New Urbanism and American Planning: The Conflict of Cultures
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For Gerald and Emma Talen

Who know a good place when they see one
Within the field of American planning history this is a very unusual book. The most common texts are primarily descriptive tours d’horizon ranging from the insightful The Making of Urban America by John Reps and Jonathan Barnett’s The Elusive City to the many desiccated quasi-official compilations. There are also a few critical engagements of certain specific subjects like Keller Easterling’s Organization Space. But none has yet attempted a unifying theory for the spectacle that regularly oscillates between rigid technocratic protocols and spineless pandering to the market. Emily Talen’s book does.

This is also an unlikely book. It is authored by a member of the haute-académie who dares to break cardinal (if unstated) rules. In the teeth of a discourse that has dedicated half a century to the destruction of all authority and the privileging of diversity, Emily Talen dares to propose a comprehensive theory. Furthermore, within an ethos of pessimistic abdication to vast and unpredictable forces, the hypothesis is positivistic and entirely free of irony. And to top it all the conclusion supports the ascendancy of the new urbanism – the devil incarnate of academic discourse. This is truly beyond the pale. Surely this book must be one of those proliferating fundamentalist tracts.

Hardly so. Emily Talen is cognizant of the current academic trends, but she is also immersed in the realities of planning and has studied the actual practice of the new urbanism. How refreshing it is to enter into conversation with someone who knows what is really going on, so that we can get on with the pursuit of what is to be done. How different this is from the ‘debate’, which seldom rises above the wilful misunderstanding of the new urbanism and hazy, lazy, assumptions about the alternative of suburban sprawl.

The courage to draw conclusions unrestricted by ideology has resulted in an explanation for an unexpected phenomenon: how is it that the new urbanism has succeeded against all odds in dominating the discourse of planning? And, to a growing extent, how is it that new urbanism is forming the nucleus around which disparate forces gather – forces that do not agree that an institutionalized artistic avant garde is the only critical position relative to the problems of culture, society and environment?
From the daily manoeuvring within the dissipated American reality arises the intellectual roughness that Robert Beauregard has identified as a singular asset of the new urbanism. By tracing the tensions within urbanism that evolved within this context and are writ large across a century, Emily Talen has been able to resolve, with the retroactive clarity of a mystery novel, the contradictory threads of American planning.

The tensions are many and they are fundamental. The new urbanism is both highly theoretical and deeply immersed in practice, such that the general principles of the Congress for the New Urbanism’s (CNU) Charter are circumstantially adjusted through the process of the charrette. There are the contradictory prerogatives of art or technique; codes versus everyday urbanism; imposed order versus organidevelopment; private profit and public good; and the recent fruitful quarrel with environmentalism that is the showdown between Eden and the New Jerusalem. The new urbanism is energized by these tensions and immunized by them. Only those who can sustain complexity can long remain new urbanists; others revert to the easy comforts of permanent uncertainties.

It is not the individual new urbanist who adeptly entertains these contradictions but the collective, for the new urbanism is a movement. This generation of work does not belong to individuals – from Le Corbusier to Hillier, with their resolved theories – but rather to an enormously diversified expertise organized by the shared nemesis to suburban sprawl, what Emily Talen calls ‘anti-urbanism’.

Another source of new urbanist strength is the discovery that it is possible to do something about the problem. The new urbanism operates to reform the reality, not by expressing the situation through critique or art. That is the difference between the CNU and the other comprehensive urban theory, that proposed by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). There is nevertheless much overlap, as Ellen Dunham Jones has written in Harvard Design Magazine, because both are interested in the same urban degeneracy. OMA and its excellent research arm, the Harvard School of Design, are, in fact, very useful to all of us. What is to be done with what is learned is where the movements differ.

As Alex Krieger has said, ‘You cannot debate a new urbanist, because whenever a good idea is proposed, they will appropriate it’. So be it. New urbanists assimilate what works best in the long run. It is a deeply American pragmatism that is at the heart of Emily Talen’s thesis. It is possible that the new urbanists may be the first generation of post-war planners to not fail in thoroughly changing the inevitable outcome of modernism.

Andrés Duany
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Emily Talen
Champaign, IL
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Introduction: Defining American Urbanism

The recent movement known as ‘New Urbanism’ is attempting to reconcile competing ideas about urbanism that have been evolving in America for over a century. New Urbanism, an urban reform movement that gained prominence in the 1990s, seeks to promote qualities that urban reformers have always sought: vital, beautiful, just, environmentally benign human settlements. The significance of New Urbanism is that it is a combination of these past efforts: the culmination of a long, multi-faceted attempt to define what urbanism in America should be. This revelation only comes to light in view of the history that preceded it.

This book puts New Urbanism in historical context and assesses it from that perspective. Analytically, my goal is to expose the validity of New Urbanism’s attempt to combine multiple traditions that, though inter-related, often comprise opposing ideals: the quest for urban diversity within a system of order, control that does not impinge freedom, an appreciation of smallness and fine-grained complexity that can coexist with civic prominence, a comprehensive perspective that does not ignore detail. Amidst the apparent complicatedness, history shows that divergences boil down to a few fundamental debates that get repeated over and over again. This means that American urbanism has endured a habitual crisis of definition. The question now is whether New Urbanists have seized upon the only logical, necessarily multi-dimensional definition of what urbanism in American can be.

My method is to summarize the connections and conflicts between four different approaches to urbanism in America. I call these approaches urbanist ‘cultures’ – a term I apply unconventionally – and use them to trace the multi-dimensional history of ideas about how to build urban places in America.¹ There are obvious inter-dependencies, but at the same time, these cultures have struggled to connect with each other. This has led to a fragmented sense of what urbanism in America
is, namely, a lack of connection among proposals that could be fashioned in a more mutually supportive way, and a poor conceptualization of the multi-dimensionality of urbanism.²

What has gradually evolved in the American experience are different approaches to creating good urbanism in America. Some have focused on small-scale, incremental urban improvement, like the provision of neighbourhood parks and playgrounds. Some have had larger-scale visions, drawing up grand plans and advocating for new systems of transportation and arrangements of land use. Others have looked outside the existing city, focusing on how to build the optimal, new human habitat. And some have emphasized that urbanism should be primarily about how the human settlement relates to ‘nature’. Multiple meanings of urbanism have, for over a century, been forming in the minds of American planners, architects, sociologists, and others who have endeavoured to define in specific terms what urbanism in America is or should be.

