Chapter 4

REVITALIZING PHOENIX’S INNER-RING SUBURBS

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ABSTRACT

The Phoenix metropolitan area was greatly affected by the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. The growth rates experienced in previous decades were substantially reduced and although the impacts were felt in many societal areas, they were especially severe in the real estate sector. Many cities and towns experienced high foreclosure rates and depressed property values. Phoenix implemented a major effort to revitalize its downtown area while several inner and outer suburbs were deprived of resources and political attention, and had to rely on existing networks and community dynamism to execute their neighborhood revitalization projects. This chapter utilizes a conceptual mechanism of place, non-place and placelessness to discuss some of the most recent transformations in three Phoenix’s inner-ring suburbs: Maryvale, East Van Buren, and South Phoenix. The opportunity to analyze suburbs with distinct characteristics (i.e., residential, commercial, and industrial) brings

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forth a more complete characterization of the urban-suburban transformation dichotomy. I answer these research questions: (1) how have these three suburbs changed in recent years? (2) What roles did their community governance structures play in those transformations? And, (3) what is distinct about these suburbs in the southwest context of growth, decline and stabilization, if anything? Data came from multiple sources but especially from background studies conducted in three separate senior capstone studios taught at Arizona State University in the late 2000s and subsequent research and study visits to the three neighborhoods. I hypothesize that inner-ring suburbs proved to be more resilient to the financial crisis than many outer suburbs and the downtown area. The massive investments in downtown Phoenix during the last decade or so were able to partially invert decades-old suburbanization trends. Although effective regional governance is still deficient, the planning goals of sustainable urban regeneration, metropolitan resilience and integrated territorial cohesivenesseness have all been experimented with in various parts of the city of Phoenix.

Keywords: urban revitalization, inner-ring suburbs, planning studios, sprawl retrofit, neighborhood planning

INTRODUCTION

Planning is a profession in a constant state of flux. Its normative dimensions are contrasted on a regular basis with political and governance contradictions and shortcomings. This affects and complicates planning education in many ways. Almost twenty years ago, Andres Duany in a keynote speech to the 1999 annual conference of the International Downtown Association (IDA) in Philadelphia asked the audience whether now that many downtowns had almost been revitalized was time to switch attention to the revitalization of other city neighborhoods.

In fact, Duany’s admonition was followed in the mid-2000s by a series of regional efforts at calling attention to the decline of inner-ring suburbs. These suburbs are different in nature from downtown; for instance, some have fewer commercial spaces and more residential development, but their revitalization processes share commonalities with those of downtowns. They may not have the historic significance or the built heritage found in
core areas, but they face relatively similar problems, such as lack of investment, declining housing stock, crime, poverty and the growing presence of ethnic minorities (Hudnut, 2003). At the same time, they also share some assets opportunities such as relative affordable housing, proximity and easy access to downtown, existence of “miracle mile” cores with mixed-used developments, and, in certain cases, also committed neighborhood leaders (Short, Hanlon, and Vicino, 2007).

Since Duany’s admonition, important societal occurrences have happened, including the attack on the twin towers in Manhattan in 2001, the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 and the repatriation of millions of illegal immigrants, mostly to Latin American countries, during the second term of the Obama administration. These three occurrences have changed the way we relate to each other in profound ways; and in addition, they have also brought the nation to a halt with disconcerting economic consequences in terms of lost jobs, unemployment, housing foreclosures, low growth and very little new housing construction in the traditional boom markets of the southwest (Kane et al., 2014). The high number of housing foreclosures in the southwest created depressed property values and changed socio-economic relationships for millions of families and households. On the other hand, massive investments in downtown areas have also changed urban dynamics considerably. But in spite of all this, we know very little about how suburbs weathered the global financial crisis.

This chapter is twofold: firstly, I utilize a conceptual mechanism of place, non-place and placelessness to discuss some of the most recent transformations in three inner-ring suburbs in the city of Phoenix: Maryvale, East Van Buren, and South Phoenix. Secondly, I utilize three capstone studios to analyze the planning pedagogies and dilemmas that surfaced during service learning engagements with three communities.

