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Royal Roads University

CRC Research Dialogues - Place

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Moderated by Ann Dale

Participants

Dr Ann Dale, Trudeau Fellow, Professor, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University, Canada Research Chair on Sustainable Community Development
Dr Lenore Newman, Professor, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University
Dr Levi Waldron, Post-doctoral fellow, CRC researcher, Royal Roads University
Ela Kinowska, Environment Canada, Foreign Affairs Canada and Natural Resources Canada

Dialogue

Ann Dale

Tonight we are going to discuss another theme of the Canada Research Chair on Sustainable Community Development, the meaning of place. Place has always fascinated me along with the dynamics of space. For example, I am able to engage in this on-line dialogue from a beautiful place, Lac Maskinonge, with the wood stove on, not having to travel anywhere because of the space this medium gives me to connect to you in real time, in some ways, allowing me to transcend place. I believe that place without space is equally destructive as space without a sense of place.

Let's rock and roll on the meaning of place for sustainable community development. We may also want to think about how place and our theme of last month, limits interact?

Ela Kinowska

Hi Ann, lucky you with a cozy place and a stove ! For those who do not know me, my name is Ela Kinowska and I am in Ottawa (quite a cool place to live!) I wear three hats, besides being a photographer and a civil servant I wear a real one (black hat !) to keep me warm in the winter days like today. Thanks to Ann for an invitation to be on panel. This is my first interactive discussion on the Internet so bear with me....

Ann Dale

Welcome, Ela, at least we can talk to one another this way, after trying to meet over the last two months. Ela is one of the Board Members to the CRC research project, and we are hoping that she will be able to bring her art into some of the community tools we are developing. Ela, you too have a special place I believe, in Chelsea. What makes it special?

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Hi Ann, lucky you with a cozy place and a stove ! For those who do not know me, my name is Ela Kinowska and I am in Ottawa (quite a cool place to live) ! I wear three hats, besides being a photographer and a civil servant I wear a real one (black hat !) to keep me warm in the winter days like today. Thanks to Ann for an invitation to be on panel. This is my first interactive discussion on the Internet so bear with me....

Lenore Newman

Hi all I very much enjoy the critical literature on space and place. It is one of the most interesting areas of cultural and social geography. I do think we have to be very careful to remember place and space have very clearly defined meanings. The way I think of space is to imagine a blank stage, where as the human element added to that creates a sense of place.

Ann Dale

Welcome Lenore, a small technical note, if I disappear, the freezing rain may interrupt my satellite connection, one of the disadvantages of living where I do, just outside of a large urban centre. **Jenny Onyx**, my co-researcher from Australia could not participate as she is teaching, but here is something she asked me to post on her behalf.

The idea of place brings passion of both a positive and negative kind.

Positive: It is where we belong. The place we belong gives us our sense of identity. We share that identity with others who also belong there. These are our people, people like us, people we understand and who understand us. These are the people we can look to for help and whom we also will help if needed. Together we are proud of who we are.

Negative: A jail is a place too, and sometimes the place where I live feels like a jail, I am not free to be myself. Always there is the expectation to conform to the demands and rules imposed by others. I may belong, but I am judged and constrained in my actions. It seems to me that some of our fundamental human dilemmas revolve around the issue of place. We both need others and yet struggle to be free of their demands.

Lenore Newman

Ann, what do you think makes a place vibrant?

Ann Dale

Interesting question, particularly given Jennie's comments. From her comments, I see that her idea of place very much involves people, for me, what makes a place special are physical characteristics, the landscape, and people are secondary. I suspect for you, that people are also central? Ela?

Ela Kinowska

I lost you for a minute...my computer quit on me...Anyways, Every place has its unique characteristic defined not only my physical space but the people occupying it. People give soul to a place, so a human dimension of place is extremely important.