Each of these approaches can be seen to have its own predictable and recurrent cultural biases. Further, the inability to integrate these cultures better has impeded our progress for reform and created a situation of stalemate in which efforts to stem the tide of anti-urbanism in the form of sprawl and urban degeneration remain painfully slow. At the same time, the recurrence and overlap of ideals is one reason why New Urbanism has had such a strong appeal.

Urbanism in American society generally has an ambiguous meaning. Urbanism may simply be defined as life in the big city, or more pejoratively, as the antithesis of nature. There is often a line drawn in the sand of the American consciousness – places are either urban, meaning downtown, or they are sub-urban or rural, meaning less than urban. Yet urbanism defined as big city life is a narrow definition that is not particularly helpful for rectifying the problems of American settlement, either for locations within the existing city or for new developments outside of it. Understanding the American take on urbanism involves much more than density calculations or the square footage of concrete.

New Urbanists have used many of these ideas in their attempt to consolidate a more complete and nuanced definition of American urbanism. Their definition tries to establish a framework for settlement, an integrated, inclusive way of thinking about urbanism. They have recognized that urbanism is not a certain threshold of compactness, a measure of density, or a condition of economic intensity. They have also learned that this makes the attempt to define it much more difficult.

My definition of American urbanism is simply this: it is the vision and the quest to achieve the best possible human settlement in America, operating within the context of certain established principles. To bring these ideals together within one framework – as the New Urbanists are attempting – it is important to recognize that there are essential principles that are recurrent and embedded in the historical
American consciousness. In other words, while urbanism in America involves multiple concepts, it is not ‘anything under the Sun’. There is a recurrent normative content, and the interrelated history of ideas about what the best possible human settlement in America should be reveals this. As this book will demonstrate, these recurrent principles consist of, for example, diversity, equity, community, connectivity, and the importance of civic and public space.

Converse principles also exist – separation, segregation, planning by monolithic elements like express highways, and the neglect of equity, place, and the public realm. I bluntly label these ‘anti-urbanism’, and make a case for this interpretation in Chapter 2. Establishing this difference is necessary because a multi-faceted conception of urbanism cannot coalesce successfully unless it adheres to some basis of commonality. This does not necessarily eliminate conflict, but it does allow the possibility for seemingly conflicting ideas about good human settlement to be drawn together within the same framework. The concepts of urbanism that I review in this book are therefore considered as part of something larger, each forming their contributory part of a broader definition.

But there is a problem in that our current conceptualization of urbanism in America does not take this multi-dimensionality into account. The common critique that ‘New Urbanism is simply New Sub-Urbanism’ is symptomatic of this problem, and has a history to it. Lewis Mumford and his regional planning colleagues in the 1920s were horrified at the metropolitan ‘drift’ (outward expansion) being proposed for New York City, but their alternative – the decentralization of population into self-sufficient garden cities – was often mistaken for suburban land subdivisions and landscape gardening. Mumford thought anyone who mistook their proposals for mere suburbs had to be ‘deaf and blind’ since his organization, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), was proposing complete settlements, not single-use
collections of single-family houses (Schaffer, 1988, p. 179). Still, the RPAA was always at great pains to make the distinction – exactly as New Urbanists are today.

By tracing the multiple historical concepts to which New Urbanism is linked, I am hoping to create a more complete and detailed view of American urbanism. This is important because the failure to nuance what is meant by urbanism in an American context has created a dichotomy that may be detrimental to the goal of establishing a better pattern of settlement. There are divisions between those who would focus only on the existing city, or only on urban containment, versus those content to focus on creating new externally situated settlements. Where overlap and complementarity (i.e., synergies) exist, they are not always exploited. If urbanists – primarily planners and architects – are constantly arguing among themselves about the true and legitimate definition of urbanism in America, they undercut the synergies that could be capitalized on. These are precisely the synergies the New Urbanists have attempted to rally. But to accept their strategy requires a much more sophisticated idea about what urbanism is supposed to be.

This is not about justifying suburbia. Nor is it about insisting that suburbs, no matter what their form, be included as essential parts of the city, as some have done (see, for example, Sudjic, 1992). On the contrary, this book is about discerning how urbanism in America is translated from different perspectives. It is about articulating a multi-dimensional view of American settlement that rises to the level of urbanism in a variety of contexts. That level can, in my view, exist in locations outside of downtown cores – meaning suburban locations. Since, in the 1920s, America was already growing twice as fast in the suburbs as in the central cities, this is hardly a radical idea.

There are tactical reasons for taking this approach: most Americans live in suburbs and in single-family homes. Suburbs account for an enormous amount of what we consider to be ‘urbanized area’ in the U.S., making their ambiguous relationship with the notion of ‘urbanism’ all the more disjointed. Suburbs are part of the evolution of American urbanism, and that means that many of them can be seen as an inchoate form of urbanism. And some suburbs were composed of the essential elements of urbanity from the start – diversity, connectedness, a public realm. It makes sense, therefore, to pay particular attention to those suburbs that have something positive to offer in our quest to define what urbanity is, despite the fact that they have been labelled sub-urban. It seems reasonable then to develop a definitional language of urbanism that fits the suburban context and that may help them evolve in a way that is more positive.

I attempt to get at this by focusing in particular on what city planners and urban activists have come up with over the past century. In the shadow of repeated disappointment with our physical situation – a commonly despoiled landscape – Americans have continuously laboured to find the ‘right’ way of American
settlement. We have been looking for an approach to building our urban places in a variety of contexts and scales – streets, neighbourhoods, towns, villages, suburbs, cities, regions, and, despite our meagre success at building according to plan, this quest to define American urbanism has never diminished. It is this fact – the persistence of an American teleology when it comes to urbanism – that translates the endeavour of making urbanist proposals from mere utopian dreaming into something more substantial.

This history of urbanism, which functions as a history of New Urbanism, reveals that there are multiple viewpoints, romanticist and rationalist approaches, different ideas about control and freedom, about order and chaos, about optimal levels of urban intensity. There are debates about the relationship between town and country, between two-dimensional (maps and plans) and three-dimensional (buildings and streetscapes) contexts, between empirical and theoretical insights, between the role of the expert and the place of public participation.

