



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Architectural and personal influences on neighboring behaviors;



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Abstract

Architectural and personal influences on neighboring behaviors were studied in a residential neighborhood using both qualitative informal conversations, and systematic recording of activity in the neighborhood's social space. This dual approach produced new insights into neighboring behaviors and social networks. It was discovered that the residents who participated in the social space were only a portion of the resident population. There was an additional neighborhood-based network whose neighboring was not conducted in the social space; instead it was maintained by direct house-to-house contact. It was also found that some individuals chose not to participate in any neighborhood social network. The social space was an effective neighboring venue for those residents who chose to use it, but did not attract commingling of groups. Contrary to an assumption in previous neighboring research, there are social groups which develop and maintain themselves without participation in a social space. © 2016 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Residential neighborhoods are places of potential social interaction and social relations. Understanding how those interactions and relations develop needs to be understood, because the development of community life is a fundamental process in social organization and experience (Almgren, 2001).

Neighborhoods expose their residents to factors distinct from (while operating in conjunction with) family processes inside

the homes (Grannis, 2009, pp. 1-3). Different neighborhoods have different types of effects; they could maintain social order or disorder, facilitate or inhibit cooperative action, and make neighbors appear as either resources or threats.

Gehl (2011, p. 77) measured a public space's social success, whether in civic, shopping, or residential settings, by its total "liveliness", that is, the total number of people participating in the space. He presumed that if the people are there, active and complex urban life including social interactions can follow. In residential settings specifically, Brower (2011), Grannis (2009), and Gutman (1966) have sought interaction networks more explicitly; through network formation, a residential neighborhoods' social relations can tend toward identification of "community".

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Putnam (2001) posited that social networks and their expectations of reciprocity have value, both to network members and, at least in some instances, to the general public. Even casual social interactions or connections have value; they increase the likelihood that one person will come to the aid of another when needed. Outcomes of social networks include child welfare, educational performance, personal health, public participation, compliance with laws, and frequency of crime (Holtan et al., 2015; Putnam, 2001).

As will be cited in the next section, previous research has studied neighboring behaviors in residential neighborhoods, and the physical and social features that influence them. The study reported here aimed to extend knowledge in these areas by examining together both the architectural (design) and personal influences on neighboring behaviors and neighborhood networks. Specific questions addressed in this study were (1) the role of certain architectural features in facilitating neighborly participation, and (2) the influence on participation from individuals' personal characteristics and overall lifestyle concerns such as family and work obligations. As will be shown, this distinctive dual inquiry allowed the recognition of new insights into neighboring behaviors and neighborhood social networks.

2. Previous studies

Previous research has studied social networks and their values in residential neighborhoods, neighboring behaviors, the types of behaviors that occur in shared or public spaces, and design features that influence them. Important findings and viewpoints from these types of research are summarized here.

2.1. Social networks

The connections that hold social relations together are various, such as ethnic identity, religious congregation, kinship, friendship, economic status, work, profession, and political ideology. Some are formalized through institutions such as churches, clubs, or professional societies. Some are locally concentrated as in residential neighborhoods; others are globally dispersed. Different community memberships overlap with each other, and compete for participation and enforcement of norms (Chaskin, 1997). Many networks are shaped by complex exogenous social processes and issues (Almgren, 2001). People can be pulled away from local neighborhood networks by forces of modernization, urbanization, migration, and communication technology (Chaskin, 1997; Wellman, 1996).

Some research has treated "community" as an ideal; in which to evolve into a "community" is a desirable achievement for the residents of any neighborhood. Long effort has been given to defining that ideal, including McMillan and Chavis' (1986) much-cited formulation, in which a complete community has four elements: membership (belonging and sharing), influence (making a difference to the group), fulfillment of needs (meeting of individuals' needs through the group), and shared emotional connection (common history, places, and experiences). None of the definitions have been final (Brower, 2011, pp. xxviii-xxix). In this paper the term "community" is used without normative implications; it is used almost interchangeably with "social

network", with the implication only that it may represent a relatively strong and complete type of network.

Social networks can constitute useful resources. The concept of social capital, articulated by Coleman (1988) and widely applied by Putnam (2001), refers to shared normative conditions based on neighbors' social ties and institutions. It builds obligations, expectations, and trust, as people do things for each other in expectation of reciprocity. It guides and facilitates action. It builds information channels. Most forms of social capital are created or destroyed as by-products of other activities. Its effectiveness depends on the strength of relations between individuals, and its reinforcement by other social relations and institutions. Those social relations persist, which are discovered to work for the individuals and the group.

The development of community is not always for the good (Grannis, 2009, pp. 1-3; Putnam, 2001). An individual's commitment to one community could lead to separation from another (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Social capital can inhibit some potential actions, or derail them from their original goals (Karner, 2001). Wilson (2012, pp. 60-61; 259-260) emphasized the socially isolating and disorganizing effects created by macrolevel exogenous factors such as economic restructuring, concentrated poverty, and racial segregation. In neighborhoods influenced that way, gangs and other social affiliations based on fear, hatred, and crime, are arguably forms of community.

2.2. Neighboring behaviors

In residential neighborhoods, interactions among residents vary in intensity, frequency, and intimacy (Grannis, 2009, p. 17; Gutman, 1966).

Gehl (2011, pp. 15-21) distinguished between degrees of contact intensity. At the low end of his scale are passive contacts involving merely seeing and hearing others. These low-intensity contacts are sources of information about the social world, and opportunities for inspiration and stimulation. At greater levels of intensity, contacts include acquaintanceships, friendships, and finally close friendships. Each form of contact has value in itself, and, according to Gehl's formulation, is a prerequisite for more intense and complex interactions.

Similarly, Grannis (2009, pp. 4 and 19-26) hypothesized that interaction among residents is the primary process producing neighborhood communities. He posited a scale of neighbor interaction frequency and quality. At his low level of interaction, neighbors encounter each other unintentionally, during which they have the opportunity to observe each other's behavior, to acknowledge each other's presence, and to initiate conversation. Unintentional contacts can be abundant among residents who live close to each other on streets with provisions for pedestrian movement. Passive contact is a "latent tie", a possibility for further social interaction. At higher levels of Grannis' neighboring, residents intentionally initiate contact. The final level of neighboring consists of activities built upon mutual trust.

Among the personal characteristics influencing the scope and intensity of local networks are residential stability, and similarity of income, education, child-rearing practices, political ideology, ethnicity, life-cycle stage, and life style

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