The opportunity to analyze suburbs with distinct characteristics (i.e., residential, commercial, and industrial) brings forth a more complete characterization of the urban-suburban transformation dichotomy. I attempt to answer these three research questions:
(1) how have these three suburbs changed in recent years?
(2) What roles did their community governance structures play in those transformations? and,
(3) what is distinct about these suburbs in the southwest context of growth, decline and stabilization, if anything?

I have identified these six contradictions:

(1) the legality of regulatory housing in terms of code compliance, additions and maintenance
(2) the status quo of automobility versus sustainable transportation
(3) physical versus social revitalization
(4) environmental justice issues
(5) parallel economy and informality versus market economy
(6) centralized management versus neighborhood democracies.

I hypothesize that inner-ring suburbs proved to be more resilient to the financial crisis than many outer suburbs (which received no direct help whatsoever) and the downtown area (which received massive amounts of public and private investment) (Breton, 2001). Moreover, it is argued that planning studios in the twenty first century should not be modeled on blueprint paradigms and instead should be novel approaches that expose students to spatial and socio-economic inequalities in neighborhoods and help to expand opportunities for those who have few or none. Otherwise intolerance, racism and other social malaises will compromise the pursuit of more just cities and one’s own fundamental rights and responsibilities.

The research methods comprised case study assessments (Dandekar, 2003), an application of reading the city according to theory of place in urban design (Clay, 1973; Relph, 1976; Arefi, 2004), together with post-studio reflections (Long, 2012; Neuman, 2016). Data came from multiple sources but especially from background studies conducted in three different senior capstone studios taught at Arizona State University in the late 2000s.
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It is important to clarify that attention has been paid to post-crisis alternative frameworks to the mostly spatial and unidimensional interpretations enabled by land-use and transportation models, and the broken window and neighborhood succession theories, typical of a pre-information revolution context. During the 2007-2008 financial crisis, land and property values based on county assessors databases and MLS monopolies were overblown by democratization of information made available by such online real estate sites as zillow, trulia, and walkscore, among others. Furthermore, nebulous data on who and how to qualifying for the ‘Save Our Home’ program in Arizona and for similar programs elsewhere, and torrents of new foreclosure listings, but little information on the effectiveness of housing aid programs, which required the canvassing of entire neighborhoods for answers, were some of the common research problems encountered by anyone interested in understanding how city neighborhoods were changing at that time.

Reflecting on the opportunities and challenges associated with capstone studios serves to understand the effectiveness of such teaching engagements and the rewards and difficulties for students, faculty and communities under the big umbrella of scholarship of teaching. With the exception of Arefi (2004) and Balsas (2006), there is meager research on the scholarship of teaching in first-tier suburbs, especially in the U.S. mid-and southwest regions. This chapter ought to be of interest to those studying community development, neighborhood revitalization, and sprawl retrofit strategies, as well as neighborhood governance interventions, and the role of planning and urban design in influencing urban transformations in a post global financial crisis scenario.

The chapter is structured into five parts. Part one is a threefold analytical mechanism. Part two contextualizes the theory and evolution of inner-ring suburbs. Part three provides a case study overview of the three neighborhoods according to their phenomenological characteristics. Part four is the comparative analysis of the three capstone studios. And finally, part five is the conclusion and implications for planning scholarship, pedagogy and professional practice.
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<td>Paths, edges, nodes, landmarks, and districts; place – authentic, non-place – inauthentic, placelessness – zone of transition</td>
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<td>[2] Service learning (planning capstone studios)</td>
<td>Honing planning skills and practice, land use analysis, GIS, transportation modeling, housing conditions inventories, public engagement to advance the mission of the institution of higher learning and the communities that benefit from such work</td>
<td>Checkoway (1997)</td>
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**ANALYTICAL MECHANISM**

Table 1 provides a survey of the literature on reading the city, service learning, and urban revitalization. The premises and notable examples are used to contextualize and contrast the three Phoenix case studies. These and subsequent reviews are based on scholarly literature and policy documents produced by think-tank organizations such as the Brookings Institution, the National League of Cities, and the Urban Land Institute.

