



Visions and Values – What Values do Cores Help Achieve?

Cores serve and create value, and they do it in many ways.

First, they create synergy among those individuals and organizations that visit, live or work in or near a core. This increases educational, cultural, social and economic opportunity for the larger community in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is described in almost poetic language by Margaret Mead and discussed at length by Lewis Mumford, Richard Meier and others. Some of this synergy is created by the very existence of a city and the communication it affords. But the greatest and highest levels of communication and value creation are found in its core.

It is the synergy of emerging cities in the Middle Ages that gave them the strength and riches to gain independence and often dominance over the power of kings and bishops. It is the synergy that fed the flourishing of philosophy, crafts, commerce, music and the arts. Although computers and other forms of communication now play some of this role, cores still offer much, especially where personal interaction, creativity, innovation and personal contact are important. Second, they save resources, land, money, energy, time and environmental values.

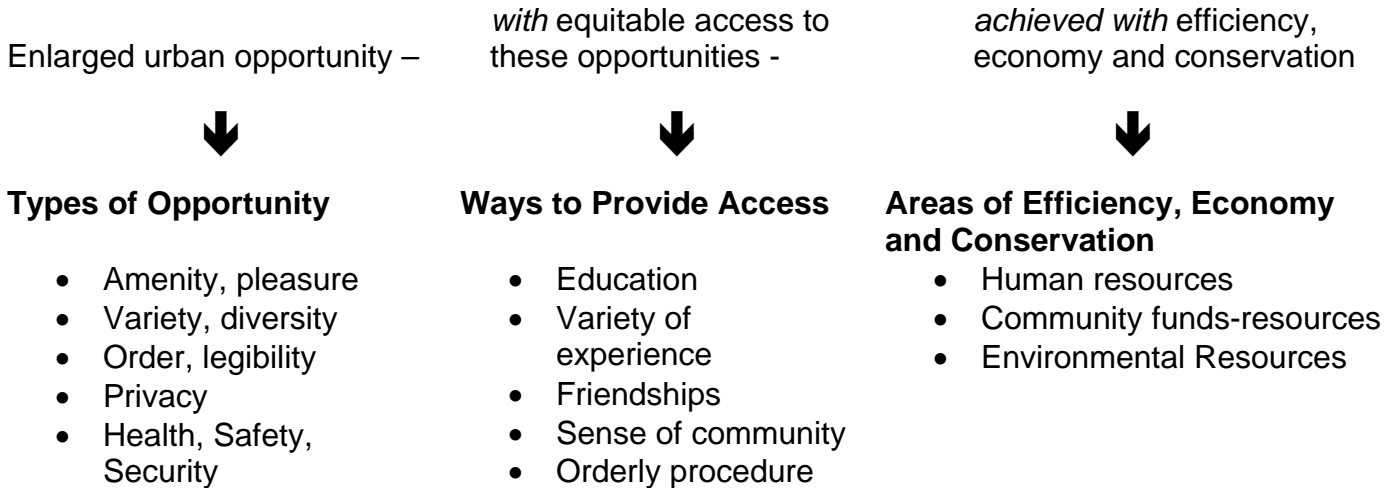


People come together in cores to meet each other, experience culture and history, build community, and to create and find value.

Studies suggest that the value of just energy savings alone of focusing urban development into cores run into the billions of dollars for an individual metropolitan area. Both science and philosophy agree that mixed-use cores are very desirable.

At the highest level they support basic values important to society. Everything we do should, in some way, be evaluated in terms of how it helps to achieve our values. At a second level are benefits or impacts. Research into benefits is difficult, costly and not plentiful. However, what there is identifies strong benefits described in mostly economic terms. These are also summarized below and

further described in linked sources. Ultimately, benefits depend on values. Any agreement that cores, centers and corridors be used as major organizing elements of cities and regions depends on understanding the basic goals and needs they can help achieve. The following diagram describes one effort to do this.