Cultural heritage is an integral part of space we occupy in the universe and it makes are distinct, culture is like spice that make each dish different, even though made from the same raw ingredients. Cultural identity makes us belong to a place, even though we do not occupy it physically, I can talk to this end from my immigrant's perspective. Having grown up in Poland I will always belong there, even though my place is in Canada now.

Lenore Newman

Is it just the three of us online? Who else is out there?

Levi Waldron

Hi guys, Levi joining you now from rural British Columbia, about 5000km from the rest of you.

Ann Dale

So, Ela, you have multiple identities of place?

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Cultural heritage is an integral part of space we occupy in the universe and it makes are distinct, culture is like spice that make each dish different, even though made from the same raw ingredients. Cultural identity makes us belong to a place, even though we do not occupy it physically, I can talk to this end from my immigrant's perspective. Having grown up in Poland I will always belong there, even though my place is in Canada now.

Lenore Newman

Good afternoon, Levi

Ann

It's about time, again one of the disadvantages of rural access. Levi, ask Lenore your question?

Levi Waldron wrote:

Hi guys, Levi joining you now from rural British Columbia, about 5000km from the rest of you.

Levi Waldron

Lenore, I was wondering if you could expand a bit more on your definitions of place and space, and if you have the references handy where those come from. Might be a useful introduction to the discussion.

Ela Kinowska

Absolutely, now I want to introduce a theory of one square kilometer. Here it goes. When I searched for a definition of a place in the Google search engine, I got 1,140,000,000 hits. The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides 22 entries for a noun "place". But take definitions apart, and focus on the meaning of place for us, as members of the society, members of community. Some fundamental questions surrounding the meaning of place is sense of belonging, what makes us identify with the place and how we draw the boundaries.

Sometime ago, while vacationing in Poland, a poet living in a small hamlet told me something that shaped my thinking about my relation to the community where I live in, he told me: you will not change the world but you can make a difference in 1 square kilometer that surrounds you. 1km² is the definition of your place.

Going back home (to Canada) I gave it a serious thought and indeed, if we took care of our little world of 1km², we would have a better world we live in now. SO MY PLACE IS MY SQUARE KILOMETER, we found it in Chelsea.

Lenore Newman

Well, as far as I know, space means physical space. i.e. think physical layout, physical form. It can have people in it or not. It is objective.

I don't yet have a good definition of space. It is a much harder concept. No refs at moment, that is next week's reading!

Ann Dale

Jenny Onyx again says, "Of course much depends on how the boundaries are set. The jail has stone walls and is almost impenetrable. Many places have very vague, ambiguous boundaries. The place enclosed can be small or large. My place has grown to match the planet, and Gaia has my heart, as I have come to know and love others of many faiths and nationalities, and as I have come to understand how we are all interconnected and interdependent for our very survival."

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Absolutely, now I want to introduce a theory of one square kilometer. Here it goes.

Ela Kinowska

Place without a human dimension is not the same concept, it is a geophysical sphere, but how about place in a cyberspace like what unites us now? How would you define this?

Frank Roselli

Hello everyone, sorry for the delay but i keep needing to log in and out. Although I'm not as readily informed on a lot the theory as many of you are, I do believe that space is a proper noun of sorts and place is quite possibly a theory or construct. as a planning student, I've learned to VERY MUCH deal with the issues of not only space and land, but also of place - culture, community and neighbourhoods. A great trend that I would hope to see continue is the ability to recognize place and cultural identity in urban planning. Place I believe is a cultural construction of our societies and is ultimately informed by the dominant ideas and paradigms of the people. I think both are ultimately valid and utterly integral to each other. Of course the line tends to blur and sometimes politicians or individuals focus solely on the space and not on the place...

Levi Waldron

Ela Kinowska wrote:

he told me: you will not change the world but you can make a difference in 1 square kilometer that surrounds you. 1km² is the definition of your place.

That is an interesting definition of your place, although does it still hold in a globalized world? Some people, more than others, have far-reaching influence, and others may have little ability to influence even within their own 1 square km.

