

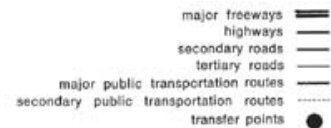
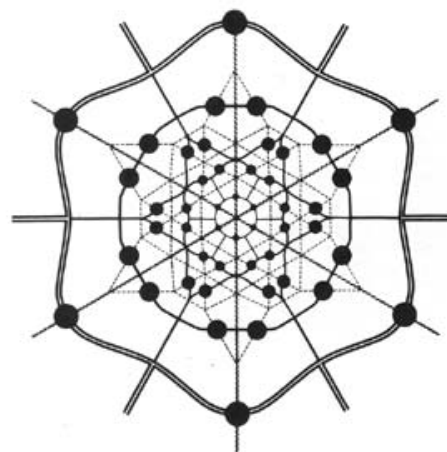


Planning Systems of Cores

Early Thought

Most of the thinking about cores focuses on the abstract or the individual – why cores are important, what principles should be used for their development, etc. Much less thought, and very little work, is devoted to cores as a system or as a pattern for organizing urban development.

Important questions are: What types of cores are there? How do they differ? How should they be located in relation to each other? Yet this has not always been so. Even in early town planning in ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, and in the emergence of modern city planning in the early 1900's, it was usual for plans to include a mixed-use central core (agora, market place or downtown) in each city, with smaller concentrations in individual communities or neighborhoods.



Gruen's theoretical core diagram is a "pure" representation of cores built as centers of communities and neighborhoods.

In the late 1800's, early geographers and sociologists developed "models" of urban settlement, and in response to the growth of urban populations, identified patterns of cores going beyond original downtowns for outlying towns, cities, or metropolitan regions. They developed simple diagrams to express these ideas. Assuming a flat featureless plain, they show a theoretical distribution of cores, including a central downtown and several lesser regional, community and neighborhood centers and their service areas. One of these diagrams is shown here.

It shows a theoretical pattern of neighborhoods clustered into communities, communities into (sub-) regions and (sub-) regions into a city or metropolitan region. A core lies at the center of each of the "market areas" thus defined. The core of the whole is called "downtown." And many of the "communities" would correspond to suburbs today.

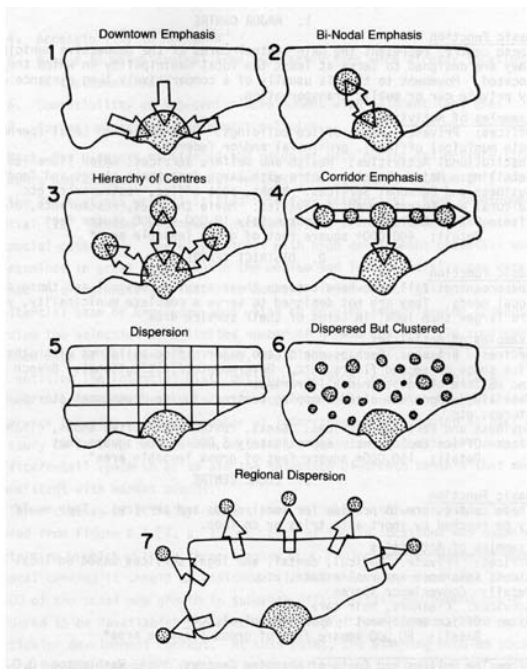
Planning Systems of Cores

Little has been done over the years to further define this concept. Most studies and planning have been focused only on locations of (sub-) regional centers, with little concern for how they relate to those at community or neighborhood levels. Sub-regional centers have the greatest impact on land use and transportation systems. But planning to give them the qualities of good mixed-use centers, and to function within an overall system of cores, has been mostly ignored.

At downtown, regional, and community levels much work has been done to find ways to develop individual cores. But little has been done to develop guidelines for their location and relationships to each other. (See Schneider, Polycentric Cities) Moreover, little has been done to plan for cores below the sub-regional level.

Post-War Planning

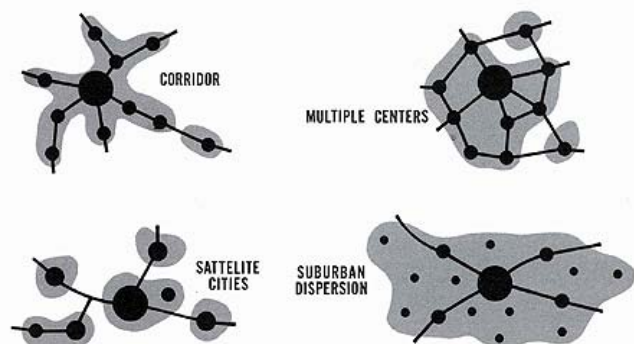
Much planning of downtowns and at the regional level took place after WW II as governments responded to the accumulated deterioration and neglect of the depression and war and to growth and change generated by the interstate system. As a prerequisite for funding the freeway system, the federal government required that city and regional land use and transportation plans be prepared. These plans were required to show projected patterns of commercial and other major traffic generators.