Others who have given thought to the fundamental values of cities and their centers include Lewis Mumford (one of our greatest thinkers about the purposes and values of cities) described the city as:

"the point of maximum concentration for power and culture of a community. It is the place where the diffused rays of many separate beams of life fall into focus, with gains in both social effectiveness and significance. The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here in the city the goods of civilization are multiplied and manifolded; here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order. Here is where the issues of civilization are focused."¹

Mumford wrote this with major cities in mind. However, his writing about medieval cities shows a similar assessment of the importance of cores at every level.

"Usually near the center of the city, both for practical reasons of assembly and for symbolic reasons, was the principal church or cathedral: here the main routes might converge, although they rarely crossed or attempted to form a continuous route: the market place was not a device for attracting or pumping out fast-moving traffic. In the shadow of the church, sometimes hugging its walls for protection, the regular market takes place; this square forms and agora and an acropolis in one. Sometimes the chief buildings in the market place form conspicuous islands, with access on all sides; sometimes they are directly attached to the neighboring houses; but it is highly unusual to find them surrounded on four sides by a wide open plaza, as the "improvers" of the nineteenth century transformed them.

“The central position of the church or cathedral is the key to the layout of the medieval city; within its narrow area its towers, or the shadows they throw, are visible from every point, and the difference in size between its towering walls and the little houses that huddle at the base is a symbol of the relation between sacred and profane affairs. When one finds the market square spreading beside the Cathedral one must not be tempted to assign to these institutions the same values they have today; it was the first that was occasional and the second whose services were regular. The market place grows up by the church because



Towers of cathedrals and mosques were among the first symbols of our communities.

it is there that citizens most frequently assemble. It was the church, in the early days, that the city's treasury was stored; and it was in the church, sometimes behind the High Altar, that deeds were deposited for safekeeping; because of its central location, in a quarter or city, the arms might even be kept in the church. In fact, one must think of the early church as what one would now call in America a community center building: not too holy to serve as a dining hall for great public festivals.

“The scale of the market place is not directly determined by either the height of the main buildings or the size of the city; it is rather adapted to marketing and public ceremony, for it is on the porch of the cathedral that the miracle plays were enacted: it was within the square that the guilds set up their stages for the performance of their mystery plays; it was here that the great tourneys would be held. It was not merely acropolis but amphitheater.... the medieval planner tended to keep human dimensions....Coulton reckons that there was one parish church for every hundred families. In London in the twelfth century, according to Fitz-Stephens, there were 13 conventual and 126 smaller churches. The habit of erecting such buildings continued long after the social need had exhausted itself (note the church-building that went on in the City of London under Wren). This decentralization of the essential functions of the city not merely prevented overcrowding and needless circulation: it kept the whole town in scale.”

Richard Meier wrote an analysis of the unique functions cities perform and how they perform these them. His principal finding is that facilitating communication is the key function of cities and that the downtowns are the parts of cities perform that perform this function most efficiently.



Millions of interactions between people take place in downtown centers such as this each day.

Since Meier wrote in 1962, technology has changed these forces and their impacts considerably. Yet, this book still provides important insights into the roles of central areas and cores and provides a basis for determining the conditions that must be provided in such areas if they are to be successful.

Here is one passage from Meier's work to illustrate his analysis of the importance of communication as a cause for creating centers:

"Engineers and planners notice two closely related phenomena in the behavior of urban populations that combine to prevent the use of transportation facilities up to their technical capacities-- the extraordinary attraction of the central sections of the cities for individuals who exert power and influence upon the affairs of the population as a whole, and the strong emphasis placed upon having the great bulk of them at work simultaneously so that they and all the service works associated with their activities must travel to work and back simultaneously. These forces bring about a strong peaking of the passenger flow, which moves inward during the morning rush hour and outward during the late afternoon. The peaks presently set limits for the association of people in space and the reasons for them are therefore worthy of closer scrutiny. **What goes on in the city center that is so vital?**" (Emphasis supplied.)

