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LEARNING FROM SUBURBIA: URBAN DESIGN LESSONS FROM AMERICA'S LARGEST NEW TOWN

Abstract
Irvine is the largest North American new town. It is also the quintessential Urban Design inspired new town (Forsyth, 2006); its planning and design were shaped by the latest Urban Design principles adapted to low-density, single-family environments (Cameron, 1976). Perhaps the most unique aspect of Irvine's design of Irvine is the deliberate use of Urban Design as a marketing tool. Imageability was not only valued in aesthetic terms, but became a way to differentiate between different marketing "products," a term that included the homes as well as the identity that would derive from living in them. Three decades after its founding the city is still developing according to these Urban Design principles.

Despite the rigid Urban Design framework and the need for continuous maintenance, change is affecting Irvine both in socio-economic and physical terms with major consequences on its place identity and on its residents' sense of attachment. Most of all, change is undermining some of the most basic Urban Design principles established during the early days, and there are signs that design alone might no longer be sufficient. This paper attempts a post occupancy evaluation of Irvine from the standpoint of its users. The method, emerged out of research at Berkeley (Cooper Marcus, 1988; Appleyard, 1976), has not yet tested Urban Design and its consequences on place attachment, and this is the goal of my research, whose preliminary findings appear in the last part of this paper.

1. The Uniqueness of Irvine

Located an hour south of Los Angeles, at the convergence of the I-5 and 405 freeways, Irvine is a thriving city of 200,000 named after the owners of the ranch operations that were once the driving economic force of the Orange County region. To outsiders, the city is nothing another suburban community. Some academics have gone as far as calling it a "scamscape," the epitome of a placeless environment and likened it to an amusement park (Soja, 1992). Yet, Irvine has been for years among the 10 fastest growing communities in the United States (Campbell, 2006).

Irvine is also the largest non-government funded master planned community in the world developed according to some of the most innovative Urban Design principles of the time, laid out by researchers like Kevin Lynch. The prescriptive framework of edges, nodes, landmarks, districts and paths was embraced by Ray Watson the then president of the Irvine Company and by William Pereira, planner and designer of the new campus of the University of California, Irvine, which was to constitute the center of the new town.

However, Lynch's ideas were adapted to differentiate Irvine from any other community in Southern California (Interview A; Interview G).

A second unique aspect of Irvine came from its ownership. Single ownership by the Irvine Company and lack of pre-existing urban settlements made the implementation of Pereira's master plan a straightforward endeavor. Acting as a de facto local government the company oversaw the establishment of strict design and administrative guidelines, which became public policy after the incorporation of Irvine as a city in 1971. These guidelines remain in place to this day and constitute the bulk of Irvine neighborhood planning strategies.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IRVINE RANCH

Since WWII Los Angeles had been steadily expanding to the south, eventually reaching the Irvine ranch northern edge. Cameron (1976) traced the causes of this unprecedented development to the construction of the 405 and 5 freeways and to tax increases, which forced many farmers to sell their land to developers. During this stage, development occurred according to minimal county requirements and by extending the 1x1 mile grid of arterial streets. Within the grid, a network of loops and lollipops provided access to each residential lot, with commercial development located at the intersection of the main arterial roads (Southworth and Ben Joseph). Such sprawl was made famous by Bill Garnett's aerial photos and found many detractors among the planning and design community.

Figure 1 Typical 1960s suburban development in northern Orange County (Courtesy: Irvine Company)