Lenore Newman

The slippery thing about place in my mind is that it is really subjective. I think there is some idea of feeling "at home". I had the great privilege to grow up in one of the world's most beautiful spaces, and I love nature, but I feel much more at home in chaotic urban settings, preferably very diverse, dirty, slightly edgy spaces. Critical theorists call such places "third space" or "heterotopia", and in the past these spaces were known as Bohemian. The weird thing is that though I love nature, if someone were to clean up the garbage and graffiti and plant trees in my favourite places, they likely would clean up the "placeness" I so enjoy.

Ann Dale

Ela, you are digging at the definitions, for me, cyberspace is all about allowing people who are place-based space to explore new ways of communicating, of relating. The difficulty comes when people are so wired into cyberspace that they have no connection to a physical place, or perhaps I am too rooted to place?

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Place without a human dimension is not the same concept, it is a geophysical sphere, but how about place in a cyberspace like what unites us now? How would you define this ?

Lenore Newman

The interesting question Ann: are electronic places spaceless? Clearly not entirely, but the relationship is interesting

Ann Dale

Frank, you have clarified for me something in this dialogue, we are all using different conceptions of space and place. For me, place is geographic, a physical entity to which I identify, and space is the human construct, one is finite, the other is infinite, one involves identity and the other is identity free, alluding to what my dear colleague Dr. Onyx was talking about.

Frank Roselli wrote:

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Levi Waldron

Lenore, I think you and I enjoy living in a similar kind of place, which is not surprising given how long we were roommates :). Is it really the physical characteristics, the garbage and graffiti for example, or is it the people who we associate with that type of place?

Or do they necessarily come together?

Lenore Newman wrote:

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Ann Dale

Yes, for me, cyberspace is spaceless, it transcends physical place, its ability for insanities connection endless . . .

Lenore Newman wrote:

The interesting question Ann: are electronic places spaceless? Clearly not entirely, but the relationship is interesting

Ela Kinowska

yes, yes, it is a provocation...I am aiming at technology changing the concepts of place and creating new space (place if you wish) for people to interact. Do we need a nice place to sit on a bench and chat if we can meet in the cyber cafe?

Also, another aspect, as technologies develop they pollute urban space with satellite dishes, electric poles (I hate them in Ottawa and any city I go to), highways.. etc.

Janet Moore

Hi folks.

Janet Moore here - joining in (if I may) from Vancouver to participate in this 'e-space' place...I work at the Centre for Dialogue and teach in the Semester in dialogue - my research focuses on sustainability education at the university level.

I'm interested in urban space as we continue to density and lose the ability to have spaces of our own - and instead need to share space/place with others. Community gardens are full and waitlisted and looking for land is a big problem her in Vancouver.

Ann Dale

My sense of place is not subjective, replying to Lenore's earlier comment, it is very physically based, it is the lake, the trees, the loons who return every year who make me forget about existential loneliness. It is the stillness of the bush in winter, it is the way the wind whistles through the trees, I know and feel this place, I have healed and become whole again here. And there are other physical places in the world, for example, the Mundi Mundi Plains in Australia?

Lenore Newman

Ann, Frank is technically correct, if we define the terms according to the formal definitions. So in that case what you have been thinking of as "place", ie the physical "place", is technically known as "space". It is far less confusing in French, the terms being defined formally by Foucault in a paper called "Les Espaces Autres" Levi, I think the chaos and the people do go together. That is one reason I so detest gentrification.

Ann Dale

Welcome, Janet. There is a lot of literature that talks about the need for green space (I would call this place) in urban centres, and the sense of community that can create.

Janet Moore wrote:

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Janet Moore here - joining in (if I may) from Vancouver to participate in this 'e-space' place...I work at the Centre for Dialogue and teach in the Semester in dialogue - my research focuses on sustainability education at the university level. I'm interested in urban space as we continue to density and lose the ability to have spaces of our own - and instead need to share space/place with others. Community gardens are full and waitlisted and looking for land is a big problem her in Vancouver.

