

## What is a Village?

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What is a village, or more particularly the Village that is the subject of this book?

Let's begin with what it is not. No, it is not an Intentional Community – a form that spans the likes of Eco-Villages, Co-Housing, Gated Golfing Communities, Retirement Villages and Hippy Communes. Such places attract like-minded people, segregated by interest. It's not Utopia or a live-in Disneyesque theme park. It's something more authentic, vernacular and eminently sensible in an era dominated by artificial, vacuous design, driven solely by profit with little consideration for quality of life. Right – now that we have made that clear...

Traditionally, communities grew around some natural feature: good water, fertile soil, protection, a crossroads or harbour, sheltered from weather. Then in the 20th century, we saw the emergence of developers who took farmland and created housing subdivisions, strip malls, mega-shopping malls, glass-block office complexes and big-box factories, all connected by multi-lane roads. In this new form of development, human scale gave way to mega-scale. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we realise this mega-development form of living has some nasty unanticipated negative side effects that are proving harmful and in the long view, unsustainable.

As we search for better alternatives, we look both to history and to modern invention – something old, something new – and ask how we can weave those together to find a form of development that works better. Looking back in history, we find **human scale** proves more satisfying to people than the mega-scale of the 20th century.



Walk down a shopping street in Greece or Italy, and notice how narrow it can be, yet the people do not feel hemmed in. In fact, the experience is delightful, so delightful people travel from the ends of the earth to visit such places. How can we take that experience, identify its attractive details (called “patterns”) and use them in the creation of a new form of development?

*Human scaled street – as long as the buildings are fire-proof it works and feels delightful*

This question becomes the foundation of a dialogue to which we apply a focus and a name: the **Village**. We could put an adjective in front, the Walled Village, Urbis or Urban Village, the Ancient 21st Century Village, New Village, or whatever, but we leave that to the pundits – for now, it's the Village.

The Village is high density\* clustered living on 100-400 acres in which everything one needs is within a ten minute walk – home, school, work, play, shops, cafes and gathering places, sacred land, and in a clearly defined demarcation just beyond the Village walls– the countryside. To achieve this successfully, we define its critical mass in terms of population – no less than 3,500 people, no more than 10,000, with 5,000 - 7,000 residents being optimal. The minimum population is required to support a thriving local economy, the maximum is set because research shows beyond that size people lose their voice and the infrastructure and management of the community become overly complex.

A key aspect of the Village is the banishment of cars. “Cars turn towns into mincemeat”, wrote Christopher Alexander in *A Pattern Language*. His proposed solution was to separate local transport from regional. With everything placed within a 10-minute walk, providing for car-scaled roadways, car parking and all the complex and costly infrastructure that cars demand, is irrational. It makes no sense to provide for 3,000 cars in a 5,000-population community.

In fact, we already have a car-free model: the mega-mall, only you have to drive your car to get there, creating a barren wasteland of acres of car parking. In the Village, a motorpool is set at the edge. While some may want to own their own car in the motorpool, most may prefer to be part of a rental co-op where you select the car for the day (shall we take the hybrid or the vintage Rolls?) and pay as you go. Within the Village, most walk, some use bicycles, and a few use the golf cart sized Low Speed Vehicles long popular in Italian cities.

Another unusual element of the Village is the use of targeted deed restrictions to provide 20-30% of the housing for sectors of society whose earnings power is lower and who otherwise will be priced out of the market. Creative and performing artists, teachers and public servants, elders, youth, solo parents and other income-band groups may buy homes with a Village subsidy, but when they go to sell, the buyer must be from that sector. This creates a parallel market driven by the average income for that group. Just as buyers of homes in a gated golfing community find their purchase subsidises the clubhouse and greens, buyers in the Village generate the revenue to subsidise the “glue” that holds the community together – not through higher prices, but by lowering the overall cost of ownership, both in initial capital investment, and on-going cost of living. In this way, permanent parallel real estate markets assure important sectors are not priced out of the Village.

We propose to enable people and communities to provide for their social, economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing. To achieve this, we propose a higher level of involvement by the people who will actually live there. We call them the Founders. Starting with the design brief and continuing through construction, we propose a methodology to enable these Founders to participate in planning and designing the Village that will become their home. By involving the people who will live there, we can expect to see a more authentic outcome. For a community to have a strong and enduring spirit, we must find a way – from the very beginning – to embed the authentic stamp of its inhabitants, reflecting their diverse personalities and their outlook in the buildings, streets, plazas, shops, cafes and landscape.

\* Figure about 15-30 units per acre (a building can have a residential unit and a commercial unit) with 30% of land within the Village walls as open space for plazas, streets and gardens. If a larger piece of land is available, allocate the excess land outside the walls for greenspace (gardens, trees, fields, etc.).



*Everything within a ten minute walk means people connect with each other on the plazas – no appointment necessary*



*Low Speed Vehicles appropriate for Village use. Here in Italy an electric quadracycle and motorscooter charge at a municipal, on street charging station*



*Pitigliano Italy*



*Los Angeles, California on a rare clear day*



*A recently built suburb in the Auckland region of New Zealand*

Villages almost died when the industrial revolution put cities on steroids

In the 1950's many cities fell into ruin when the automobile gave us the suburbs.

Now, we assert, the suburb is obsolete. We suggest

with the introduction of advanced, affordable telecommunications, we have come full circle. Economically, Villages are viable once again, and can be a most satisfying and fulfilling form of human community. The time of the Village has returned– but only if it is done right.

Attention to detail is essential. This book is about those details. It contains recipes, “how to” sections, intended to show the way to get started, and to finish.

Before we get to the details, realise that Villages emerge from individual needs – needs as different as the cycles of life and the path of life each of us choose. Each home reflects the dreams and aspirations of a unique individual, and if empowered to mark their home with their personality, the Village as a whole emerges with a distinct and authentic character.

Consider the difference between this distinctive building found in Italy in the photo to the right, and this suburban home in a subdivision, below. One reflects the character of the owner in a glorious riot of colour, artistry and potted vines. The other reflects a developer who picked designs from a stock design and fit them on a road plan, beneath power lines, intended to maximise profits within the local zoning rules. One contributes to a sense of place, a sense of community. The other provides a place to sleep, to watch TV but no sense of identity or place – it is functional and distinctly temporary, devoid of character – as if life is something to get through.

In this book, we seek to empower the individual in hopes of engendering the individual character found in the example of the Italian building. To do this we offer a framework to enable people to provide for their wellbeing.

In this first part of the book, we invite you to identify the stage and focus of life that matches your life and aspirations. The remaining two parts of the book guides you through the steps on how to build a Village.



*Yes, the letters of the sign really are backwards*



*The front face of a home makes a statement. Here we do not find a path to the front door but a driveway to the garage door*