The Irvine family, who had been farming the land for over a century, owned the 63,000-acre Irvine ranch. Anticipating that intense development would soon replace agriculture as the region's driving economic force, the family started to explore the idea of creating a new town. At about the same time, the University of California was looking for a site for a new campus; both joined forces and asked designer William Pereira to master plan a new town around the new campus. The identity of the new town was in opposition to the sprawl of Los Angeles area, its lack of an open space infrastructure and poor planning. Irvine's Firts Master Plan (1961) envisioned a new community planned to the smallest detail, a new paradigm for suburban development (Cameron, Forsyth, Dagen Bloom). Its success was celebrated by no other than Times magazine, which featured Pereira on one of its covers.
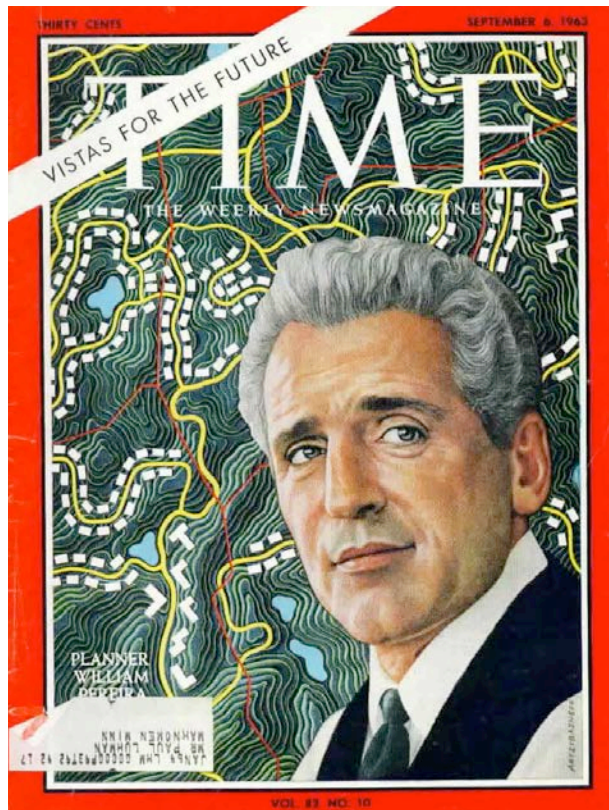

Figure 2 Pereira's master plan proved so popular that he was featured on the NY times.

By the early 1970s it became clear that the initial target population target of 100,000 was too conservative. Pereira's masterplan for a self-contained community could not respond to the demands of the market. After its incorporation in 1971 the city worked closely with the Irvine Company to modify the original plan to accommodate additional growth. Together they identified in the flat agricultural areas north of the 405 freeway as the land that would most likely be able to accommodate future urban growth. Similarly, the center of town shifted from the University of California to an activity corridor cutting east west through the town. One after the other, the villages of Woodbridge, WestPark, Northwood, NorthPark were built. Today, development has reached the foothills to the north, with the construction of the villages of Woodbury (opened in 2004) and the future village of Stonegate that is curently under way

3. EXPERIMENTATION ON THE IRVINE RANCH

From the very beginning, innovation and experimentation were driving forces in the design of the new town of Irvine. Innovation was achieved through changes in the planning processes, with a collaborative approach between the Irvine Company and the city of Irvine, or though Urban Design and the creation of self-sustaining villages designed to enhance a sense of identity and distinctiveness.
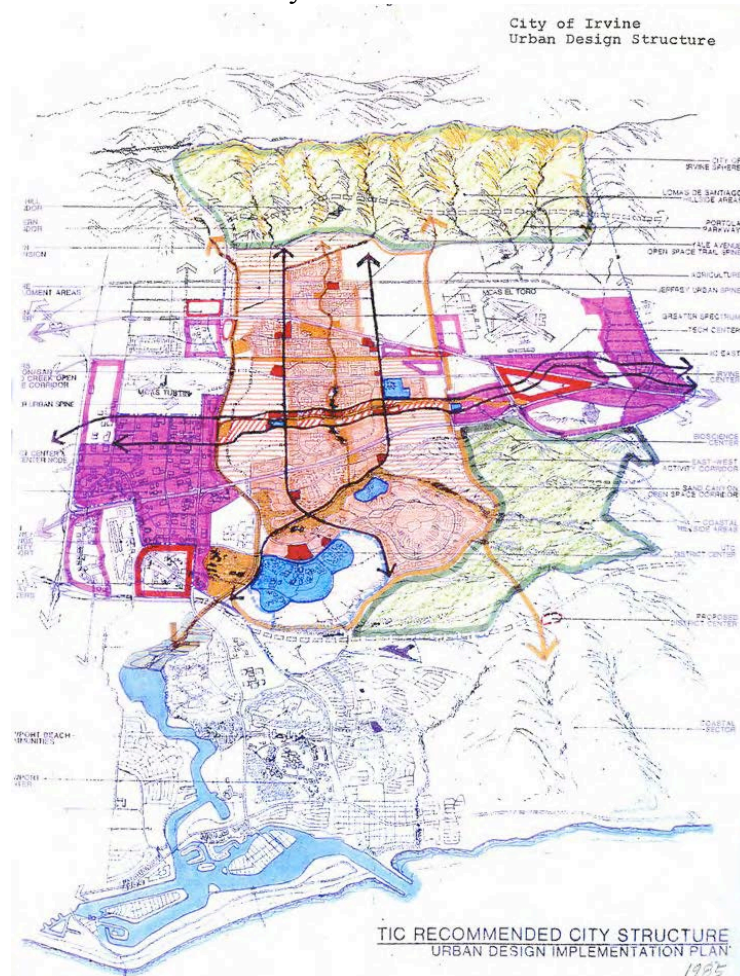