"A simple-minded observer of external behavior will note that a very large share of those persons moving into the center of the city during peak hours spend their day reading, writing, talking, and listening. These activities are interspersed with a certain amount of paper shuffling, cable connecting, and machine manipulation. Even when eating, people are often engaged in communication. The contingent of service workers appears earlier or later than the mainstream, and the shoppers arrive irregularly when impulse guides them. The rate for the completion of transactions is very high. Some of these are effected through trips by elevators, taxis, or on foot, but most are completed with the aid of the communications systems.

Many such transactions are transfers of ownership or rights, but even more represent transfers of information from one address or individual to another. People come into the central city to work with symbols. They do this in the interests of justice and welfare when engaged in governmental administration, the benefit of the "organization" when in the corporate executive offices, or service to a clientele when working in professional offices. Individuals and groups seek opportunities to create and expand new enterprises, to improve efficiency in the distribution of goods, to achieve social status and prestige, or merely to indulge in various forms of entertainment."²

Margaret Mead, the famous sociologist, identified freedom as a primary benefit provided by cores or downtowns -- what she called the unique value of urban places. She said:

"This value is the value of the freedom of interchange which follows unexpected routes, permits individuals to make new contacts, to maintain or break old ones, and brings together in face-to-face, multimodal relationships, individuals of diverse temperament and vocation."

Although some may say that new communication devices will permit this value to be obtained regardless of densities or patterns of development, Miss Mead argues otherwise:

"...the opportunity to meet and talk, to plan and confer, to argue and wonder in groups of the diversely gifted and experienced is still, in any present projection of practical technology, dependent upon a great many people being together in one place. In such centers, they can meet and part, talk formally or informally, listen to music or look at a play, together, and learn--in an interchange which is dependent upon the alert use of all five senses--what the others think and feel, catching the half-fledged dreams of other men, which would otherwise die, and giving them life."³



Tens of thousands of people meet in cores each day in classes, conferences, workshops, and other meetings like this to learn, exchange views, build networks, and to sharpen skills and knowledge.

Good downtowns, cores and corridors generate tremendous value in all of the areas listed above: creation of opportunity, providing better access to that opportunity, and optimizing efficiency, economy and conservation.

Communication is the best known and the most historic value of cores. It is the communication of the crossroads, the river crossing, and the agora. It is the communication provided by the coming together of people in villages and towns and then cities. This very elemental communication is that of easy and informal face-to-face contact of the kind that can only be obtained in cities, and especially in relatively concentrated cores and activity centers.

Although modern electronic communication has eliminated much of the need for such contact, that need still exists. The creation of areas within cities in which such contact can be found is argued strongly in the following discussion describing the need for such densities:⁵

"Failure to permit or encourage higher densities of development in certain key locations is a source of many urban frustrations and shortcomings; it is a major obstacle to the achievement of high levels of opportunity."

"For example, when key locations adjacent to important business, medical, educational, or recreational facilities or overlooking an outstanding view are occupied by low- or medium-density development, many persons are deprived of the economy, convenience and pleasure of being able to walk to shopping, recreation or work, or to enjoy scenic surroundings. Failure to provide for higher densities also forces development to spread over much greater land areas, thus increasing

travel and increasing problems associated with the conservation of unique historic, geologic, or other natural features and open space. (It is often observed that only by developing some parts of urban areas to high densities can we afford to keep others at a significantly contrasting lower density.) ...”

“Many specialized businesses and institutions can survive--and their unique services be provided—only where large numbers of people live or can be assembled. These include specialized health, recreational, educational, technical, and artistic services, and the number and range of such services is growing rapidly.”

Other statements of the values to be sought through cores are summarized below:

Bay Area Sustainable Metropolis

The San Francisco Greenbelt Alliance Report⁴ describes problems of the patterns and spread of suburban development, regional values and Alliance’s model for patterns of land use that would address these problems and help achieve the region’s values.

Values emphasized include freedom of choice, special identity, beautiful and healthful environment, livable, enjoyable community, socially and culturally stimulating, mobility, inclusion and accessible and sensibly organized government.

One of the important policies proposed to achieve these values is that of creating and improving the region’s centers and sub-centers. This would compliment other polices supporting greenbelts, efficient land use and community design.