**READING THE CITY**

There are various approaches to reading the city. Certain schools of thought emphasize quantitative approaches based on hard data, the use of statistical methods and the identification and extrapolation of trends over time (Rogerson, 2014). Other approaches emphasize the literal reading of a city by immersing oneself in the city environment and using one’s senses to feel and comprehend neighborhood characteristics (Dandekar, 2003). Both approaches are utilized in neighborhood planning processes. However in the context of planning capstone studios and planning practicum activities, the qualitative approaches enable direct contact with neighborhood environments before doing the quantitative analysis. Emotional and psychological interpretative states of mind can be created from walks and windshield surveys through the various built environments, the neighborhood’s infrastructure, transport networks, open spaces, and from talking and listening to residents, patrons, employees, visitors, and etc.

The phenomenology of place – phenomenology being the interpretative study of human experiences – was utilized early on by Lynch (1960), Clay (1973), and Relph (1976), among others. Lynch’s mental maps can provide the first conceptual understandings of a city’s structure. On the other hand, Clay argued that the elements of epitome district, breaks and fronts serve to capture the dynamism of urban form better than the age-old triad of perspective, cross-section and centrality. Relph’s
dialectic opposites of place/non-place and insideness/outsideness have been utilized extensively to reflect on the perceived and sensorial characteristics of places.

Augé (1995, p. 85) made the case that place focuses on static and non-place focuses on temporary characteristics, and that non-place is sometimes equated with a negative quality, “an absence of place from itself, caused by the name it had been given” for instance. Furthermore, the same author has argued that “as anthropological places create the organic social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (Augé, 1995, p. 94). Other constructs involving place and non-place interpretations of the city include, for instance, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic places, differentiation between rootedness and mobility, and place as a static bounded site over place as a dynamic globally connected process (Tuan, 1977).

Arefi (2004, p. 103) conducted a seminar on reading the city of Cincinnati and the students reported the following associations: place as being related to identity, history, a sense of attachment, and memory; non-place being interpreted as connectivity, freeways, bridges and parking lots; and placelessness stressing a lack of meaning as a result of standardized development with cookie-cutter buildings and theme-parks. Furthermore, Arefi (2004, p. 105) also showed that the innate characteristics of places influence “the nature of urban activities, their directions of change, energy flows and resulting constant states of boom and bust.”

**Service Learning**

Universities’ missions have changed radically from their ivory tower conceptualizations completely disconnected from reality to being seen as integral components of cities and metropolitan regions (Rodin, 2007). Universities not only create new knowledge but they also have the responsibility to make it useful to society. This can be done through the creation of patents, jobs and impacts on the local, regional and state economies. Moreover, universities are also part of growth coalitions, and
in the United States some of their missions are codified in land grant charters, requiring some universities to transfer knowledge to the community through extension activities (Checkoway, 1997; M’Gonigle and Starke, 2006).

Furthermore, universities also need to minimize their disruptions on adjacent neighborhoods by establishing town-gown programs and good working relationships with community development organizations and the business community. Wiewel and Perry (2005) have even recognized that universities are now in many cases the new city planners. For several years, these scholars coordinated a study group at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy on the dynamic relationships between cities and universities. However for the most part, they have approached university’s impacts mostly from real estate perspectives and not so much from the perspective of service learning and the expansion of opportunities for both university and community constituencies.

Dewar and Isaac (1998, p. 334) have written about the traditional culture-clash between universities and community organizations in terms of the style of work, social justice understandings, and power relations. Nonetheless, there have been recent attempts at fostering “community-driven practice in making of public realm, based on converging theories of social movements and planning” (Hou and Rios, 2003, p. 19). On the other hand, Hoyt (2005) has argued in favor of bridging planning theory and practice through practicum courses. Hoyt (2005, p. 6-7) has also synthesized MIT’s six-prong criteria to assess whether a certain course provides opportunities for service learning as: “(1) involve constituents and issues at a particular place, (2) provide opportunities for reflection and appraisal, (3) include opportunity to put theory into practice, (4) encourage exploration and innovation, (5) address cross-cutting issues and involve allied disciplines, and (6) make and test proposals.”