Frank Roselli

As a student i use technology all the time. but i never regard the web or cyberspace as a place or even a space. it is a concept grounded in s a scientific reality i think. i think technology should only ever remain a tool and not a replacement (hmm, the word place is in replacement, i wonder how to interpret that now?) for communication and being together in a place or space. i would love to be having this discussion in person with everyone (this is fun btw...) but it is great that our spaces between each other have ultimately been narrowed or reduced so we can "talk" with one another.

Lenore Newman

Ann, you are leading us into deep theoretical water. The postmodernist in me says that what is turning the space you describe into a place is you. And you happen to like loons. If you had a strange fear of loons, the space would have a very different feeling. Actually, I never did trust loons...

Ela Kinowska

OK - A little bit of Etymology: Place: Middle English, from old French, open space, from Latin broad street.. etc.

Levi Waldron

Ann Dale wrote:

And there are other physical places in the world, for example, the Mundi Mundi Plains in Australia?

I'm curious why you chose the Mundi Mundi Plains in Australia as an example of a physical place? Isn't everywhere a physical place?

Ann Dale

You know me too well. I do not adhere to the post-post modernist thought that there is no reality, it is all constructed, nature is the ultimate reality, and perhaps we are the construct? Sorry, now having a glass of wine.

Lenore Newman wrote:

Ann, you are leading us into deep theoretical water. The postmodernist in me says that what is turning the space you describe into a place is you. And you happen to like loons. If you had a strange fear of loons, the space would have a very different feeling. Actually, I never did trust loons...

Ela Kinowska

Ann; I am curious on other panelists' views on places and social networking?

Ann Dale

Levi, interesting question, this conversation is making me think about the meaning of place, our intention, I now realize that physical place for me must also include a sense of space, is it psychological, emotional, spiritual, and I don't find that in large cities. The Mundi Mundi Plains is this vast vista, it is endless and Jenny told me that some people

freak out because of its vastness, I could have stayed there all day. Yes, every place is physical, but I never realized how important space was to me in a physical setting.

Levi Waldron wrote:

And there are other physical places in the world, for example, the Mundi Mundi Plains in Australia?

Lenore Newman

I think our sense of place can play a huge role in our social networking. Levi and I like a certain type of space because it leads to places ripe for making connections.

Interestingly, though I agree green space is critical to successful urban living, the great experiments of the early part of this century to pull down slums and build towers in green space were horrible failures that destroyed community. Note that this week they are starting to tear down Regent Park, Toronto's largest "green space/tower" housing development. They are replacing it with higher density and mixed use, much like what was there a hundred years ago. The best laid plans, I suppose...

Ann Dale

Frank, there is always this divide, I do not see technology and in particular, on line dialogue and forums as a replacement or substitute for face to face social capital, it is a complement not a substitute? It creates a different kind of community and can create novel links between communities, and perhaps, to reply to Ela, create new networks of social relationships, introducing critical diversity?

Frank Roselli wrote:

As a student i use technology all the time. but i never regard the web or cyberspace as a place or even a space. it is a concept grounded in a scientific reality i think. i think technology should only ever remain a tool and not a replacement (hmm, the word place is in replacement, i wonder how to interpret that now?) for communication and being together in a place or space. i would love to be having this discussion in person with everyone (this is fun btw...) but it is great that our spaces between each other have ultimately been narrowed or reduced so we can "talk" with one another.

Ann Dale

Janet, any comments on this?

Lenore Newman wrote:

I think our sense of place can play a huge role in our social networking. Levi and I like a certain type of space because it leads to places ripe for making connections. Interestingly, though I agree green space is critical to successful urban living, the great experiments of the early part of this century to pull down slums and build towers in green space were horrible failures that destroyed community. Note that this week they are starting to tear down Regent Park, Toronto's largest "tower/tower" housing development. They are replacing it with higher density and mixed use, much like what was there a hundred years ago. The best laid plans, I suppose...

