neighborhood. For example, it took me five minutes to walk to school from home, using a park as the route to the school. This park also served as a great community hang-out spot for my neighborhood. Unlike my 10-years-old niece who cannot stop playing with a smartphone, I was given the chance to play in nature, looking over a four-leaf clover, playing hide and seek, and all the fun, outdoor recreational activities. Social interaction was an important part of this neighborhood experience. We had community centers where neighborhood teens can study and work out, and most importantly, socialize with other neighbors.

The reasons why neighborhoods are important units of analysis for urban planners in the US might be associated with social justice perspectives. That said, a neighborhood-level analysis may involve identifying neighborhood needs and promoting equity and inclusion so that all residents, regardless of their gender, age, and race, can improve their health and quality of life. In our class discussion, I found it interesting to reflect on how to measure and quantify a “great or bad” neighborhood. APA’s characteristics and guidelines of a “great neighborhood” (Talen et al., 2015) gave me a snapshot of what it is like to be a great neighborhood, and I particularly liked the features related to the neighborhood environment and sustainable practices. At the same time, I was a bit skeptical on a quantitative way to evaluate the neighborhood, considering there are many qualitative aspects of the neighborhood environment that cannot be assessed quantitatively. For instance, many people would agree that great neighbors will make a great neighborhood; nevertheless, how can we evaluate the quality of neighbors? It is not simply determined by neighbors’ income or educational background, but rather it will depend on subjective values and interpretations.

References:

Perry, C. A. (1929). *Neighborhood and community planning* (Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs v.7). New York, NY: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs.

Rohe, W. M. (2009). From local to global: One hundred years of neighborhood planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *75*(2), 209–230.

Talen, E., Menozzi, S., & Schaefer, C. (2015). What is a “great Neighborhood”?: An analysis of APA’s top-rated places. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *81*(2), 121–141.