Figure 3 WRT's Urban Design implementation plan for Irvine ca. 1972
(courtesy: Robert Donnenbrinck)

The main point of experimentation had to do with the process of designing the new villages. Because during the early stages of the planning process The Irvine Company was solely responsible for planning the new town, and to prevent the Irvine company from overruling City's interests, an army of consultants—more often than not landscape architects—were hired to make sure that all aspects of the new town's landscape would be carefully designed (Campbell; Forsyth). The reliance on consultants prevented conflict and insured constant innovative solutions. City, Company and consultants would form "project teams" that would follow a project from its early conception to completion (Interview A; H).

On the Irvine Ranch, Urban Design experimentation occurred within the regulatory framework established by the City's 1972 "Urban Design Implementation Plan"

commissioned to the firm Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd. The plan was a re-interpretation of the more informal Urban Design parameters set forth by the *Irvine Company General Plan Program Urban Design Element*, an unpublished manuscript summarizing company's key terms and Urban Design principles. During my interviews many design professionals pointed at the experimental nature of Irvine as one of its distinctive characteristic (Interviews B; I), whereby small, incremental changes to village design are tested and replicated. This experimentation is continuing to this day, with the application of New Urbanist design solutions to the newest neighborhoods and the use of native plantings and other sustainable principles (Interviews G; I). The following chapter explains how Urban Design was used in Irvine as a tool for shaping a new type of suburban community.

4. IRVINE'S OBSESSION WITH URBAN AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The *Irvine Company General Plan program for Urban Design Element* introduced a series of guiding concepts for planning and urban development on the ranch and identified five levels at which Urban Design would operate. The document, drafted in the form of a manuscript for internal use to the company explained with terms half way between a planning document and a marketing brochure the company's city building goals, mainly to fight the sprawl that surrounded the ranch and the effect of which "is to create widespread visual monotony and an "environment (…) devoid of identity and meaning." (unpublished manuscript B, 2). For each of the five levels the document made a series of suggestions as to the most appropriate Urban Design tools to fight the monotony of sprawl.

a) The regional and sub regional landscape

This level included the southern California region and, more specifically, Orange County. At this level, Urban Design goals would be limited to the preservation of an "ethos," a regional aesthetic and lifestyle (Unpublished manuscript A, 5). The introduction of discourses as determinants of Urban Design solutions is perhaps one of the innovative aspects of the Irvine Urban Design:

> *"In subtle ways, buildings, projects, neighborhoods, villages, districts and cities should somehow recognize and reflect certain things that people will associate with the region's culture or inherent attributes (...) In Southern California, this would include the value that people place upon recreation and leisure time activities, which is fostered by the region's mild climate" (unpublished document A, 5)*

b) The city level

At the city level, Irvine Company goals aimed at creating an overall ***imageability*** "allowing residents to find special meaning out of the larger scale environment and permit[ting] them to perceive a differentiated yet well structured environment" (Unpublished manuscript A, 4-5). People in Irvine were to orient themselves according to landmarks and natural features of the surrounding environment. (Forsyth; Interview G). Planners and consultants were to make sure that the layout of the arterials would orient towards views of natural landmarks, like the San Joaquin hills, which would insure that residents would develop a clear mental map of the city and provide the new town with identifiable boundaries (Unpublished Manuscript A, 4). This particular requirement

derived directly from Lynch's research on **imageability** and **regional identity** (1960, 1976). Another important element of the existing landscape to be preserved and enhanced was the system eucalyptus windbreaks planted to protect the crops from the harsh winds during the early agricultural years.

Figure 4 Campus Avenue was oriented toward the UCI campus and towers visible in the distance (Image by the author)

c) The district

Urban Design guidelines used by the Irvine Company and its consultants (and later adopted by the city) defined *district* as a collection of villages sharing similar characteristics. The guidelines suggested that Urban Design at the scale of the district would be mainly concerned with creating and reinforcing district foci around which villages could be organized. In the case of the early villages, the University of California campus, the Newport bay or the ocean would be ideal foci for new districts.