Ann Dale

With respect to social networking, Jenny offers this comment.

"The issue of place is also central to social capital, and to the relative merits of bonding and bridging social capital. As Portes and others have pointed out, bonding can be very limiting, especially if there are strong boundaries dividing "us" and "them", thus preventing people from reaching out and learning from "them". Or as Woolcock and Narayan point out (World Bank), bonding is about "getting by" (surviving) while bridging is about "getting ahead".

However I dispute the independence of these dichotomies. There are many forms of bridging, across geographic divides but also across divides of class, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, political persuasion etc. all of which can occur within the one place. Furthermore I suggest that bridging depends on good bonding. We usually start with those we know and trust, then move to friends of friends, then to people within the same "place" and only gradually move our boundaries out to encompass bridges to wider universes. But the initial bonds of our own place forms the foundation on which all further learning and networks depend."

Frank Roselli

I think Janet's comments are interesting and they've made me observe that it's never a "green place" but a "green space". There's always a need for green space and i think that parks and natural spaces create their own place - as do a lot of urban spaces. I was recently in New York City for the first time and was completely in awe of this incredibly dense city that is just amazing. I love the urban form, but it was fast realized that NYC is not a place without it's green spaces. The height and intense urban form make one appreciate the green spaces all the more. Central park in particular is what makes NYC both a place and a space for me. Without the "green lung" i doubt the city would be tolerable as a place or a space for too long.

Ela Kinowska

Well, I am old fashioned and prefer a glass of wine with a friend at my place (chez nous !) over a chat via Internet-MSN (never did it in my life !), as I type I regret we cannot sit around Ann's stove sip wine and chat...however, we need e-dialogues too ! I grew up in a very sociable society where people are very close and walk to each others house without an invitation.. so it is a different culture that affects are behaviour, however I do not dare visit anybody in Canada without a phone call, email etc.

Janet Moore

I am enjoying the time in between the comments to reflect on my own conceptions of place, networks, social cohesion - I spend a lot of time in my dialogue class trying to create pauses before jumping in. I am thinking about the physical spaces that I am most connected to and I can't stop thinking about the camp in northern Ontario where I spent all of my summers growing up - and the social networks that were created and still connect me to that place and others. In fact - many of the physical places that I love are deeply connected to networks...

Lenore Newman

Here is a question- has anyone out there logged any time in a suburb? What kind of "place" does one find there? Why are such spaces so popular?

Ela Kinowska

Nobody mentioned an important connotation with place which for me is very much HOME, my family, my dog within the fiscal boundaries of our apartment.. I think our family plays a big role in a definition of place. Any views?

Ann Dale

Ela, we do have great taste in wine, I must admit. Again, you made me think, the reason I love cyberspace is that I get to connect, as Janet raised the links between place, networks, social cohesion but with a degree of space between us. Believe it or not, I am very shy, hence, my love of cyberspace where all voices are equal independent of physical looks, dominance, and so forth.

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Well, I am old fashioned and prefer a glass of wine with a friend at my place (chez nous !) over a chat via Internet-MSN (never did it in my life !), as I type I regret we cannot sit around Anns stove sip wine and chat...however, we need e-dialogues too ! I grew up in a very sociable society where people are very close and walk to each others house without an invitation. So it is a different culture that affects are behaviour, however I do not dare visit anybody in Canada without a phone call, email etc.

Ann Dale

Lenore, you do push my buttons sometimes. I grew up in a sterilized, homogenized suburb that my poor mother hated, as she came from England and was so afraid of all the space, no where to walk, she had to learn how to drive, she only ever mastered left hand corners, boy, did we spend a lot of time just driving around to find left hand turns:)

Lenore Newman wrote:

Here is a question- has anyone out there logged any time in a suburb? What kind of "place" does one find there? Why are such spaces so popular?

