

New Urbanism Revitalizes an Old Precedent

The Wall Street Journal, 704 words
Jun 14, 2006

Your article describes these "faux downtowns" as a New Urbanist backlash against sprawl. But the force creating these new shopping centers isn't a change in style but a change in market forces -- not New Urbanism, but simply urbanism.

In metropolitan areas across the country, highways are reaching the limits of how much traffic they can handle and people are reaching their limits of how far they're willing to drive, especially as gas prices continue to climb. In response, developers are looking to develop land more intensively. Infill development is going up on parking lots, and one-family houses are being replaced by multiple dwellings. Consequently, close-in developable land is becoming scarce, and land prices are rising. In this environment, spread-out shopping centers aren't just unstylish, they're inefficient.

This dense reurbanization has created pent-up demand for a public realm, that space where citizens meet one another, move around, play and relax. Those who provide it become competitive. Those who don't, close down. That's not a style. That's the market at work.

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