



Rooting out mixed use: Revisiting the original rationales



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ABSTRACT

Mixed use has become one of the most popular principles of contemporary urban planning. In the United States, its benefits are so commonly extolled that it is easy to forget that some hundred years ago, US experts advocated the opposite—the rooting out of mixed use from cities—with the same passion that we argue for it today. This paper reviews early 20th-century discourses on the perceived harms of mixed use. These discourses paved the way for land-use separation to become a key tenet of 20th-century US municipal regulation. Understanding the case against mixed use made by our predecessors calls into question the basic assumptions we inherited from them.

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Mixed use—the co-location or immediate proximity of homes, workplaces and services in buildings, neighborhoods and districts—has become a central principle of good 21st-century city form; indeed, it might well be called a contemporary urban planning mantra (Grant, 2002). In the United States, it features prominently in policy guides issued by the Smart Growth Network, the Congress for the New Urbanism (Leccese and McCormick, 2000) and the American Planning Association (1998, 2003; Freilich et al., 2008). It is routinely considered an integral component of urban livability and sustainability and is explicitly pursued by advocates of the new generation of form-based zoning codes (Grant, 2006; Lewyn, 2006; Elliott, 2008; Talen, 2012a, 2013). The concept has gained such widespread acceptance among US planners that about ten years ago *Planning*, the magazine of the American Planning Association, announced: “Thou shalt mix uses!” (Porter, 2004).

The benefits of mixed use (and the harms of land-use separation) have been the subject of discussion for several decades. Contemporary theorists have articulated the problems of land-use separation and the virtues of mixed use in great depth, especially in relation to the “three Es” of sustainability (economy, equity and the environment; Campbell, 1996), as well as in relation to aesthetics and public health and safety (for a summary, see Grant, 2002). The well-established arguments for mixed use are as follows: it stimulates economic activity and decreases the need for wasteful investment in sprawling infrastructure; it contributes to social equality because

it allows a greater variety of people (e.g., the young, the elderly, the poor, the disabled) to access jobs and services; it improves the environment because it reduces the need for automobile travel and thus mitigates car-generated greenhouse gases; it enhances public health because it curtails pollution and encourages people to walk (thereby reducing rates of obesity and related diseases); it makes for more vibrant and safer cities, where activities occur at all hours of the day (Jane Jacobs’s famous “eyes on the street” thesis, 1961); and it helps people grow accustomed to social difference (Wickersham, 2001).

But if the benefits of mixed use are so indisputable, why did early 20th-century American urban reformers try so resolutely to root it out from cities, towns and suburbs? How did separation become the bedrock principle of municipal zoning—a legal practice that has had an enormous impact on US landscapes during the last century? How is it that mixed use is the mantra of today, but separation of uses was the mantra of yesterday?

These are timely questions to explore. In 2016, we will observe the 100-year anniversary of two landmark municipal acts in the United States: the 1916 zoning ordinance of New York City, which was the first to regulate the use, bulk and shape of land and properties in a thorough, city-wide fashion; and the lesser known 1916 ordinance of Berkeley, California, which was the first to seek the strict separation of residential and non-residential spaces. We will also mark the 90-year anniversary of *Euclid v. Ambler*, the US Supreme Court case that established the legal validity of zoning as part of the government police powers and articulated the case against mixed use in unambiguous terms:

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Some of the grounds for this conclusion are promotion of the health and security from injury of children and others by separating dwelling houses from territory devoted to trade and industry; suppression and prevention of disorder; facilitating the extinguishment of fires, and the enforcement of street traffic regulations and other general welfare ordinances; aiding the health and safety of the community, by excluding from residential areas the confusion and danger of fire, contagion, and disorder, which in greater or less degree attach to the location of stores, shops, and factories. (*Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 1926)

The purpose of this paper is to revisit the nearly forgotten rationales of early 20th-century American urban reformers who advocated land-use segregation. Specifically, the paper focuses on the arguments for the separation of residential spaces from work- and service-related spaces,¹ as these were articulated in the discourses surrounding the landmark municipal zoning acts of the day, in the writings and speeches of some of the key experts, and in the transcribed proceedings of the National Conferences on City Planning over a twenty-year period, from 1909 (the year of the first conference) to the late 1920s. Through analysis of these texts, several types of rationales against the co-location of dwellings and non-dwellings (shops, other services, industry) are revealed: public health- and safety-based, property-based, pastoral, populist, and privilege-based. These arguments are briefly contrasted with our contemporary rationales for mixed use. The findings suggest that most of the theories used by the early experts were based on assumptions common in the early 20th century but questionable today. Furthermore, the early experts' understanding of what land-use separation entails was quite different from ours, as *Talen (2012b)* astutely observed. Even when they were advocating against mixed use, the early experts did not seek to eliminate it to the extent that it was eliminated over time. The latter-day, mid-20th-century systematic rooting out of mixed use from cities through zoning was partially based on a misunderstanding of the original proposals. Today's land-use planners would do well to consider why we misinterpreted the ideas of the early experts and why we continue to subscribe to their outdated assumptions.