My analysis of American urbanism incorporates the existing character of cities and city life, but I am focusing primarily on what we aspire toward. It is a distinction between understanding why urbanists propose what they do and how they go about getting it, versus understanding only the latter. My view of urbanism, as in cultural theory, is that both understandings are needed (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990). We need to know why preferences are formed as well as how and whether goals are achieved because this gives a more complete picture. It is also essential for understanding urbanism, since the quest to build the ‘best’ human settlement is often more about aspiration than accomplishment.

Thus, I am particularly interested in what we think urbanism in America should be as opposed to attempting to measure only what we have achieved, important as that question is. This is nothing more complicated than the quest to make good cities, and to do so with specific ideas about ends and purposes. But it is not an analysis of lost dreams or utopianism. Countless ideas and plans remain unrealized, but that does not mean they are inconsequential – even seemingly abstract theories generated by intellectuals can have tremendous impact on actual practice, for example in the way Emil Durkheim’s theories became a basis for urban renewal (Schaffer, 1988, p. 233). The impact of ideas about urbanism may be appropriately measured by the degree to which they continue to inspire and effect city planning. Because ideas are not formed in a vacuum but rather within a political context, they are on some level a reflection of what Americans think about their forms of settlement. Admittedly, this does not necessarily mean they are based on public consensus: the degree to which urbanist ideals are based on direct citizen input varies widely. The point is that a history of what we aspire towards should not be viewed as somehow existing apart from reality.³

I think a more concerted effort to define American urbanism is justified given
the rather loose way in which the term has been used in the U.S., and given the fact that there is no official definition of it in any case. It is a term that can legitimately be seen as being fluid, not only because it describes a variable state of being, but also because the multiple traditions impacted upon it are so strong. Neither is it useful to get lost in various technical meanings and usages of the term urbanism. This is exactly what happened at the first meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture), known as CIAM, in 1928, where some thought the word incomprehensible and wanted to use instead ‘City and Regional Planning’ (Mumford, 2000, p. 25).

Accordingly, self-proclaimed ‘urbanists’, from the Communist ‘urbanists’ of the 1930s to the ‘New Urbanists’ of the 1990s, have been critiqued for not living up to the requirements of the term, however that was defined. Starting with a more inclusive sense of the term, we can at least start with the notion that ‘urban’ is related to ‘city’, and that the idea of a city was not originally based on anything more specific than a community of citizens living together in a settlement.4

Four Urbanist Cultures

In seeking a better definition of American urbanism, a key question is why these common principles – for example, diversity, community, accessibility, connectivity, social equity, civic space – have not coalesced into a more united front when it comes to employing the principles of urbanism. One way to get at this is to explore how these enduring, overlapping or potentially complementary principles have fared under different planning regimes. What happens when they are approached in different ways, under different constraints and legalities, with different levels of political commitment, different methodological insights, different participation rules, different notions of fairness? What happens under different implementation realities and measures of success and failure?

My survey of the past one hundred or more years of urbanist ideals reveals four separate strains that I call incrementalism, plan-making, planned communities, and regionalism. These are the four ‘cultures’ of American urbanism, four approaches to city-making, constituting four sets of debates, critiques, counter-critiques, successes and failures. Each has built up its own culture, in a sense, with its own set of cultural biases. Each culture has its own unique story to tell, its own contribution to make to the story of American urbanism.

The four strains, or cultures, vary in their level of intensity and sense of order (explained more fully in Chapter 2). Concisely, incrementalism is about grass roots and incremental change; plan-making is about using plans to achieve good urbanism; planned communities focus on complete settlements; and regionalism looks at the city in its natural, regional context. Their differences are substantive
and procedural, and they are sometimes empiricist and sometimes rationalist. They differ in their relationship to existing urban intensity and notions of order, but ultimately, American urbanism depends upon all of these dimensions and perspectives, varying as they do in their level of specificity, scale and approach.

In my analysis of these four cultures, I look for the essence of their principles – the underlying causes of their approval or disdain. Each strain has vehement supporters and vehement opponents, and I am most interested in trying to understand the underlying dimensions of these views. Many times, it is the instance where they veer away from urbanistic thinking that forms the basis of their critique. I conceive of the struggles surrounding these four cultures as important for revealing what American urbanism is trying to be.

I see it as somewhat tragic that most ideas about how to build a better settlement in America – how to help the inner city, stop sprawl, save the environment, manage traffic, support schools, and all the other myriad issues related to city building – are so recurrent. There is a need for a wider recognition that ideas for improving the American city came from somewhere, and that they have been similarly critiqued and debated many times before. Freedom, control, diversity, order, plurality, community – none of these are new to the American city-making debate. It is important to realize their tenacity at irresolution, and get to work on the essential task of finding more creative ways forward. We may decide that it is necessary to reframe the debate, or that the debate itself is a necessary part of city-making, or even that there is no resolution for a given issue. Perhaps every generation will need to revisit the same issues and debate them each time in their own way. But at a minimum, we should be engaging in these debates in full knowledge of how they were framed, resolved or unresolved in the past. Such an effort is bound to produce a more enlightened discourse.

**Multi-Dimensionality**

In city planning history, the attempt to fashion an interconnected set of ideas, joined together to create a coherent basis for American urbanism, goes against the usual view, described by Jencks, that approaches to urbanism are more reminiscent of the ‘wandering drunk’ than a ‘cumulative tradition’. The question I raise is whether aspects of several different approaches can in fact be forged together to create a multi-dimensional project that is the essence of American urbanism, now organized as New Urbanism. It requires the ability to look at divergent ideas and, rather than seeing commonality merely on the basis of ‘agitated, sometimes apocalyptic, pursuit of new solutions’, seeing a more deeply rooted, substantive form of agreement (Jencks, 1987, p. 301). What this might be based on is what I have set out to discover.
The question to address is whether a coexistence of perspectives is a necessary condition of American urbanism. We can find interconnections, which would seem to help the case for multi-dimensionality. But running throughout the intertwined threads comprising American urbanism, there is a corresponding set of threads that weaken, or perhaps simply obscure the linkages. A clear example is needed to ground this analogy. One connecting thread is the idea of the neighbourhood. The concept of a localized, village-like, self-contained unit is pervasive and is present as a response to the industrial city from the beginning. John Ruskin had his version, and later William Drummond and Clarence Perry articulated it in American terms. The pervasiveness of the idea is understandable. The neighbourhood unit is service-oriented, socially-supportive, and attentive to human need. The problem is that, almost simultaneously, it came to be associated with something more sinister – the eradication of the existing city and the social diversity it contained. Ruskin’s programme called for total destruction and replacement wherever cities were less than works of art, while Perry advocated ‘scientific slum rehabilitation’ (Perry, 1939, p. 129). In any case, the seeming thread of the neighbourhood model of human settlement is shadowed by a tension of associated urban destruction that makes its linkage and lineage less than straightforward.

