

(Habermas, 1991). Many argue that the public sphere is essential to modern democracy, and further that it is made possible by modern cities: by the social energy, economic power, division of labor, and quite importantly, the regular and unavoidable encounters with those whose ideas, beliefs, values, and lives are different from our own. One role of cities is to nurture this public sphere and political community.

In so far as suburbanized people rarely encounter directly those with different experiences of the city, and in so far as the primary mode of interaction is the intricate ballet of the automobile, these people might lack the intellectual and experiential resources to engage critically the direction of the city. We might consider the work of Harvard University political scientist Robert Putnam, who shows that the longer people spend in traffic, the less likely they are to be involved in their community and family (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003; Putnam, 2001). The experience of the city is often an experience of alienation from Nature, and also an experience of alienation from each other and from self. Once again Dewey has a relevant comment.

Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself because something else is entered into so speedily. What is called experience becomes so dispersed and miscellaneous as hardly to deserve the name. Resistance is treated as an obstacle to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection. An individual comes to seek, unconsciously even more than by deliberate choice, situations in which he can do the most things in the shortest time. (Dewey, 1980).

This points to the fourth reason: Self-discovery and creation. The modern city is an important site of self-discovery and self-creation. One that helps nurture citizen participants whose self-understanding is formed through face-to-face encounters with others. The second reason, Community Life, is also present here. Cities are places of work and play in ongoing, changing networks of family and friends. All of which lead to the third reason, Sustainability. A sustainable city, or community, is one that is open to change. Places, communities, people who are static tend to be overwhelmed or fragile, and thus unable to respond to the real exigencies of life.

### **3 Evaluating New Urbanism and Civic Environmentalism**

Consider the following story about one of the showcase New Urbanist developments. The first crisis in Celebration, Disney's New Urbanist development, was the widespread recognition that the houses of Celebration are poorly built. It turns out that Celebration was built using unskilled migrant labor because that was the only labor available in the booming Orlando construction economy. The residents had very pricy homes with leaky roofs and pipes, cracked foundations, chimneys out of plumb, and doors that would not close. Eventually, the residents organized a Homeowners Association to bring pressure against Disney. Thus, a community began to form, but not because of the success of design and planning, but in

response to a common experience of a defective product. Disney had attempted to sell community as a commodity, one of those things purchased along with a garage door opener and highly regularized street front appearances.

While this is just a brief anecdotal account of why New Urbanism fails, we can more precisely lay out the problems by considering the following.

- a) New Urbanism proposes to solve problems of community cohesion through design alone,
- b) New Urbanism proposes a design solution that would in some ways replicate, and in other ways leave in place, existing design problems (e.g., preferences for single family dwellings),
- c) New Urbanism proposes a top-down design solution that trusts existing market forces to resolve urban dilemmas, and
- d) New Urbanist developments, within existing legal and economic frameworks, have increased commuting and economic segregation.

Thus, New Urbanist solutions will likely replicate, or even further, existing problems.

New Urbanism does work to create something like community life, even though, as the example of Celebration shows, that might come about not because of the success of the design but because of the recognition of a common problem. But, it fails to nurture public life, and thus fails as a site for the building of a genuine and sustainable democratic community. I offer three reasons.

(1) New Urbanism takes self and desire as either (i) fixed or (ii) infinitely malleable. New Urbanism attempts to resolve urban problems through an appeal to market forces responding to new design. One possibility is that New Urbanism assumes that our desires are fixed, but the existing market has failed us. If the latent desire for good design can be unleashed we will then have better lives. Or, it might be that New Urbanism understands desire as malleable and assumes that design alone will transform our desires. So, if we can just get these new design paradigms accepted either people will respond from their long submerged authentic desires, or the new settings will be so powerful that our desires will respond and embrace New Urbanist communities.

(2) New Urbanism embodies a problematic quest for certainty. New Urbanism is a static design model. And, one that is certain about what people need and want (or ought to want). Yet, New Urbanism as such is not flexible or revisable. One example is the response of Andres Duany to the new “Latino New Urbanism.” He calls it “barrio urbanism” and criticizes it for valorizing the wrong aesthetic and for celebrating poverty. Latino New Urbanism starts with the real neighborhoods where many Latinos in the U.S. live. Alas, these neighborhoods fail to have the regular, harmonious, and predictable design features that New Urbanism specifies. Further, the residents of these neighborhoods use public transit and live in more modestly sized structures not by choice, but because they are poor. Duany suggests that these choices are virtuous only when chosen (Holtzmann, 2004). New Urbanism thus fails to be sustainable, and to nurture individual and community growth and creativity.

Finally (3) New Urbanism is a response to an urban crisis that represents a dislike and distrust of cities. The response of Duany to Latino New Urbanism also