The report argues strongly that the region’s present pattern that includes three major cores and three “commuter sheds,” has major advantages which should be enhanced through continued support and development of existing centers and the creation of more sub-centers.

Phoenix Futures Forum⁵

This major statement of community values, goals and strategies is the result of over two years of effort involving several thousand people directly and many more indirectly through public meetings, mail and media contact. It places its highest emphasis on the creation of community in both physical and social terms. Its summary introduction includes the following references to the goals of community:

“We have a duty to create and maintain an effective community.”

“OUR VISION is of a metropolitan region, made up of cooperative communities and strong, proud, stable and fully integrated neighborhoods and urban villages, with a high sense of community, caring and responsibility that permeates economic, social, family life and respects a wide variety of racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.”

“OUR VISION is of a beautiful city with buildings and landscape that are appropriate to our climate, are framed by the grandeur of our setting, and are diverse in form, material and symbolism. ... Our mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented village cores and neighborhood activity centers integrate open space, are convenient to housing and public transportation, and are built on a human scale. The heart of our city is a vibrant downtown core and provides a wide range of residential, cultural, business and entertainment opportunities.” (Emphasis supplied.)

Benefits

Research into benefits is not plentiful. However, what exists points to strong benefits and is primarily stated in economic terms.

Energy Savings

With respect to energy, studies reported by Richard Schneider⁷ indicate that in a region organized around a series of cores or centers residents will “consume 57% less gasoline for passenger travel than those of a Concentric City and 44% less than those of the One-sided City. Their average trip lengths were 30% shorter than those in the Concentric City and 23% shorter than in the One-Sided City.”

Other studies reported by Schneider indicated that a multi-centered city form “produced the least number of person-hours of work trip travel and the shortest average work trip length... The multi-centered form was 29 percent better in person-hours of work travel and 22 percent better in average trip length than the next best form” studied. Other studies referenced by Schneider reported similar results.

Health

New research now underway by the U. S. Center for Disease Control suggests that increased walking for both access and internal circulation in good cores generate strong health benefits. These two types of benefits are further discussed in linked pages on Values and Benefits. Some are also discussed in the section on Failures to Achieve Benefits.

Benefits

Benefits can be described in several ways. One is to assess benefits that cores generate in relation to values. (See Values) Another is to identify perceived or expected general benefits to the economy, environment or society. This has been done by some of the cities and regions that have adopted cores as one of their principal organizing elements. Some of their expectations are summarized below. A third is to report any rigorous analysis that has been conducted to attempt to measure benefits. Only a few such studies have been made. They are expensive and difficult to conduct and are very dependent on assumptions on which they are based. Schneider includes summaries of some of the most relevant of these studies in his report.

Broad Community Benefits

Benefits affecting the broad community as well as those having direct interests in cores include:

- Reduced congestion in the central parts of the city or urban region
- Improved air quality
- Fuel conservation because of shorter as well as fewer trips
- Shifting of travel to transit resulting in lower unit costs for transit operation and corresponding reductions in parking and road operation and maintenance costs.

Several major studies reported by Schneider deal with this issue. They determined that reductions in the amount of time, work-trip travel and energy used ranged from 29% to 76%. Additional savings in infrastructure costs were found in the range of \$1.2 billion to \$4.2 billion. One study found that cost savings were sufficient to pay for the building of a transit system to serve the region studied (Toronto). It should be noted that these studies did not include an analysis of non-work travel that now exceeds home-work travel in most communities. It is possible that benefits would be even higher if non-work related travel were considered or if the system of cores were more complete.

- Providing a better distribution of low and moderate-income housing. This assumes that many cores could accommodate some housing of this type. This would take the pressure off the central city to accommodate most such housing and would put middle and lower income people in closer proximity to suburban jobs.
- Making outlying areas more self-sufficient in terms of employment and cultural opportunity.
- Improving access to many types of goods and services, particularly public services.
- Providing the convenience and stimulation of an “urban” life style in more locations in a city or region.