Naming was also mentioned as a tools useful in defining a district. In the early villages, reference to *bluffs* and *ridges* in village names was considered sufficient in creating a "district." In the 1970s the reference to a *woodsy* character helped establish a district identity in Woodbridge and its successor, the village of Northwood (unpublished manuscript A, 4). The use of naming and signage devices to establish a district was a departure from Lynch's definition of districts sections of cities that shared similar visual qualities and a solution that spoke yet again of marketing goals rather than design.

a) The village level

According to the Irvine Company a village consists of as a series of neighborhoods large enough to contain a variety of housing product "yet not so large that movement among these products would be achieved only through automobile. At the level of the village

Urban Design was seen as the primary tool for creating a sense of identity and distinctiveness (Unpublished manuscript A, 3). This would be achieved through the use of landscape elements that would help achieve "visual, psychological, thematic and functional identity" (Ibid., 4). To this end, an entire section of the Urban Design guidelines centered on a discussion of Urban Design tools for the achievement of the goals outlined above. Among them was the provision of green edges to each village to create both a buffer from traffic and to enhance the identity of each village. In the early village of Woodbridge the village edge consisted of a thick massing of evergreen and eucalyptus trees, while in later villages like WestPark a "Mediterranean palette" of palm trees, Italian rock pines and birds enhanced the place identity and contributed to the Southern California "ethos."

Figure 5 Example of village identity features and monumentation. This type of iconic landscape was intended to establish a unique identity in the villages (Image by the author).

b) The neighborhood level

Irvine Urban Design guidelines define neighborhood as "simply a collection of buildings" where a "satisfactory level of compatibility was to be achieved" (Unpublished manuscript A, 3). This generic definition of neighborhood was preferred to Clarence Perry's more established "neighborhood unit" definition, which had been applied with mixed results by planners and developers in Southern California since the 1920s. Company officials were skeptical of using the neighborhood because of the negative associations with the suburban neighborhoods surrounding the ranch and because they found the village to be a more appropriate scale at which to market their Urban Design principles and the call for imageable environment. Unlike a neighborhood, the village was large enough that it could allow for differentiation of products within it, yet small enough that it could be marketed at one time (Unpublished manuscript A, 7).

The combination of Urban Design and imageability concerns with marketing is a unique and defining characteristic of the Urban Design philosophy of the Irvine Company, for which the environment was important not only in terms of its inherent qualities but also in terms of its marketability. The Urban Design guidelines conclude in fact that "the village level, therefore, should receive design emphasis and be central to this company's marketing strategy" (Ibid, 8). These words constituted an interesting and unprecedented twist on Lynch's theories in the direction of the real estate market.

f) *Streets and signage*

Streets and signage constitute a separate, yet primary level of implementation of the Irvine Company's Urban Design goals. Streets were designed with a right of way large enough to accommodate the dense planting required to strengthen the village edges. To this end, landscaping long the streets would require the same level of financial investment and design commitment as any other area of the villages (Unpublished manuscript B, 7). The streetscape was key in creating a hierarchy of streets that would help people develop better mental maps of the place (Interview G) and guide viewers toward culturally and naturally meaningful landmarks. For a more in depth discussion of the role and nature of such landmarks, the company document referred directly to Kevin Lynch's "Image of the City" (Ibid., 8-9).

As for the signage, company literature recognized the importance of signage and the need to control their nature and design in order to create "a superior living environment." Studies were conducted in order to select the signage system that would be most appropriate to a community that wanted to be different than any other suburbs. To this end, a specific office within the company was to be established to control the application of the policies with regard to signage (Unpublished manuscript B, 12). Today, the signs designed by the company to market and direct buyers and visitors are an integral part of the landscape of Irvine.

Figure 6 **Example of Irvine Company signage used across the Irvine ranch to advertise civic open space (left) and future communities (right) (Image by the author)**

Conclusion

Urban Design played a major role in positioning Irvine as an alternative to the sprawl and monotony seen in many of the surrounding communities. However, the most innovative aspect of the practice of Urban Design and landscape architecture on the Irvine ranch consisted of their use as marketing tools. By underscoring the importance of an imageable and distinctive environment Irvine Company designers also fulfilled the goals to provide their colleagues in the marketing department with concrete elements that could be used in creating the "ethos" that was needed to differentiate the new town from the surrounding sprawl.