Frank Roselli

I think the idea of home is a great one to bring up. Home is very much a personal state. As you can make anywhere a home on your own or with your family, I don't think it's as easy to "make a place". I think that sometimes needs a collective or group. so maybe all our homes make up a place? Or maybe make up a space?

Ela Kinowska

How often one hears COME TO MY PLACE, yes, my home is my place, we take it for granted.

Janet Moore

I grew up in a suburb of Toronto - but somehow I got lucky with a forest behind my house that was a wild space - no trails or gravel or signage...a real forest that somehow got left in between the windy streets that define suburbs (it took forever to drive to the store because of the street patterns). Lots of the streets did not even have sidewalks. By the time I was finishing high school I decided to head to McGill without any of my friends - I was craving diversity - and I knew it was out there because we would sneak in to Toronto to find it - diversity of people, ideas, design, film, food...things we could not find in the mall.

Ann Dale

Interesting, I have a relationship here with both the land and my home and family. However, in my travels, I have found some beautiful spaces (Frank, thank you for bringing this clarity) that literally make my soul soar with no family, that is, relationship, but a sense of being home, the ocean, in particular, Long Beach and old growth forest, give me the same feeling of being connected with something greater than myself.

Ela Kinowska wrote:

Nobody mentioned an important connotation with place which for me is very much HOME, my family, my dog within the fiscal boundaries of our apartment.. I think our family plays a big role in a definition of place. Any views?

Ela Kinowska

Yes, but after seeing all these wonderful places you come home, which is ultimately your place from where you escaped for a little moment.

Lenore Newman

Heh heh. So much is about our own history. I can't enter an old growth forest without at least taking a moment to think about where one would lay out the logging roads. And if you take my father to a park he starts talking about it!

Levi Waldron ??????????

Lenore Newman wrote:

Here is a question- has anyone out there logged any time in a suburb? What kind of "place" does one find there? Why are such spaces so popular?

I've spent a fair bit of time at my grandparents' place in Denver, in the heart of the burbs. Seems to me that some of the things that make suburbs popular are: you have home and green space (i.e. lawn) on your own property it appeals to many peoples' desire to have both city and rural, and you're more likely to live near some woods or a river. I have a desire for urban and rural places as well, however to me, suburbs are neither rather than both. subsidized mortgages and cheap land haven't hurt either As for "home" - it seems to me like a place where you feel comfortable, that feels familiar, where you have a history, and where you have close friends or family. I think the place that feels like home can change over time.

Ann Dale

I suspect there is this historical aspect to our adult selection of place, for example, suburbia forced me to rural, your rural forced you to urban, and Levi? I love cities, but only to visit.

Lenore Newman wrote:

Heh heh. So much is about our own history. I can't enter an old growth forest without at least taking a moment to think about where one would lay out the logging roads. And if you take my father to a park he starts talking about it!

Lenore Newman

I agree with you Levi, to me the burbs seem to be the worst of both worlds. But clearly we are in the minority. Perhaps because I am allergic to grass?

Tim Penner

I'd like to toss a couple of comments on the pile here. There are many aspects of space and place how culture affect them.

Think about the following situations:

- my mother's little hospital room turned into a place when we witnessed her death there
- Granny Clampett refusing to leave her place
- families abandoning their place for space to create a new home in a new land
- travelling miles through unknown spaces seeking the company of family or friends in a new place that is at once familiar because they are comfortable there
- a home suddenly being transformed into a mere house by the death of a spouse

What I'm getting at here is that we probably need space to express ourselves but the place itself is not so important as the attitude we have towards it, no matter the origin of that attitude. We can have a wonderful experience in a strange city and a horrible experience in a wooded glen. We can be brought to those feelings by people we trust or mistrust.