- Reducing conflicts with neighborhoods by commercial, institutional and similar activities by locating them in fewer and better-planned groups.
- Increasing the efficiency of travel by facilitating the operation of transit, car-pooling and higher-occupancy vehicles.
- Make cultural, recreational and similar facilities more accessible and increase their patronage by clustering them with retail and employment activities.
- Make cities and regions more “understandable” and “comfortable” by placing more destinations in well-known, highly accessible locations.
- Provide a way to accommodate growth with a minimum of disruption to existing communities and neighborhoods.

So that it can accommodate an expected 400,000 person growth in the city over the next decades, the City of San Diego is trying to find ways to put more intensive mixed-use development on the approximately 5% of the city occupied by existing shopping and retail activities.

Benefits to developers, owners, renters and occupants or users of well-designed cores may include the following:

- Increased retail and service convenience to employees as well as visitors, students or others visiting or using the cores regularly. This is potentially most valuable in non-retail anchored cores (such as office, educational or medical centers) that often have very few or no such services available.
- Reduced labor costs because increased accessibility, and better services, amenities and identity have made cores more attractive to prospective employees. The attractiveness and convenience of skyways in Minneapolis has had this impact for buildings attached to the skyway system. In turn, reduced vacancies and a willingness to pay increased rents have increased rent income for land owners (See Evaluation of Skyways).
- Increased income from joint use of parking facilities, making it easier to pay for parking facilities and reducing costs to employers and/or employees. (See the discussion of the Shared Parking Study.)
- More flexibility to tenants who may need to change the amount, costs and/or locations of space they occupy without relocating to different parts of the neighborhood or city. This can preserve the convenience and identity of their location to both customers and employees.
- Increased opportunities to owners in finding new users for vacated property where some functions are in decline.

For example, a hospital in Phoenix has generated a demand for the reuse of two department stores in an adjacent shopping mall being abandoned by retail occupants. (See Dillard's, St. Joseph's in Phoenix.)

Note that new housing is also replacing industrial and commercial uses in many areas where these activities are in decline. Such changes can occur much more easily if plans allow or call for mixed-use development.

Refer to Geoffrey Booth⁶ and Jerry B. Schneider⁷ for more information on benefits.

Failures to Achieve Benefits and Values

There have been and continue to be critical analyses of the patterns of development that have emerged over the past fifty years. Most tend to identify “sprawl” in its broadest terms as the culprit for the traffic, environmental and health problems we experience. Few specifically identify the way we arrange our shopping, office and institutional activities. In fact, conventional shopping centers and office parks have largely “gotten a pass” in these analyses with blame all too often going to residential development.

One critique is especially powerful. It comes from Victor Gruen, often credited as the “father” of the suburban shopping center. He discusses what he terms uni-functional centers. These are mainly single-function centers of all types that have developed over the past 50 years, including most of the shopping centers built in the 20 years preceding his writing of this book. They are the antithesis of the mixed-use centers he advocated and that are proposed here. In his analysis, Gruen states the values or “essence” he is concerned with optimizing as a basis for his commentary. His analysis is devastating.

Refer to Victor Gruen⁸ and Geoffrey Booth⁶ for critique and evidence of failure.

References:

¹Mumford, Lewis, *The Culture of Cities*, Harcourt Brace, 1938.

²Meier, Richard, L., *A Communications Theory of Urban Growth*, Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard, 1962.

³Mead, Margaret, Values for Urban Living, *The Annals of the Society of Social and Political Science*, 1957.

⁴Future of the Metropolis Committee, *REVIVING THE SUSTAINABLE METROPOLIS Guiding Bay Area Conservation and Development Into the 21st Century*, The Greenbelt Alliance, June 1989

⁵Phoenix Futures Forum, *Phoenix 2015*, City of Phoenix, January 1990

⁶Booth, Geoffrey, et al, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, Urban Land Institute, 2001.

⁷Schneider, Jerry B., *Transit and the Polycentric City*, U. S. Department of Transportation, 1981.

⁸Gruen, Victor, *Centers for the Urban Environment*

Please check website [Sources, References and Contacts](#) for further information on the subject of *Vision and Values*.

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