Service learning is a relatively new paradigm in higher education, perhaps not so much in planning and architecture, but in business and sociology where for instance there is growing interest in issues of
corporate responsibility and community embeddedness (Balsas, 2012). Service learning is also called public engagement and there are now whole university offices dedicated to these specific tasks. The outcomes of such scholarship is known as public scholarship (Ellison and Eatman, 2008), and their effectiveness is starting to be used in faculty retention, tenure and promotion decisions.

Planning capstone studios are critical to the education of future urban and regional planners (Long, 2012). This includes learning by doing approaches and direct study of urban transformations. Groups of students and instructors utilize studios to tackle real problems in the community and to expose students to the type of work that they are likely to perform once they complete their programs.

Traditionally utilized in the design disciplines, studios were adopted by planning programs as part of their core requirements. Practicum courses have evolved a great deal and now technology even facilitates the possibility of having virtual and interdisciplinary studios with teams in various locations and of different backgrounds (Neuman, 2016). Another modality is the cross-cultural studio with teams of international students and instructors working in various settings domestically or abroad. The American Planning Association also utilizes professional clinics where teams of professionals volunteer in pro-bono work to improve low income communities. Studios serve to synthesize knowledge and to sharpen critical skills through various literacies (Sandercock, 1999). However, there is a gap in the literature on the challenges and dilemmas encountered by those who conduct such activities. Such gap needs to be addressed on a systematic basis, so that planning programs can help to overcome deep societal problems such as intolerance, racism, and the threatening of fundamental freedoms.

Learner-centered education approaches (LCE) allow students to identify and frame urban problems, to acquire and analyze data, to propose solutions and deliver the planning recommendations to clients with minimum guidance from their instructors (Balsas, 2012). In such cases, an
instructor’s role is one of coordination and supervision. LCE belongs to the same educational paradigms as problem-based learning (PBL), and team-based learning (TBL).

**URBAN REVITALIZATION**

Urban development happens in cycles according to socio-economic trends, market forces and the normativity or relaxation of regulatory mechanisms. This cyclical trend has been responsible for the development of certain areas and the neglect, abandonment and decay of others. Urban revitalization is implemented to restore the desirable characteristics and dynamics of specific places, such as social and economic vitality and viability, in addition to highly sought community development and quality of life goals (Keating and Krumholz, 1999; Paumier 200).

Urban revitalization is part of a battery of planning techniques used to enhance not only the physicality of public spaces and of the built environment, but also to improve their immaterial qualities and to help create diverse, productive and safe places (Fitzgerald and Leigh, 2002). This is accomplished through urban design interventions and community economic development activities. Re-urbanization and the creation of more walkable neighborhoods has been one of the goals of smart growth programs (Lee and Leigh, 2005). The outcomes of revitalization strategies have been not only more cohesive urban territories, but also more robust and resilient metropolitan areas (Breton, 2001).

Downtown revitalization is traditionally championed by a city’s political leadership and its business coalitions. On the other hand, neighborhood leaders capitalize on certain strategic projects in attempts to revitalize their neighborhood cores (Von Hoffman, 2004). Residential development tends to be the hallmark of the suburbs (Schmitz, 2003; Forsyth, 2005). Neighborhood cores are smaller in scale and perhaps less diverse than downtowns. Nonetheless, they are likely to provide a relatively similar assortment of goods and services. However, suburban neighborhoods frequently tend to get neglected and underfunded since...
mayors usually dedicate a lot more attention to downtowns. Lucy and Phillips (2006) have not only documented the signs of resurgence in cities (Ehrenhalt, 2012), but they have also conducted an exhaustive study of suburban decline (Gonçalves, Costa, and Abreu, 2015).