This attempt to combine proposals will elicit a recurrent criticism – that it is invalid to squeeze out only the positive and reject the negative of a given proposal. The question becomes: what is intrinsic to each element being sought or rejected, that requires that it be packaged together with other specific elements? After all, almost all planning is, in fact, an amalgamation. The City Beautiful movement itself, as Peterson (1976) has argued, was a culmination of the combined forces of municipal art, civic improvement and outdoor art. Lewis Mumford forged a synthesis between Dewey’s pragmatism and Santayana’s aesthetic idealism which would provide ‘the best of both worlds’ in science and humanism (Thomas, 1994, p. 284). When these ideas were then merged with Geddes’ ideas about regionalism, the resulting amalgamated planning project of the Regional Planning Association of America became one of the most important planning schools of thought this country has ever seen.

For the most part, academics seem particularly uncomfortable with the idea of combining proposals. There is the argument that the attempt to forge a hybrid, amalgamated project is necessarily ambiguous (Beauregard, 2002). Peter Hall’s synthetic history of the profession, Cities of Tomorrow, weaves a story of planning mishap resulting from the ‘monstrous perversion of history’ (Hall, 2002, p. 3.). In Hall’s view, misinterpretation and naiveté in the planning profession are born of the combining of ideals across time and place.

It is not difficult to find examples of concepts forged together that, when combined, produced amalgamated disasters. The merger of garden cities and
the City Beautiful into what Jacobs called the ‘Garden City Beautiful’ produced notoriously unappealing places. Other critics hone in on the idea that the amalgamated planning project is necessarily inauthentic, and therefore invalid. In this context, some see the New Urbanist brand of ‘revivalism’ as disturbing because it attempts to revive an urbanism, such as Nolen’s, that was itself revivalist to begin with (Easterling, 1999). A revival of a revival can only be viewed as disingenuous.

Thus it is sometimes said that America lacks an authentic urbanism, and because of this American urbanist ideals never seem to gain much stature. According to some observers, America has been raiding other cultures and historical contexts for its city-building approach, and this is why the results have not been very pleasing. American urbanism is viewed as being mostly a matter of inauthenticity when it comes to urbanism – ‘a long history of diverse and hybrid models’ as if purity of form were a necessary condition of urbanism (Easterling, 1999, p. 157). In a not very ingenious way, the argument goes, Americans have been getting by with forging together pieces of urbanism to create cities that are too sub-urban to classify as truly urban.

But there is a different interpretation of American urbanism. It states that American urbanism is simply more complex than other versions, in part because the whole idea of America is that it is – or is meant to be – a pluralist society. It makes sense, then, that urbanism in America must be defined by more than one stream. And because of its multi-dimensionality, it has been caught in a long, convoluted process of trying to define itself. What has often looked like ambiguity in city-making could be seen instead as an attempt to define and structure urbanism in more than one way.

New Urbanism has tried to formulate a definition of urbanism that is multi-dimensional, expresses commonality of thought while being sensitive to different contexts and scales, and is a combination of related ideas that work together to define what urbanism is and what it is not. The experience of the New Urbanist movement over the past 10 years with trying to make this work has revealed two interesting things. First, the multi-dimensional approach to American urbanism is exceedingly difficult to pull off. It is met with resistance because, by attempting to merge ideas accustomed to opposing each other, there is a reaction that labels the attempt inauthentic and watered down. Second, in the resistance to multi-dimensional approaches, there is a tendency to single out one particular strain as superior in all contexts. One aspect will be, in a sense, forced into predominance.

One of the most enduring examples of this is the seemingly intractable division between the existing city and its peripheral extension. Urbanist culture that I characterize as having high urban ‘intensity’ insists that existing cities everywhere be reformed and resettled. A second, potentially complementary, view is about looking in currently non-urban places for pockets of potential urbanism. This latter
view not only involves looking for urbanism in currently ‘unspoiled’ places, but it means that the whole spectrum of human settlement types must be considered. One practical question coming out of this division is whether it is possible to embrace both the planned community, positioned externally, and the existing city, with its concomitant urban problems, simultaneously. Proponents of the peripheral planned community – like Lewis Mumford and Ebenezer Howard – believed the existing city would fail. Proponents of the existing city – Jane Jacobs and William Whyte – believed that the planned community was anti-urban. This is an essential contrast that has plagued both sides, evidenced by the fact that American settlement falls woefully short of either perspective’s main objective – a revitalized core or a clustered and coherently settled region.

In breaking down these divisions, my hope is that we will begin to acknowledge that each cultural stream has made a contribution to the definition of American urbanism. I cast a wide net over the various proposals that have been put forth over the past century. Small-scale urban improvers, the incrementalists, offered us the idea of using grass roots community activism and principles of diversity and complex order to change the urban environment incrementally. City Beautiful era plan-makers focused our attention on civic design, on the design and massing of buildings relative to streets, and on the relation of three-dimensional to two-dimensional patterns. City Efficient era plan-makers pulled together a wide range of subjects, traversing large-scale comprehensive plans as easily as they did tree selection and bridge engineering. They gave us the ability to be generalists, to discuss multiple currents of city plan-making in an integrative fashion. Planned community advocates contributed the ability to think holistically about city form and to envision alternative, idealized societies. Regionalists showed us how to fit it all together into a much larger, environmentally responsive framework.

In the end, American urbanism may be a composition that requires something from all of these cultures. It may need small-scale incrementalism, larger scale civic improvement, planned communities, and regionalism. My thesis is that, while these four cultures have evolved in separate ways over the past century, there should be recognition not only of their mutual legitimacy, but of their mutual dependence.

