

THE SUBURBAN THRESHOLD AND THE POTENTIAL LINK TO COMMUNITY SOCIABILITY

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1 ABSTRACT

The suburban form has been the subject of much criticism over the past decades. Designers point to its lack of aesthetics and monotony (Dunhan-Jones and Williamson, 2009; Tacheiva, 2010), while medical professionals point to its link to obesity (Strum and Cohen, 2004) and American's waning mental condition (Jackson and Tester, 2008). As designers we ask questions and examine the suburban context for clues that might shed light on why this form of development creates such negative consequences.

Existing research on community sociability focuses on "sense of community" (Brown and Croppe, 2001; Kim and Kaplan, 2004; Lund, 2002) as the key measure and explores the influences of the landscape context on social interactivity. Surveys of residents are the instrument of choice when investigating the potential relationship between a community's landscape and the reported sense of community. This paper looks at a separate measure, "knowing," to evaluate the level of community present in a neighborhood. Knowing, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the ability of one person to identify another.

This paper reports the results of a research project that was conducted in the Phoenix Metro area, exploring the "threshold's" influence on knowing within the suburban context. The condition of the threshold was calculated based on its transparency or level of visual access to the public from within the residence. A survey was conducted on two neighborhoods within the Phoenix Metro area with varying degrees of threshold transparency to determine the level of knowing present.

1.1 Keywords

suburbs, sociability, community, knowing