5. A BRIEF TYPOLOGY OF IRVINE VILLAGES

Planner Ann Forsyth (2006) identified three phases of Irvine urban development, each distinguishable by changes in landscape and architectural aesthetics. Phase one corresponds to the creation of the village of Woodbridge; phase two is associated with the design of WestPark and North Park; finally, the third phase corresponds to the design of the village of Northwood. During the interviews with residents, designers and planners of Irvine I conducted over the winter of 2006 and Spring 2007 for my dissertation research, I have found this distinction to be not so clear cut. What emerged is a much simpler distinction into two main phases of urban development roughly corresponding to changes in ownership of the Irvine Company (interview B). Early villages like University Park, Turtle Ridge and Woodbridge are representative of the first phase of the Irvine Company operations. At the time, TIC was still mainly owned by a non-for-profit foundation, which accounted for the wealth of planning and design experimentation that went into some of the design.

The second phase of urban development starts in 1983, when the company came under control of a former builder and developer of the nearby Mission Viejo Company. It is Donald Bren (aka as "the Chairman") who brought to Irvine a builder mentality and a focus on housing and architecture rather than open space planning (Forsyth; Dagen Bloom). Although the original Urban Design principles were not rejected, Bren replaced the original focus on ranch architecture with southern European, Mediterranean forms and landscape aesthetics and a more conservative and standardized approach to neighborhood planning (interview B). As one resident put it "the farther one goes from Woodbridge, the more diluted the Irvine model becomes" (Interview K).

The new generation of Irvine villages, exemplified by the design for Woodbury—which opened its doors in 2004—is an attempt to combine some of the planning principles seen in Woodbridge (hierarchy of parks, presence of community facilities and swimming pools and a mix of housing types) with the higher densities and mediterranean aesthetics of WestPark. In the following pages I give a brief overview of the three village types and their main design features.

a) Woodbridge

Development of the area now called Woodbridge began in the mid 1970s in the area that Pereira's master plan had identified as the heart of the new town of Irvine. Woodbridge

occupied an area of roughly 1700 acres and a total projected population of 26,000 people. The Village of Woodbridge was to become the most comprehensive of the planned communities designed by the Irvine Company, with provisions for housing, recreation, education and commercial. The most innovative aspect of the plan consisted of the presence of two artificial lakes running north-south as the backbone for the community as well as an activity corridor/town center along the San Diego Creek, running east-west in the middle of the village

The residential areas of Woodbridge are organized in quadrants, each accommodating roughly 5000 people linked to the town center and to each other through by a loop road-- the Yale Loop—as well as by neighborhood street, pedestrian and bike trails and by pedestrian *paseos* along existing eucalyptus windrows. Through an extensive system of paths the lake was connected to every corner of the village, which would be within a relatively short distance from it. From a housing standpoint, Woodbridge offers a variety housing types, densities and a much finer texture than found in most other Irvine neighborhoods.

Although there are only four main access points to the Village and traffic is kept outside of the neighborhoods, Woodbridge is fairly accessible by pedestrians and bike riders. In its original design, the village would be accessible by public transit (through the proposed and later rejected Orange County light rail) and through a linear greenway along Jeffrey Road (which was not implemented until a few years ago). The opportunities for connections make Woodbridge the most open of all Irvine villages and a prototype for residential developments on the ranch. In the words of its developer, "Woodbridge is Irvine" (www.irvineco.com).
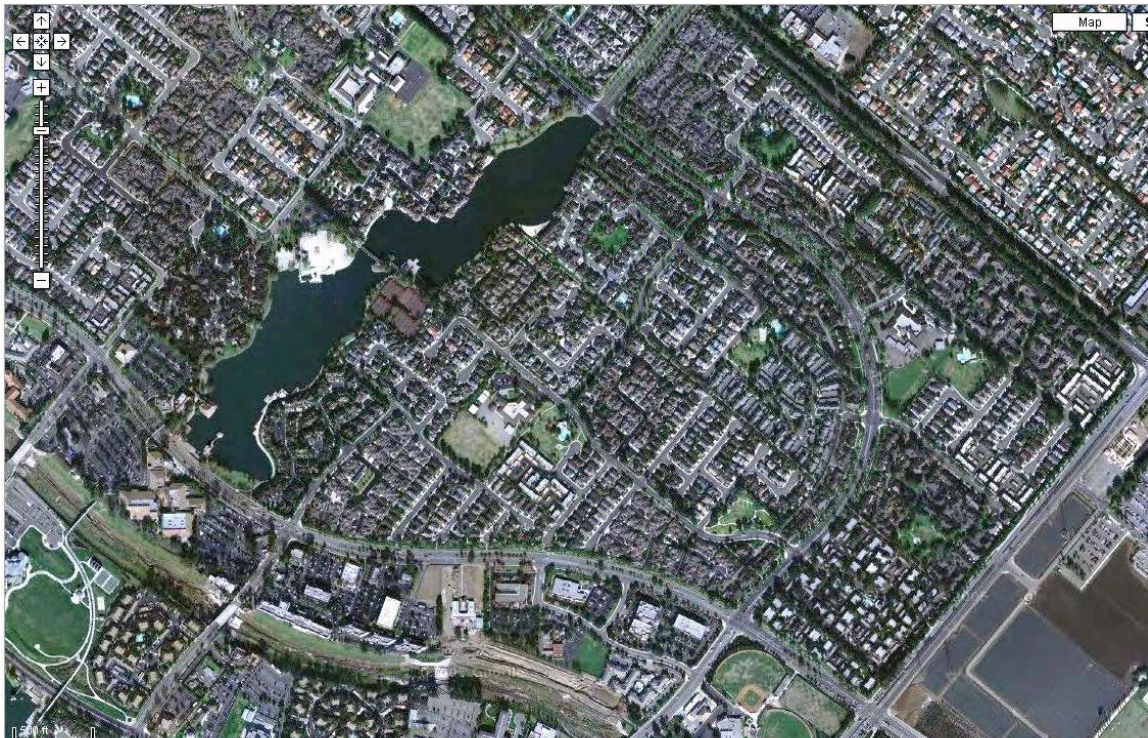