But it's always a "we". "We" make our place in our heads, and all we need is sufficient space to support our physical presence, to leave our marks.

Community, as tied to place as it seems, is much more space than place - sufficient space to create the physical presence that a physical community needs to express itself. If the community isn't physical, then a metaphysical space will do nicely.

Ann Dale

Lenore, you and I have spent hours discussing how to transform suburbia into more sustainable communities, and the corollary, how to communicate sustainable community development to them? Frank, any thoughts?

Lenore Newman wrote:

I agree with you Levi, to me the burbs seem to be the worst of both worlds. But clearly we are in the minority. Perhaps because I am allergic to grass?

Lenore Newman

On a different note, one of my great complaints about multinational capitalism and globalization is the homogenization of place. Would I have bothered trekking all over the globe if everywhere I went I found a McDonalds and a Home Depot. Why does this homogenization occur? Why are so many people willing to toss aside regional differences that make life interesting? As an example, the drive from Toronto to Montreal is completely soul-sucking, a six hour slog of Tim's and Mc-Ds. Arrgh! (Sorry, I get a little heated on the subject)

Ann Dale

Tim, so glad you have joined us. I never thought of this before, place can actually be created through human agency, and again, be nothing without it. This is so timely, my father was in a respite home, and I have never had any experience with retirement homes, and was devastated to see so many unhappy people, not talking, the lack of diversity, but with agency and diverse social capital, one can create a sense of place and community?

Frank Roselli

Ann Dale wrote:

Lenore, you and I have spent hours discussing how to transform suburbia into more sustainable communities, and the corollary, how to communicate sustainable community development to them? Frank, any thoughts?

Lenore Newman wrote:

I agree with you Levi, to me the burbs seem to be the worst of both worlds. But clearly we are in the minority. Perhaps because I am allergic to grass?

I must confess that i used to love suburbia, but now can't generally tolerate it for too long. I've been in many a lecture talking about the suburban form - just ask Prof. Lister! And i honestly think that the biggest issue with creating sustainable communities has more to do with lack of education and knowledge of alternatives. you can provide higher densities but ultimately no one will tolerate them if they have been "trained" to only see a clear divide in urban/suburban. sustainable communities have much more to do with social issues i think that built form or design.

Ann Dale

But Frank, doesn't the built form influence our behaviour?

Lynelle Osburn

Hi everyone. I'm Lynelle and I'm in Wagga Wagga Australia today is hot and sunny. Networking and space and place causes me to reflect on an experience Jenny Onyx and I had while doing some research. We watched a person who belonged in a community - her 'place' enter a different physical space within that community (a particular building on a particular day) and discover that she was 'out of place'. She had entered a world where she knew everyone and, had an immediate sense of not belonging. She saw people she worked with and talked with in her day to day life in networks and connections with others. She became aware that because of these networks that related to this particular physical space that she could no longer trust her networks (or perhaps her map of network). She had a whole new perspective. She understood why a campaign she had run with the people she new had failed - because

there was this other place - that used to be outside here awareness.

What I'm wondering is, does a look at where we are not in space or feel out of place help us in this analysis?

Lenore Newman

I agree with Ann on this one- I think one can build something so unfriendly to social interaction that it is doomed to fail. Jane and Finch comes to mind- the intersection, so infamous in the new in Canada, might be a little less dangerous if it didn't have fifty acres of pavement (really!) at the intersection.

Frank Roselli

I agree that built form does influence behaviour and culture. prior architecture student in me should have noticed that. but it is a bit of "chicken and the egg" scenario. What came first? what influenced what first?

Ela Kinowska

Yes Frank, talking about leaving physical mark, I think I want to elaborate on aesthetics of physical space, i.e. architecture and design that help us appreciate space we inhabit. I am sure we could make our cities more livable with smart architectural design reflecting values of communities surrounding a place...opening room for thought ?