**Historical Framework**

Historic connections are easily drawn throughout history in part because the urban predicaments of the early and late twentieth century have strong similarities. Both eras are marked by change, disorder, and conflicting sentiments. Henry Adams wrote in 1900 that he was ‘wholly a stranger’ in his own country, and that ‘Neither I, nor anyone else, understands it’. Charles Eliot Norton spoke of his age in the early twentieth century as ‘degenerate and unlovely’ because of the urban degradation
he saw around him. These are wholly familiar sentiments towards American places now. And in both ages, the internal conflicts and turmoil of the age created an interventionist strategy that embraced change and promoted optimism among some segments of the population. At either end of the century, there were some who criticized a status quo based on commercial interests, and thought optimistically about a new future course.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, urbanists reacted to the extreme crowding in cities, the solution to which was ‘to encourage the diffusion of business, industry and population’. Now, urbanists are motivated by the perversities of decentralization, not centralization, but they nevertheless share an identical goal, the quest to procure the best possible human settlement forms. Garden cities, the self-contained, compact, community-oriented settlements proposed by Ebenezer Howard a century ago, were intended ‘to make traffic less intensive and movement more comfortable’, goals that, despite the changed circumstances, are not inconsistent with urbanist principles today (Lewis, 1916, pp. 318–319).

The historical framework I use is mostly focused on the twentieth century, but the attempt to define American urbanism in fact began earlier. The earliest reform proposals coincided with the start of the Industrial Revolution. When industrialization started to take hold in earnest in the U.S. between 1840 and 1850, the impact on cities was profound. Americans saw firsthand how the arrival of industrial technology (most importantly railroads) and simultaneous improvement in agricultural productivity, set in motion a new sort of urban pattern that required a new type of proactive response. That pattern was intensely congested. Given the fact that productive capacity and urban growth were inextricably tied, this was inevitable. What was clear at mid-nineteenth century was that the symbiotic forces of technological change and industrial expansion were producing a new kind of city. Urban geographers call this period the era of the ‘transitional city’ (Knox, 1991, p. 9), and it was this transition that instigated a whole new occupation of urbanistic reform.

Thus the American century of urbanization – the nineteenth century, in which the urban population expanded at three times the rate of the national population for each decade between 1820 and 1860 – was logically the period during which the culture of city reform was launched (Schultz, 1989, p. xv). Subsequent proposals were many and varied: utopian communities, civic improvement, municipal art, garden cities, the City Beautiful, the City Efficient, regionalism. Visionaries and writers, religious leaders, philanthropists, politicians, industrialists, architects, and urban dwellers met city growth and change with new ideas and physical proposals for how the human environment could be improved. Some were utopian and escapist, some were incremental, and some expressed grandeur. Some were religiously motivated and many sought social and moral redemption. Many were never built.
But all were united in a belief that human enterprise could rise up and challenge the shape and pattern of the city, an urban form that was being moulded by forces and interests external to, or at odds with, basic human needs.

Much has been written about the perverse motivations involved in the quest for urban improvement. What started as a preoccupation of zealots and social utopians in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century, became by the later decades, a condition of the growing culture of professionalism – the need for ‘experts’ to solve problems. Much has been made of the domination by business elites, capitalists, or even an inwardly-focused voting public (Fairbanks, 1996). We have been shown how the motivations to heal the dying city can be characterized in what Charles Jencks calls ‘eschatological and hysterical’ terms, punctuated by ‘overtones of the hospital and operating theatre’ (Jencks, 1987, p. 300). In other words, there was an intense preoccupation with sterilizing, opening up, and sorting urban places in ways that would supposedly make them more innocuous.

This supports the common perception that Americans disdain cities. The view is that Americans, still under the spell of Jeffersonian agrarianism, equate urbanity with immorality. Jefferson’s view that cities are ‘pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of men’, and constitute ‘a malignant social form . . . a cancer or a tumor’ has been used repeatedly to expound upon this view and diagnose the sad state of contemporary American landscapes (White and White, 1962, pp. 17, 218; Kunstler, 1996). In large part the disdain is tied into the endless pursuit of the American Dream, and classic studies of suburbia like Kenneth Jackson’s Crabgrass Frontier (1985) and Robert Fishman’s Bourgeois Utopias (1987) have investigated both the causes and effects of this enduring quest.

Some scholars, notably Fishman, argue that American anti-urbanism is a ‘persistent misunderstanding’, and that in fact ‘in no other society since the European Middle Ages have cities played such a formative role in creating the national economy and culture’ (Fishman, 2000, p. 6). What should be recognized is that there is a rift between what ordinary citizens thought about cities, and the bulk of writing about cities from the American intelligentsia. There were plenty of boosters, orators, ministers and common folk who spoke passionately for cities. To a great extent the fear and anxiety of anti-urbanism was born of the American intellectual, not the common urban dweller (White and White, 1962).

The anti-urban ethos cultivated by America’s great intellects – Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, James – had to be overcome by progressive era reformers. In writings like The City: The Hope of Democracy by Frederic C. Howe (1905) the optimism that the progressives held for cities was made known. As a leading progressive era political reformer, Howe was fundamentally an urbanist, proclaiming urban life to be a condition of the ‘great epochs of civilization’, through which came ‘education, culture, and a love of the fine arts’ (Howe, 1905; Howe,
This was an enthusiasm for cities caught up in boosterism and rivalry, but it was pro-urban all the same.

The notion that urban reformers had nefarious motivations is particularly challenging to refute since so much of urban reform is rooted in nineteenth-century upper middle-class culture. The whole act of trying to create a better settlement form can easily be reduced to something that is merely reflective of the contradictions of Western capitalist democracies. Ever looming is the fact that ideas about urban improvement were, and continue to be, about fashioning a reasonable human habitat under the forces of capitalism. This was the motivation from the start, and the first ideas were formed under capitalist effect: intense industrialization and social polarization. Yet there was recognition that the processes of industrialization and the rapid growth of urbanization combined to put tremendous pressure on city form in a way that ignored human need and social justice. There was a perception that the industrial city was based on an unjust social structure, and that a new social order would require a new form of city.

The various phases of capitalism, along with the governmental responses to them, have often been viewed as having detrimental effects on city pattern and form. Disorganized capitalism, organized capitalism and now global capitalism have all wreaked havoc on cities that were supposed to be made for people, but instead seemed only about stoking the fires of production and consumption. Through each phase, city makers have had mixed effectiveness at countering the destructive tendencies. Yet there has been no let-up to the task of formulating a response. Consistently, a different reality is envisioned, one that is not content to let the forces of capitalism be the sole determinant of human settlement form.