Toronto studied many alternatives in considering core options.

Many metropolitan areas conceived plans that called for cores to be built (or strengthened) to accommodate major post-war development. Because sites for many so-called “regional” shopping centers were being selected at that time, their locations became the model for sub-regional cores. They were spaced to match then current standards for market areas of department stores, and it was assumed that proximity to freeways would be a must. Few thought of cores as compact, comprehensive, mixed-use centers of communities. Fewer were planned or built as such, and even fewer included any serious thought of transit or walking as significant means of access.

Because most planning was being done at the metropolitan region level, few plans proposed new centers below the sub-regional level, for “communities” or “neighborhoods.” If they were thought of at all, they were considered the responsibility of individual cities and described in the abstract. Even where such centers existed, they were rarely reflected in regional plans. In spite of the fact that tens of thousands of “centers” were eventually built, almost no



METROPOLITAN - REGIONAL FORMS

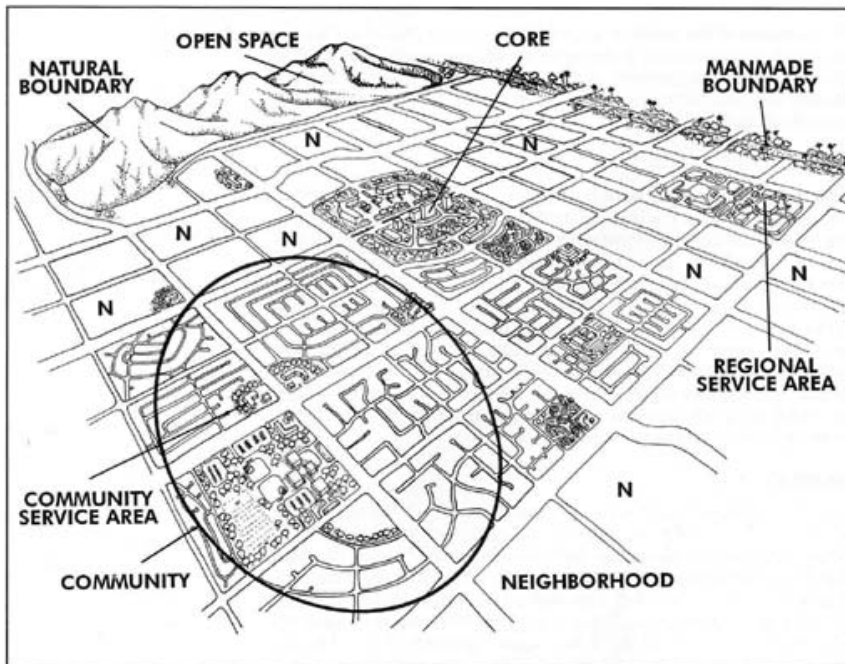
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Many small communities in rural areas need better cores and would benefit from being linked with others.

Planning Systems of Cores

one planned for the location, size or design of new centers at these levels. In fact, locations within or adjacent to sub-regional centers were often chosen, often creating undesirable conflicts and competition between centers.

A few plans acknowledged the need for mixed-use centers or cores within communities and neighborhoods. Phoenix showed them generally as dots on a map, and several Canadian cities gave some thought and managed to include them in some neighborhoods. (See below.)



Individual neighborhoods and communities such as these in Phoenix need cores.

They were located and designed primarily by commercial – mainly retail – developers, however, with little thought to make mixed use centers of them, or to include compactness, amenities or other desirable or supporting features in them. The few that are successful often stand out in a field littered with failure. The overall results are “gray fields” of vacancy, sign blight, conflicts with residential and other land uses, and spreading decay.

Early Regional Planning and Results

Jerry Schneider provides us with perhaps the best account of the efforts of regional planners of the 1960's and 1970's to include cores in their plans. (see [The Polycentric City](#)) These plans were built around the patterns of existing communities and their cores within the region, or concepts and standards for regional shopping centers that were emerging at that time. These plans varied considerably, based on historic factors, as well as expected population densities and patterns and transportation system patterns and performance. The diagram above (from Phoenix) represents one ideal.

Almost no plans resulted in recommendations that cores be created at the level of community or village. And where they were recommended, it was at a rather broad theoretical level. Only in Phoenix and a few larger cities (e.g., Philadelphia, Minneapolis) were efforts made to suggest locations or spacing for centers at these levels and to reflect these in implementation measures (zoning and transportation improvements, for example.) Few regional plans seriously advanced policies or measures to aid in core development at every level: regional, community and neighborhood. Suggestions for supporting policies and actions were made in the regional plans of the Twin Cities, N. E. Illinois, Vancouver and Toronto. But implementation of these was spotty.

Planning Systems of Cores

Partial exceptions at the regional level were Vancouver, Toronto and the Minneapolis-St-Paul regions. (see links 6.1.1, 6.1.3 and 6.1.4) Phoenix and the Twin Cities tried to influence locations, but their efforts were primarily directed toward adopting locations that had already been selected by major shopping center developers and cooperating in street and freeway planning and financing near these locations. Virtually all efforts were to support building of individual centers not to achieve comprehensive or coordinated systems, or to systematically channel new development into mixed-use cores.