The paper first highlights the extent to which separating residential spaces from other spaces by law is an aberration in urban history. Second, it summarizes the five main arguments for the separation of homes from work and services, as these were presented in the early 1900s. Finally, it reflects on these arguments from a 21st-century perspective.

1. Land-use separation: from sporadic to systematic

It may have been unimaginable to people of most past cultures that spaces defined exclusively for either home or work could be relegated to different parts of the city. Whereas some buildings were grouped by function in even the most ancient cities (e.g., temples, civic buildings, market areas, storage areas, and workshops that required large spaces), most production and distribution activities were conducted in the same spaces where people also slept, ate, took care of their families, and led their daily lives. Functional groupings occurred typically by logistical necessity and

sporadically by regulation.² Examples of medieval restrictions on the co-location of home and work include nuisance laws (e.g., medieval England; *Fifoot, 1970 [1949]; Platt, 2004*) and the occasional attempts to outlaw the spread of shops outside of official markets (e.g., medieval China; *Xie, 2012a,b*). Still, household and work activities were typically integrated into the same spaces: “the workshop was a family” (*Mumford, 1938: 35*). As *Fishman (1987: 7)* put it in reference to England at the onset of the Industrial Revolution: “The basic principle... before 1750 was that work and residence were combined within each house. Almost all middle-class work enterprises were extensions of the family... The banker conducted business in his parlor, the merchant stored goods in his cellar, and both housed and fed their apprentices along with their families.”

In industrializing cities of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the driving out of work from urban residential quarters was a deeply transformative process (*Stearns, 1993*). As technological change forced densities in the “centered industrial city” (*Rae, 2003*) to skyrocket and pollution reached distressing levels, urban elites gradually warmed to the idea that work and home could and should be separated. In Anglo-American settings, the idea manifested itself in the increasingly popular construction of residences in peripheral settings, which became the center of household life for upper-class women and children, as men split their lives between working in the city and spending time with the family in suburban homes (*Fishman, 1987*). The process reflected the growing influence of Victorian-era ideology that men's role was in the world of business and politics, whereas women's was in the home.

Another aspect of the land-use separation process entailed the emergence and gradual consolidation of large buildings with specialized functions in distinct nodes (e.g., in shopping districts, banking districts, warehouse districts, and factory districts). This consolidation followed the economic logic of industrial production and distribution: large-scale production required large spaces with unique equipment; furthermore, businesses located next to others of their own kind in order to take advantage of common suppliers, transportation facilities, and customers (*Knox and McCarthy, 2005*). Spatial separation was further aided by the increasing interventionism of state and local bureaucracies in the city-building process. Recognizing the threat that polluting industry posed to public health, Western European states were the first to impose far-reaching restrictions on the location of noxious industry in areas dominated by housing. A Napoleonic decree from 1810 created a list of noxious industries that could locate in urban residential areas only after obtaining a state license (*Reynard, 2002*).

The most sophisticated regulations developed in Germany, which was then widely perceived as the world leader in urban planning (*Mullen, 1976; Ladd, 1990; Rogers, 1998*). German cities had a centuries-long tradition of relegating some industries exclusively to the periphery of towns. In the late 1800s, Germany pioneered the municipal regulation of land use by comprehensively dividing cities into zones: some for residences, some for industry, and some for mixed purposes (*Williams, 1913, 1914*). This method was emu-

¹ The separation of homes by types (single- from multi-family homes, large-size and large-lot homes from smaller ones, etc.) through zoning, which is often dubbed as exclusionary zoning, has been widely debated in the literature (for example, see *Fuge, 1996; Frug, 1996; Chused, 2003; Hirt, 2015*). Hence, it will not be the focus here. *Euclid v. Ambler* set the stage by referring to multi-family buildings as nuisances and parasites in areas dominated by single-family homes.

² For example, mining and shipbuilding required large and unique spaces and a sizable workforce. Archeological excavations have found specialized mining and shipbuilding quarters in ancient Greek cities, although almost all other work was conducted in and amidst residential areas throughout the towns (*Hatzfeld and Aymard, 1968*). In ancient Rome, certain activities considered highly noxious, such as cemeteries and brickyards, were excluded from the central urban areas by law (*Haverfield, 1913*). There are also many examples throughout the ancient and medieval world of residential quarters that were separated through regulation according to people's race, class, religion or another attribute perceived as important (for a comprehensive history of segregation, see *Nightingale, 2012*). However, there are also many counter-examples of socially mixed neighborhoods in ancient and medieval cities (see *York et al., 2011*).

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