Thus the real problem for American urbanism is not about identifying what its lineage is but, instead, how to keep it nurtured and growing in the face of cynicism and extreme doubt about the abilities of planners as urbanists to make a positive difference. When Jane Jacobs spoke of ‘Garden City nonsense’, planners seemed not to argue, presumably because they had already abandoned the project (Jacobs, 1961, p. 289). And yet what is important about models of good urbanism is that they require nurturing and adaptation. Unfortunately, rather than attending to them, we have instead numerous examples of fallen principles – the failing of an ideal in the course of its implementation. What happened to garden cities in the course of their implementation is one of the clearest examples. Unwin and Parker detested the idea of a single home centred in the middle of ‘its own little plot’ (Creese, 1992, p. 190), but the eventual filtering down of garden city design was in fact largely a matter of houses on their own little plots. Herein lies what may be the mother load of planning conflict: how to hold on to principles while at the same time remaining flexible and open to refinement. One could argue that the failure to negotiate this balance properly is what lies at the heart of our failure to define American urbanism.
Scope, Organization and Sources

It is important to make clear what the scope of the book is, and what is clearly beyond its scope. My focus is on the physical form of the built environment and the ideas that support those forms. Largely excluded is theory about the urban planning process. I do not discuss organizational theories, the nature of rationality, communicative practice, ‘power-knowledge’ or Foucauldian discourse analysis, social learning, or any of the other theories about what planners do and why, how knowledge and action are related, or the place of planning in society more generally. In short, this book does not directly engage planning theories for and about planners. This is not to say that such theories are unimportant. It is only an acknowledgement that this book has a different kind of focus – the physical side of urbanism. It is a history of ideas that could, perhaps one day, provide grist for the theoretical mill.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 sets the framework for the historical lineage. Using some insights from anthropology, a framework for connecting urbanist ‘cultures’ as a basis for defining American urbanism is presented. This is followed by a delineation of how urbanism can be distinguished from anti-urbanism. This distinction forms an important basis for the subsequent analysis in Part 2, where each urbanist culture is dissected to discern what aspects tend to promote urbanism (which I call ‘connections’) and what aspects do not (which I call ‘conflicts’). This assessment is conducted through the lens of a set of principles about urbanism, as defined in Chapter 2.

Part 2 comprises the main historical analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss urbanist ideas for existing urban areas, and Chapters 6 and 7 discuss urbanism as it is approached in the planned community and region. Thus Part 2 explores, first, two cultures that have been primarily concerned with rectifying what currently exists, and second, two approaches to new development, where the existing city is only of secondary concern and the primary task of the urbanist is focused on the development of new settlements and systems of settlements.

Part 3 serves to condense, summarize and clarify the significance of the historical lineage. It first presents an analysis of the successes and failures in each of the four planning cultures, identifying the commonalities and particularities of success and failure. A concluding chapter offers a final perspective on the historically-rooted definition of American urbanism.

Sources for this book are eclectic. I use the writings of the primary authors discussed, particularly Raymond Unwin, Patrick Geddes, John Nolen, Lewis Mumford, Jane Addams, Nelson Lewis, Thomas Adams, Jane Jacobs, and others who were involved in some way in one or more of the planning cultures I discuss. In addition to these writings, I use magazine and journal articles associated with the planning and architecture professions, particularly those before World War II.
In addition to these primary sources, I rely extensively on secondary sources: published accounts and analyses of planning and urbanist activity. There are many excellent planning histories, and many of these I have used liberally. Since this book is a synthesis of how others have defined American urbanism and what it should be, other authors’ interpretations of urbanism comprise a critical part of my analysis.

Notes

1. The word culture is not used in a political or social sense, but more broadly as simply the ideals, behaviour, and approach associated with a particular group.
2. I am equating ‘America’ with the United States, excluding, for convenience, the more inclusive meaning of America as both North American and South American cultures.
3. Here I agree with William H. Wilson, who made a similar point in a critique of planning and urban histories (Wilson, 1994).
4. *Urban* comes from the Roman name *Urbanus* which meant ‘city dweller’ in Latin (it was also the name of eight popes). The word *urban* is dated to 1619, but its use remained rare until 1830, corresponding with the rise of the industrial city. Since *urbanus* means ‘of or pertaining to a city or city life’, there is a close association with the word city, which originally meant any settlement, regardless of size. *City* comes from the Latin *civitatem* (nom. *civitas*) meaning ‘citizenship, community of citizens’. The Latin word for *city* was *urbs*, but a resident was *civis*. When Rome lost its prestige as the ultimate *urbs*, *civitas* came to replace *urbs* (http://www.etymonline.com/).
5. See Lang (2000) for the distinctions between two types of paradigms (substantive and procedural) and two philosophical traditions (empiricism and rationalism).
8. See Fishman’s study (1977) of the urban theories of Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Ebenezer Howard.
Chapter Two

Framework:
Four Urbanist Cultures

My definition of American urbanism is based on forging together ideas taken from four different urbanist approaches or ‘cultures’, as I prefer to call them. These essentially come out of the profession of city planning, and thus there is a great deal of overlap between ‘planning’ and ‘urbanism’ in the discussion that follows (and throughout the book). This chapter lays out the rationale for categorizing planning, i.e., urbanism, in these terms. The historically-based assessment of American urbanism is made by tracing the four cultures – incrementalism, plan-making, planned communities, and regionalism – over the course of roughly the past 100 years, but with a particular focus on the early twentieth century. The main task is to sort out what is or is not contributory to a definition of American urbanism, what the commonality consists of, and how it can be combined into something that can be used to define it more purposefully.

As I have argued, to get to a more complex definition of urbanism, ideas that have occurred in different times and places, under different political, social and economic circumstances, and that fall into a range of subject matters and methods will have to be compared and contrasted. This task has parallels to the work of cultural anthropologists who seek to discover and interpret different human cultures and explain the differences found. The basic task of uncovering the history and development of human cultures thus parallels the task of understanding the history and development of a particular human endeavour – in this case the building of human settlements.