As part of planning for public transportation, Washington, D. C.; Portland, Oregon; Chicago, and a few other cities paid attention to development of cores around transit stations. If continued and coordinated, this could evolve into systems of cores.

Recently, efforts to stimulate development or revitalization of cores have been renewed (San Diego, San Fernando Valley). Perhaps the most interesting of these efforts is in San Diego, where neighborhood and core concepts are being used as tools to limit and channel sprawl as well as to support transit. There may be hope in these communities for more attention to developing systems.

Planning for Systems of Cores

Difficulties in creating cores may be so great as to effectively prevent creating them in large numbers or as part of well-planned systems. It may be that energies should be concentrated on just getting good, mixed-use, well-planned cores built in any reasonably located area where opportunities arise. Obviously, the best locations should be selected whenever possible. Locations and patterns conforming to “models,” however, will not always be available. In these situations – even though not ideal – getting good, mixed-use developments that meet environmental, access and related criteria are likely to be far superior to having would-be “core” uses scattered, with no good relationship to each other, the environment, transportation systems, markets, or work force.

In this situation, planning for cores might concentrate less on trying to precisely specify locations and mixes of land uses and more on developing criteria to help identify and choose opportunities to build good, mixed-use cores and the incentives that would attract and support them.

Such planning would allow cities and regions to be much more nimble in taking advantage of opportunities to create such cores. As a result, many more cores will likely be created, sprawl and scattered development will be reduced, and numerous efficiencies will result, both within cores and between them.

Criteria or conditions should be required that would assure success for locations selected for public support as cores, such as:

- adequate access is available or can be efficiently provided
- providing goods and services needed by their “trade” area
- at least one strong anchor that will bring a basic level of activity to the area
- ability to improve –not conflict with– the environment
- making the best use of available or planned infrastructure

Planning Systems of Cores

- enabling compact, efficient, accessible and environmentally-friendly development that will attract compatible, mutually supporting activities
- offering incentives and controls that will attract desired developers and uses to such areas
- having levels of private interest and involvement adequate to assure success
- having levels of public interest and support that will assure good chances of success

Such criteria, along with others, can provide guidance needed in selecting locations and to some extent, the types of land uses, size and other features that may be appropriate for a core. It may be that they can, in certain circumstances, provide enough guidance to allow preliminary work on the development of zoning and other standards, infrastructure planning, and even “planned unit” or similar designs.

In most areas cases, these criteria, applied to vacant land, or to existing or already planned features, make it possible to identify many potential cores with the power to attract supporting uses, such as:

- Existing or planned transit stations or similar transportation centers, including airports and rail stations.¹
- Neighborhoods or communities needing new or improved commercial or other services and employment opportunities
- Potential anchors or amenities such as parks, museums, government offices, or recreation centers
- Traditional shopping centers lacking in a variety of uses or amenities
- Hospitals, medical, research or similar centers
- Major historic, environmental or similar landmarks, parks, or monuments
- Major corporate headquarters or office or research parks
- Colleges and universities
- Major religious shrines or facilities

Tens of thousands of such potential anchors exist, some of which have already attracted mixed-use development. They are most likely surrounded, however, with scattered and unrelated development, many of them with significant opportunities to create – out of largely vacant land – compatible, mixed-use clusters with the amenities and efficiencies of well-planned cores.

Some examples of these potential anchors include major national parks and monuments, which need new and better facilities to accommodate visitors and staff, and to reduce conflicts with their basic function and attraction. These are prime opportunities to create mixed-use cores of greatly enhanced value.

It is not enough, of course, to simply identify opportunities. Implementing tools for zoning, subdivision, land assembly, financing, transfer of development rights, tax increment financing, revenue sharing and governance are needed to encourage and facilitate development. Groundwork should be laid to create support and implementing agencies – corporations, partnerships, and other entities, which can step in to do their part. These and related matters are discussed in Links 6.0.1, 6.2, 6.3.1 and other materials.

Well prepared with criteria and tools, it should be possible to proceed quickly to create good cores when opportunities arise.

Planning Systems of Cores

If we believe that the greatest benefits are to be achieved by placing the maximum amount of mutually related or supporting activity in compact, mixed-use cores, then we must proceed with this as our primary objective.

¹Two recent books provide much new information on this subject. These are: Cervero, Robert, *The Transit Metropolis: A Global Inquiry*, Island Press, 1998. Cervero surveys a dozen or more transit systems in relation to their station or stop configurations, including several transit technologies, and comments on utility, feasibility and a number of other characteristics useful in preparing and evaluating plans and programs for such facilities.

Dittmar, Hank, and Ohland, Gloria, *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit Oriented Development*, Island Press, 2004. Dittmar and Ohland deal with a wide variety of issues in creating cores or mixed-use developments around transit stops and stations. This is a major and invaluable addition to the literature on this subject.

Rodney E. Engelen

<http://www.mixedusecores.com/>

Version: 1