Figure 7 Aerial view of the northeast quarter of the Village of Woodbridge, with the activity corridor at the bottom and the north-south lake (Courtesy: Google maps)

Figure 8 *Aerial view of the lake in the village of Woodbridge. The village center is visible at the bottom. Courtesy: Irvine Company.*

b) The Mediterranean village of WestPark

In the 1980s and 90s Irvine communities saw a shift in aesthetics from the clean, functionalistic lines of the modernist inspired California ranch to more ornate Mediterranean forms seen in the village of WestPark. WestPark combines some of the planning innovations of neighboring Woodbridge with more "thematic" solutions in terms of landscape and planning design. Palm trees, stucco, pastel colors and terracotta tiles have since become key in the aesthetic vocabulary of the Irvine company.

WestPark's heart is the activity corridor, a continuation of Woodbridge's activity corridor along Alton parkway. The area provides a total of 60,000 square meters of retail space and boasts a variety of uses, including movie theatres, grocery stores and Irvine 's own town hall. However, unlike Woodbridge, the retail areas in WestPark are neither aesthetically nor functionally linked to the rest of the village.

Architectural typologies and styles in WestPark are more diverse than in neighboring Woodbridge. In particular, WestPark features new housing types of Mediterranean flavor, like the courtyard house and patio houses, which have been introduced to increase densities and provide more housing options for a range of potential buyers. From a landscape design standpoint most WestPark neighborhoods are surrounded with walls, with very limited access points. This constitutes a fundamental departure from Woodbridge's overall openness and pedestrian friendliness. Finally, whereas the design of Woodbridge integrated the San Diego creek into the design of the village by locating the town center and schools along its soft edges WestPark designers have carefully

camouflaged its presence by hiding the watercourse behind tall fences or aligning its edges with big box development.

Figure 9 Aerial view of WestPark, the first of a new generation of Irvine's "mediterranean" villages of the 1980s and 1990s (source: Google maps)

Figure 10 A residential development in WestPark, showing the densities and landscape palette (image by the author)

c) The village of Woodbury

Woodbury is the last and most recent of the Irvine Company villages, designed by the SWA group. Woodbury stretches south of Jeffrey Road along the new Jeffrey Greenway, a public park that combines active and passive recreation and incorporates a pedestrian and bicycle trail connecting the heart of Irvine to the foothills. The design is based on a modified grid, with a street layout similar to the one used in Woodbridge but with narrower sections. Trails and pedestrian paseos will provide access within the neighborhood and from the neighborhood to its open space.

Architecturally, Woodbury has a Mediterranean, southern European feel. Densities are high, with housing typologies ranging from single family to townhouses to 4-5 story condominiums. Retail is located at the south-eastern corner of the one mile by one mile development, while its northern edge is occupied by the Jeffrey open space greenway. The neighborhood has multiple access points whose presence is accentuated by tall landmarks and towers marking the entry points to the outside.

Figure 11 Plan of the newly designed village of Woodbury (courtesy SWA group

Figure 12 View of one of the main entrances of the village of Woodbury showing the hierarchy of landmarks. (Courtesy: Irvine Company)

Figure 13 View of a typical residential street in Woodbury. Notice the traffic calming measures, the narrower street section and density/height of the housing mix (image by the author).

