

I enjoyed your notes on sense of place and community. It is a subject I spend a great deal of time thinking and talking about. Two years ago I funded a UCI student study looking at Irvine to determine whether the strong physical *sense of place* we had created enhanced the *sense of community* of both the city and the villages. I asked them to divide the study into the community generating influences of religious institutions, recreational activities, local governance (the city) and community associations.

Early in my tenure at the Irvine Company I concluded that our primary contribution was to create strong “places” and encourage the social and governance organizations from which *communities* might grow. See the attached piece that I wrote a couple years ago for a talk to the local chamber of commerce. Although self-serving and full of back patting my point was that only through such organizations as the chamber does a civic community actually emerge.

As for your questions:

Job/housing balance in Irvine and elsewhere.

Our goal from day one (1960) was for Irvine to have sufficient jobs that all who live within the city could also work there. Little did we know that the information age revolution would flood the suburbs with jobs. Companies formed in response to the new economy no longer needed be near rail lines, ports, etc. etc. that we were all taught in planning school. They located where the principals and owners wanted to live. And the more attractive we made Irvine the more they wanted to locate their new companies within the city. So job growth soon overwhelmed all of us with the city fathers cheering them on.

But city fathers were less enthusiastic about housing growth. Managed growth politics soon dominated each election and as market demand for housing grew while housing supply was politically retarded the ratio of jobs to housing continued to grow. Today, 36 years after the first house was built in Irvine the job/housing ratio is so out of kilter that we would have to build over ninety-thousand dwellings tomorrow to be able to house all who work within the city. The same is true in the Silicon Valley and San Francisco. Thus for those, like me, that believe the law of supply and demand does establish prices there should be no surprise that the cost of housing has gone through the roof. In fact the cost of housing in the Silicon Valley (where we also build and own apartments) is even higher than Irvine.

The interesting fact, however, is that despite what I just said about the lack of housing in Irvine it still *has the highest ratio of residents who also work in their city* than any of the other 36 cities in the county. Indeed, Irvine is the job center of the county with almost twice the job/housing ratio as the other Orange County cities. Employees come from all over the county and many from San Bernardino County. In 1960 the county of Orange had more houses than jobs. Now it is the other way around. More commute into the county than commute out.

Part of the answer to your question about why don't more live and work in the same city is that Orange County is a defacto regional city consisting of over 36 physically small-incorporated municipalities. Work to home commuting is measured in time not distance with the tolerance maxing out at forty-five minutes. Thus even many that live in Riverside can commute to Irvine in 45 minutes. Our experience is that many of our home buyers decide to live in Irvine and continue to live there even while changing jobs throughout the county every four or five years.

The best book I've read on this subject is Dejan Sudjic's "100 mile city." He makes the case that the Los Angeles region is actually the city to most residents regardless of where within the region they actually live. I think he has a point.

Now there is a new book, *New Geography* by Joel Kotkin that builds on that idea. Because most residents not only work so far from where they live but take advantage of cultural and recreational activities through out the region that building identifiable local “places” (Kevin Lynch called them “nodes of activity” in his writings on the subject) is the best we can do in creating a sense of places. There are exceptions, of course. Paris is still the premiere place with its dominant avenue and controlled building heights filled with numerous smaller and more intimate “nodes.” San Francisco is physically contained (and separated from its suburban sprawl) by the hills, bay and ocean. In Newport we have our small islands which became examples for me of the importance of creating physically identifiable villages.

Sense of Community, in some respects, is easier to come by. Most communities are unrelated to “place.” Our phones and computers allow us to link up with those we have something in common with regardless of where we each live. Too often architects think that architectural details such as porches will enhance the sense of community by encouraging neighborliness between porches. The truth is that we all pick our community of friends and associates by what we have in common and the fact we have a neighbor with or without a porch doesn’t ensure we have a reason to become fast friends.

Irvine is primarily a family town. Thus the most unifying force creating communities are its school and sport activities for children, teens and families. Next are their local associations, which look after their neighborhoods in a way city hall never can. And, of course, the religious institutions and other social institutions form none physical communities. But the strong physical boundaries, centers, local schools, parks, bike paths and name identities of the villages is the dominate physical element that the residents identify as their “place” within the amorphous glom that the region has, because of its size, become.

With this you are now probably sorry you ever opened the floodgates to my ramblings about place. If they do nothing else perhaps that will serve as a sleeping sedative. Good night.