Lenore Newman

Frank Roselli wrote:

I agree that built form does influence behaviour and culture. prior architecture student in me should have noticed that. but it is a bit of "chicken and the egg" scenario. What came first? what influenced what first?

The egg came first. Chickens evolved from reptiles (grin).

Lenore Newman

Good point Ela. I think Levi and I could rant long and hard about how we live in spaces created by 1950's idealists who really thought we would never leave our cars! Let's just all be thankful they didn't figure out how to make those cars fly! Seriously, nothing kills place faster than a giant piece of infrastructure not scaled to humans (remember hiking under the 401 Levi?)

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Lenore Newman wrote:

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THANK-YOU!! that's the best answer to that riddle I've ever heard. And as for architecture, i am the biggest advocate for great design. Design and arch can accomplish so many goals. I personally can get just overwhelmed being in a beautiful space. for me, a great building or built form or space creates a place. i think that's been lost in city design where we don't have the "plazas" or the cultural areas as the anchor of a great city. as said prior - it's all about the mall! and living in Toronto, it's pretty much an architectural wasteland - in some respects.

Levi Waldron

Ela Kinowska wrote:

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This reminds me of a question of architectural design I have wondered about for some time. Why are apartment buildings so unfriendly to social interactions (I am living in one right now, and haven't met any of my neighbors)? Could they be designed to change this? I think they could, and this probably isn't the place to discuss it, but I hope there are architects out there pondering this.

Janet Moore

I'm not sure we are going to design our way out of the mess we've created. In my travels to India and Nepal - my favorite part of the dense cities are the spiritual places that are often right in the middle of it all - giant stupas in Katmandu, temples in Bombay and madras...places where you can walk through in barefeet and silence...I'm in downtown Vancouver these days and have a hard time finding any quiet reflective space - have not run into many developers thinking about adding a stupa to the downtown core...

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Mike Robinson

Hi all,
Great dialogue.

Peak oil will provide a new perspective on place and design. Perhaps once again most of us will spend our entire lifetimes within a 100k circle.

Lenore Newman

Janet Moore wrote:

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I suggest Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden in Chinatown. Very calming

Mike Robinson

By Peak Oil, I mean the change to a Post Carbon Society.

Ann Dale

In some ways, we have come full circle, perhaps place and space in dynamic interaction, and I am arrogant enough to believe we have the capacity to design for this, will allow us to work with biospherical limits, coupled with a precautionary principle and subsidiarity might just get us to enhanced sustainable community development?

Mike Robinson wrote:

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Great dialogue. Peak oil will provide a new perspective on place and design. perhaps once again most of us will spend our entire lifetimes within a 100k circle.*

Mike Robinson

Post Carbon Society is an ongoing RRU sponsored forum that welcomes your

participation. Please join us at: www.postcarbonsociety.com

Janet Moore

Last time I went there - I had to pay to get in - what I'm trying to get at is the idea that what is going on is cultural - and of course design is part of the solution...how can we redesign the pace we move at, our expectations of one another, how do we redesign our notions of success?

Lenore Newman wrote:

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Ann Dale

Janet, I get it, the use of place and space is cultural, whether or not we allow access, Mike Robinson asked in the e-audience, what about racism, who we allow access to and deny in the even the physical landscape, never mind space.

Ann Dale

Thank you, one and all, I have thoroughly enjoyed our discussion. Please continue to dialogue, I, however, must log off due to some family issues, nice to meet Frank, Janet and Tim on line for the first time, please join us again.

Lenore Newman

It was fun. This is such an interesting topic. Night all.

Levi Waldron

Thanks everyone. In reference to an earlier comment of Lenore's, if you ever have a chance, I recommend walking underneath highway 401. It's a memorable and impressive experience.

Janet Moore

Thanks for putting up with me on my first e-dialogue - still trying to figure it out but i did enjoy thinking/hearing from all of you.

Sun in now setting here...