6. URBAN DESIGN SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF PEOPLE
So far this discussion has unveiled the primary role that Urban Design mixed with marketing concerns played in the design of the design and planning of North America's largest new town from the standpoint of the designers and planners of Irvine. What I will do next is to evaluate the effect of some of the Urban Design and planning decisions through the eyes of its residents in order to counter the more official and corporate perspective found in the official documents

Over the course of the past few months I have been surveying residents of Irvine asking them for feedback about their attachment to their neighborhoods. In addition to surveys, I used interview methods to investigate people's reading of the landscape of Irvine. The primary goal was to test the effectiveness of some of design solutions applied in the design of urban villages and their resonance in people's subconscious. From the survey, a few themes seem to emerge that shed a very different light on the role that Urban Design played in establishing the identity of Irvine villages and a disconnect between the values of design professionals, developers and residents.

a) **Urban Design, change and maintenance.**
The order, cleanliness and maintenance of Irvine neighborhoods is the result of a complex interplay of Irvine design guidelines, CC&Rs (covenants, conditions and regulations) and the maintenance provided by numerous Homeowner Associations. Maintaining an imageable landscape requires rules. According to a representative Woodbridge Village Association:

"(the third reason why people chose Irvine) is the presence of rules. RVs are not allowed to park outside. (…) People move here because they believe in newness."

Newness and maintenance have positive effects, not just in terms of community pride, but also in monetary terms. The same HOA representative explains:

"HOAs keep the values of the houses up. (Because of the maintenance) these houses are worth $100,000 more than other places (Interview C).

It is the HOA's responsibility to maintain the legibility of Irvine over time. As a landscape architect told me:

"the HOAs are taking care of the neighborhoods (…). Some of the older communities have major work to do, but I do not see Irvine deteriorating like other suburbs (…). The value that has been created…you'd be crazy to let that deteriorate" (Interview F).

For the HOAs and the developer, change is not part of Irvine's future. As an Irvine Company official told me "there *is* no change in mind. It is just execution of a plan." The same official explains:

"once communities get established change is impossible. You can to a certain extent but it is very limited."

However, small, incremental changes are allowed. Debra, a planner with the city of Irvine noted:

> *"the HOAs are changing a little bit. Houses colors are being changed, landscaping is being changed, parks are being updated. Yet they will maintain their character. It is the HOA maintenance that will make them different. Woodbridge will always be different than WestPark."*

Many residents accept the master planned nature of Irvine and embrace the responsibility of maintaining the place. Maintenance is important to ¾ of the residents of Woodbridge and WestPark. When asked about the values that all residents share, a 35-year resident of Irvine told me that the shared value:

> *"is a sense of ownership. The responsibility to keep your house and your lawn clean so you don't run down your neighborhood."* (Interview J).

But not all residents embrace maintenance as their key value. A resident explained:

> *"this is a highly controlled environment: painting colors, structural materials, asking permission to do what you want to do with your house. High control is here and I noticed it moving from (…) where I used to live. There is a list for approved vegetation, paint colors. (…) I am illegal. I was the first in my neighborhood to say I want a tree that is not on the list, not a Mediterranean tree (…). There are committees checking what you plant. This is dissatisfying. We call them "the tree Nazis"* (Interview K).

b) Trees and landscape architecture

The presence and extent of landscaped areas is by far the most unique and imageable aspect of Irvine, something that sets it apart from any other community. A designer estimated in 30% the amount of added investment in open space compared to any other regular "Texas-type" development (Interview F). Over 70% of the residents consider trees and landscaping the most distinct aspect of their neighborhood, followed closely by parks and open space. The importance given to landscape architectural elements strikes when compared to the low consideration given to architectural style (19%) and building colors (between 5% and 19%). This contradicts the efforts of TIC and its obsession with details.