Despite the strong and sometimes obvious overlaps among the four different planning cultures, their distinctiveness can be clarified along two dimensions – I call these intensity and order. The first dimension is more significant. It divides the lineage of American urbanism into two main traditions: those ideas, principles and
implementation strategies aimed at the existing city, and those aimed at creating new ones. Both groups are focused on cities and urbanism, and this is the common denominator that connects them. But there is a key distinction. One approach to reforming urbanism is about working through givens, the other is about forging new realities. This difference affects a range of other issues. For example, how an urban reformer works through the problem of relating the ‘urban’ to the ‘rural’ will be significantly shaped by whether the problem is conceptualized through existing forms and patterns, or whether it is possible to envision an entirely new design. In practical terms, one is seeking ways to interject the country into the town, the other is seeking ways to interject the town into the country.

Another effect concerns the difference between having to contend with existing social and political realities, and being able to start fresh, with no existing political or social interests to mollify. Relph (1987, p. 154) argues that two distinct types of modern planning are divided between the ‘technical and apolitical’ act of planning on the ‘unpeopled countryside’, and the ‘politically saturated activity’ of planning at the city centre. This distinction may become somewhat blurred where environmental activism constrains development at the fringe.

Within these two main traditions of contending with established urbanism or starting anew on a greenfield site, there is another discernible dimension. The response to urban problems varies according to the level of its normative sense of order. At one end of the spectrum, urbanism will focus on the creation of very specific plans and designs that can be said to be highly ordered. The solutions will be physically distinct and most often expressed as master plans of various types. At the other end, the focus will be less about making normative plans and will involve instead a range of other types of interventions. These may entail small incremental changes, or they may be expressed as a set of political and economic reforms. Physical change is still the primary subject, but it will tend to be either small-scale or process oriented as opposed to large scale and tied to a physical blueprint.

These two dimensions create four inter-related but distinct cultures. This makes possible a range of urbanisms – big city to small town, small scale to large scale – implemented through a variety of approaches ranging from code revision to regional planning. Often, scale will determine approach, but this is not always the case. There has been a desire to create good urbanism in all cases, even in the context of small, new developments. For example, Ebenezer Howard was trying to create something urban in the context of a small city; his view was that a real city was no larger than a town (see Fishman, 1977). The fact that this has been highly problematic in the American context only underscores the need for multiple approaches in the nurturing of urbanism: finding ways to enhance existing urban places in decline; finding ways to inject urbanism in areas of new development; and using multiple strategies to accomplish both goals.
The four planning cultures vary in their level of internal homogeneity, some constituting a broader range of hybrid ways of thinking about urbanism. Some may coalesce into a particular planning paradigm, such as in the case of the Regional Planning Association of America formalized by Stein, Mumford, MacKaye and others. Other cultures are more loosely connected, as in the case of incrementalism, which, by its very nature, has never had any formal organization. In any case, an important point is that each planning culture is in some way related to every other culture, ranging from strong to weak association.

As with any typological categorization, there are downsides. To begin with, some ideas are not easily categorized. There is a danger in attempting to ‘force’ a particular idea about urbanism into a particular planning culture. Predictably, this has been a criticism of other attempts at cultural typology building (Asad, 1979; Boholm, 1996). But the idea here is to understand a particular idea or approach in relation to a larger, historically based framework. The typology can always be taken apart. I am not trying to prove whether the typology exists but rather use the typology as a tool for making relevant associations. Thus what matters is not the typology itself but the relationships within it. It should be seen as a structure through which to view the rotating constellations of ideas about urbanism in America.

There are other typologies in urbanism. For example, the New Urbanists divide urbanism into regional, neighbourhood, and block levels. This apparently reflects an initial division among early New Urbanist organizers in which one group felt that the primary principle of organization for urbanism was the region; another group felt it was the neighbourhood unit; and another was focused on small-scale elements of urbanism (Moule, 2002). The other main New Urbanist typology, the ‘transect’, specifies a range of human habitats that vary according to their level and intensity of urban character, a continuum that ranges from rural to urban. Conceptualizing this range of environments is the basis for organizing components of the built world (Duany, 2002).

There are similarities between these typologies and the one I use, although mine is geared specifically to organizing historical lineages. The exploration of historical precedents is about finding similarities in underlying concepts and ideas, which is somewhat different from trying to organize a set of proscribed solutions. In any event, the historical record of ideas about urbanism is complex enough to require a typology to help make the lineage and its internal associations more accessible.

The typology of four planning cultures can be summarized as follows:

Urbanism tied to the existing city:

1. Incrementalism – concern for existing urban settlements in a way that is necessarily
small scale, incremental, and preservationist, originating with the settlement house and municipal arts movements, and reflected in the writings of Camillo Sitte, and later William Whyte, Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander.

2. Urban plan-making – concern with the existing city, but rather than small-scale, grass roots, incremental change, a focus on the larger and more comprehensive endeavour of plan-making – urban improvement guided by a physical plan – associated with metropolitanism; includes the City Beautiful and its close cousin, the City Efficient. Associated with Burnham, Nolen, Adams, and Robert Moses.

Urbanism that focuses on new development:

3. Planned communities – utopian and quasi-utopian ideas about the proper place of cities in the region, the correct functioning of society within urban areas, and the formation of new towns, villages, or neighbourhoods according to specific principles. Associated with Howard, Unwin, and Parker, and the American planners Nolen, Stein and Wright.

4. Regionalism – human settlement in its natural regional context, originating in the writings of geographers in the French tradition (Reclus, Kropotkin and Proudhon), evolving through the work of Geddes, MacKaye and Mumford, influenced by the approach of Olmsted, and continuing through Ian McHarg.

These four cultures represent distinct schools of thought in the history of ideas about American urbanism. Using these categories, it is possible to develop a lineage for American urbanism that blends and contrasts the varying contents and methods employed. Each is present, in various ways and to varying degrees, in the history of urban reform, first as a response to the industrial city, and later, as a response to the global, postmodern one. Each is associated with particular people, events and places, and each has shown some degree of success in effectuating change.

But they do not include every response to urban problems. My analysis focuses on the first several decades of the twentieth century (although nineteenth-century events are also included). Ideas about urbanism that flourished in the mid-twentieth century are de-emphasized for reasons that are explained in Chapter 2. This is not to say that there were not ideas important to our understanding of American urbanism being developed at that time. Some connections do exist, but they are overwhelmed by an anti-urbanist ideology that represents more of an antithesis than a source.