When asked about the value of landscape features, people talk about their personal, emotional attachment to the place as well as the monetary value of a well-maintained landscape. In the words of a resident:

> *"(A well designed landscape) cultivates the soul, the individual and the community. It provides a place to draw you out of your house and also draw people together."*
> (interview K)

Yet, landscape has a price tag associated with it and one that is worth maintaining because, as another resident suggested:

" (A well designed landscape) has a big value. You look at it, the visual…it makes it more desirable. It is priceless. It's worth so much more, it's like night and day."
(Interview J)

c) Functional aspects of living in an Urban Design driven new town

Despite the focus of Irvine planners on imageability and other design concepts, what I gathered from the interviews and surveys is the resident's concern for more functional aspects of the physical environment. When asked about the most distinguishable features of Irvine, the large majority mentioned schools and swimming pools. One out of two residents mention freeway access as one of the most satisfactory aspects of living in Irvine, and about 20% of residents are satisfied with the presence and variety of retail nearby.

d) density and change

While the original master plan identified areas where high-rise office buildings would be allowed, only a few towers were built by the Irvine Company to accommodate corporate offices. Over the past few years 3-5 stories apartment buildings and high-rise condominiums have been built around the Spectrum retail/office hub and at Jamboree and the 405 on land no longer owned by the Irvine Company. Unlike the old towers, these high-rise buildings are much more detailed, using steel, glass and other slick architectural materials. They attract the eyes of drivers along the freeways and speak of a new phase for Irvine. Because of their "in your face" character, they are feared by residents as a sign that the old "city of villages" may become another Los Angeles. What strikes is the juxtaposition of the new towers with the relative stability of the residential neighborhoods. While The Irvine Company dismisses them as "a different animal" Interview G) other designers see them as positive change:

"people want to be in high rise today. I did some research and found that most people buying these condos are from Irvine" (Interview F).

The addition of higher densities in the context of a low-density environment is a cause for concern with the residents. A survey respondent summarized it this way "lots of houses being built; streets more crowded; schools more crowded." Another traced the roots of the problem to the lack of participation in the political process: "results from last election indicate that few people are voting; this gives leverage to organized groups that do vote; 2) desire to build high density housing; 3) desire to have a transit system like BART (drain tax payers forever)."

A very engaged resident articulated in detail her opposition to the high rise towers:

"They do not have any landscaping. They are a giant concrete mess, no personal space, backed up by freeways. They are not about walking around. They are about driving home and using the elevator (Interview K).

7. CONCLUSION

From this brief discussion on the Urban Design experiments that have taken place over the course of 35 years it is possible to derive a few lessons for Urban Designers and community planners.

a) Maintenance considerations.

Although Irvine may be an extreme case, maintenance is as important as a good overall design in creating and maintaining a strong sense of place. However, and this is perhaps the toughest lesson design and maintenance should be able to accommodate for changes. Designers are asked to play the role of visionaries and predict the outcomes of changes in taste and aesthetics on the places that they design. We must strike a good balance between the preservation of original design intent (which also means keeping the value of properties high) with the need for flexibility and for accommodating socio-economic and cultural changes.

A corollary to the maintenance consideration has to do with costs. Maintaining a physical environment costs and such costs are ultimately absorbed by residents both in terms of higher taxes and fees but also I terms of alienation and lack of personal expression. Relying too heavily on privatized maintenance of public and semi public spaces makes places less affordable and less diverse, as the case of Irvine shows. Most of all, there are psychological costs associated with extensive maintenance; it becomes impossible for people to relate to the physical environment and using it as statement of one's own identity.

b) Value(s) of a well designed landscape.

Many Urban Designers, particularly in Europe, tend to see landscape architecture as a secondary player in neighborhood design. As a designer put it, landscape architecture tends to be seen as the "parsley around the turkey." However, the results of the survey and interviews I conducted in Irvine show that the presence of trees and a beautiful landscapes has enormous value, both in terms of "monetary equity" (as an official of the Irvine Company told me) and in terms of the emotional attachment. Most of all, landscape architecture can truly be the distinctive element that sets one place apart from all others.

c) Density is not always a good thing

Although it is undeniable that higher densities are necessary for the creation of more diverse and lively neighborhoods, their introduction must be sensitive to the existing context. In Irvine, opposition to the towers comes from a complete misunderstanding of the true character of a place. The new glass towers speak of a new type of citizenship and of a different Irvine resident, one that is more concerned with the detached view from his 30th floor condo than with the social life of its neighborhoods. A more sensitive design would attempt to tie the new towers into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhoods as well as to the social and cultural milieus.

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9. UNPUBLISHED SOURCES AND MANUSCRIPTS

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10. INTERVIEWS

Interview A: Planner
Interview B : Marketing executive
Interview C: HOA association
Interview D: UCI academic

Interview E: Planner, City of Irvine
Interview F: landscape Architects
Interview G: Irvine Company executive
Interview H: Planner, City of Irvine
Interview I: landscape architect
Interview J: Irvine resident
Interview K: Irvine resident
Interview L: Irvine resident.

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