Within the field of city planning, explorations of planning ‘culture’ are varied. The idea of culture in planning has generally been used to differentiate planning from other professional practices, as in Krueckeberg’s *Introduction to Planning*
In this view, planning as a specialized culture is usually discussed as being rooted in mid-nineteenth-century landscape planning and officially sanctioned in 1909, the pivotal year of two major events, Burnham’s Plan of Chicago and the first National Conference on City Planning. There have been explorations of the political culture of planning in a particular region (Abbott, Howe and Adler, 1994), whereby the relationship between professional planners and citizens is uncovered. There have been attempts to uncover a single planning culture that defines what it is the profession does, a kind of soul-searching of planning practitioners (Krueckeberg, 1983). Krumholz (2001) defines a ‘new planning culture’ based on its institutional practices, and its embracement of politics, scientific management, short-range outcomes, and participatory planning.

While these views of planning culture will come in to play, my use of the term will be defined more anthropologically than politically or professionally. That is, I use the idea of culture to explicate the different ways in which the planning and design of cities is conceptualized – how it is thought of and interpreted, and the meaning it holds. This is tied to the physical qualities of urbanism, not the procedural or political aspects of the planning activity alone. Urbanist culture can be defined as the bundle of ideas, strategies, perspectives, and values associated with different ways in which the act of planning human settlement – cities of various forms – is approached. Politics is only one part of that culture.

My use of the term ‘culture’ is therefore broad, which introduces at least one liability. It has not gone unnoticed that the term ‘culture’ is overused, prompting Jacques Barzun in his book *Dawn to Decadence* (2000) to view it as having devolved into ‘absolute absurdity’. But the overuse of the term may simply reflect the need to fill an explanatory gap. As cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas states: ‘Something vital [is] missing from the picture of the real live individual; that something is culture’ (Douglas, 1978, p. 5). In this same spirit I use the idea of culture to attempt to understand the spirit of American urbanism. The basic postulation is that ideas about urbanism, as expressed in different planning or urbanist cultures, have tended to self-organize into groups, and four can be identified. These four cultures have interesting similarities to groups found in other cultural contexts, in the sense that they exhibit analogous cultural biases.

**Grid/Group Theory**

There are many ways to construct cultural typologies. One useful theory, which I use here to help differentiate urbanist cultures, is known as ‘Grid/Group’, developed by the well-known cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas. The use of this approach, applied to a planning context, is more metaphorical than literal. It has been applied in a range of other fields, however, and can be adapted to apply
to city planning and urban reform, i.e., urbanism. Relevant applications include interpretations of environmentalism (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Grendstad and Selle, 1997; Johnson, 1987; Rayner, 1991); educational systems (Bernstein, 1971–1973); analyses of risk (Dake, 1991); rational choice theory (Douglas and Ney, 1998); the abolitionists during the American Civil War (Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990); public administration (Hood, 1996); work cultures (Mars, 1982; Mars and Nicod, 1984); technology and social choice (Schwarz and Thompson, 1990); high-technology and regional development (Caulkins, 1995, 1997); the analytical perspectives of geologists (Rudwick, 1982); and religious communities (Atkins, 1991).

Grid/Group theory, which is also referred to as a method, was devised by Mary Douglas during the 1970s, and its conceptual structure is shown in figure 2.1. Mary Douglas and her associates used the Grid/Group method as a systematic basis for defining types of social environments. These environments are understood in terms of two types of societal controls: (a) externally imposed rules – the ‘grid’ dimension; and (b) bounded social groups – the ‘group’ dimension. The grid dimension captures the concept of power in society, whereas group indicates status and the boundaries that exist between the society and outsiders (Kemper and Collins, 1990). The grid dimension defines the rules that guide individual behaviour, ‘leaving minimum scope for personal choice, providing instead a set of railway lines with remote-

![Figure 2.1. ‘Four types of social environment’, postulated by Mary Douglas in Cultural Bias, 1978.](image-url)
control of points of interaction’ (Douglas, 1978, p. 16). Group, on the other hand, is used to define a social setting, determined by the degree to which an individual associates with groups of varying kinds. Such groups have a way of controlling the individual, or making claims on their behaviour.

A primary concern in cultural anthropology has been simultaneously to conceive of the individual in a social setting and the culture of which the individual is a part. Thus grid and group are social constructs, describing the relationship between individual actions and social environments. Interestingly, grid and group are analogous to groups and networks, the two fundamental patterns of relationships in mathematics (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990).

One of the more common uses of Grid/Group has been to analyze political cultures (Caulkins, 1999). Weak grid/weak group1 (cell A in figure 2.1) is individualistic, describing an entrepreneurial network of free exchange. Moving ‘up grid’ to the strong grid/weak group quadrant (cell B), the political culture is characterized as being constrained by exterior social forces but lacking the ‘security’ of a strong social group. The strong grid/strong group cell (cell C) is described as ‘the classical Weberian bureaucracy with a clear organizational hierarchy and rule-constrained rational action’ (Caulkins, 1999, p. 111). The final quadrant, low grid/high group is characterized as egalitarian, where there is concern with moral purity, group solidarity, and social differentiation is not condoned.

There have been other interpretations. Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990) gave each quadrant of the Grip/Group typology a ‘flesh-and-blood’ vignette in their book *Cultural Theory*. Cell A they ascribed to a self-made manufacturer, relatively free from control but exerting control on others. Cell B they analogized as the ‘ununionized weaver’, the ‘fatalist’, subject to binding prescriptions. Cell C is equated with ‘hierarchy’ and the ‘high-caste Hindu villager’, subject to group control as well as ‘the demands of socially imposed roles’. Finally, cell D is the egalitarian ‘communard’, who rejects ranked relationships and instead values protection from the outside world of inequality.

In addition to defining types of social environments, the Grid/Group types are used to define differences in cosmologies. This is not a causal model – i.e., where social environment is seen as cause and cosmology as effect – but is rather an associational model. Certain Grid/Group structures appear to be associated with certain cosmological beliefs. The degree to which these associational generalities can be made constitutes the value of the Grid/Group framework.

Using the four social contexts as constraints, Douglas identified elements of cosmology ‘not circularly implied in the definition of social context’ but instead associated with a distinctive ‘cosmological bias’. Different types of explanations and justifications about the structure of nature and the universe are derived within each social context. These cosmological derivatives consist of, for example, ideas