Some of the common problems in the suburbs include land vacancy, accessibility, pedestrian injuries and crashes, declining retail environments, lack of or inadequate social services, and in certain cases weak political leadership and unstructured neighborhood governance mechanisms (Kirby, 2005; Musso et al., 2006). Since the debate between people and place is still unresolved (Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom, 2004), typical neighborhood core revitalization initiatives utilize placemaking strategies, many of which are still based on the neighborhood-unit concept proposed by Clarence Perry almost one hundred years ago (Bohl, 2002; Arreola, 2012). Hudnut (2003, p. 470-471) has identified a series of ten principles aimed at revitalizing inner-ring suburbs: “(1) empower local leadership, (2) be competitive, (3) find a niche/attraction-market/or purpose, (4) create opportunity, stability and diversity, (5) strengthen schools to achieve balance, (6) incentivize the private sector, (7) maintain and strengthen infrastructure, (8) embrace smart growth principles, (9) think and act regionally, and (10) be results oriented.”

More recently, there has been a change from only promoting suburban infill to implementing sprawl retrofit and sprawl repair strategies. Sprawl retrofit and sprawl repair became popular strategies in the late 2000s due to the work of among others, Dunham-Jones and Williamson (2008) and Talen (2011, 2015). The former advocated the need to “extend beyond the notions of rehabilitation or adaptive reuse to encompass the idea of systemic, long lasting, transformative change, to the point of completely redeveloping [suburban] sites” (Dunham-Jones and Williamson, 2008, p. xii). The latter, on the other hand, advocated sprawl repair to retrofit abandoned chain stores, dead malls, disconnected apartment complexes, and segregated housing pods (Talen, 2015). The advantages for cities are easily observable in terms of reduced energy consumption, reused existing infrastructure, and the provision of denser more walkable neighborhoods.
INNER-RING SUBURBS

Many inner-ring suburbs in the United States and Canada were built predominantly after WWII and are currently experiencing major physical, demographic and socio-economic transformations due to accelerated aging and changes in their social composition. Lee and Leigh (2005, p. 332) claimed that a lack of conceptual uniformity has put forward a “confusing array of terms” to refer to basically the same areas, including: old suburbs, inner suburbs, inner-ring suburbs, older inner-ring suburbs, first suburbs, and first-tier suburbs. These suburbs have many assets but they also face common challenges. The assets include mixed-use neighborhoods, centrality and convenience, infrastructure and sense of place. While the challenges include aging housing, foreclosures, poor maintenance, predatory lending, increasing poverty, high unemployment, deteriorating schools, abandoned retail and commercial corridors. Many of these inner-ring suburbs are now confronted by the problems that years ago affected the downtowns of many cities: deteriorating and obsolete real estate, shrinking tax base, inadequate utility systems, low investment, and the significant presence of mostly low-income, and often, minority inhabitants.

Many suburbs represent more than fifty percent of many urban areas in the U.S. Puentes and Warren (2006) have identified 64 first suburban counties with a total population of 52.3 million people in 2000, which represented approximately 18.6% of the national population. From a cultural perspective, these suburbs were the object of TV series such as The Dick Van Dyke Show, Everybody Loves Raymond, and Father Knows Best (Short, Hanlon, and Vicino, 2007). In terms of urban form, many of these suburbs are disconnected cul-de-sacs based on master planned community land development models. Socially, they are no longer the homogenous communities of earlier decades (Fishman, 1987; Baxandall and Ewen, 2000; Langdon, 2000). Now they are mostly characterized by mixed income, diverse ethnic groups, which in many cases are not well integrated.
Short, Hanlon and Vicino (2007) identified four phases in the historical evolution of the U.S. suburban frontier: (1.) suburban utopia (late 19th and early 20th), (2.) suburban conformity (1945-1960), (3.) suburban diversity (1960-1980), and (4.) suburban dichotomy (1980 onwards). On the other hand, Hanlon (2009, p. 221) developed a typology which comprised the following five categories: First, vulnerable inner-ring suburbs; second, ethnic inner-ring suburbs; third, lower income and mixed inner-ring suburbs; fourth, old inner-ring suburbs; and fifth, middle-class inner-ring suburbs. These suburbs were differentiated by class, race and ethnic composition and with high or subtle variations depending on the distance to their respective cities’ downtowns (Hanlon, 2010). Furthermore, inner suburbs also now vary in terms of their economic functions. Industrial suburbs have also suffered with the process of de-industrialization, which has led to the abandonment of industrial structures and to the appearance of vacant land made available for non-industrial uses (Kotval and Mullin, 1994; Lewis, 2004).

The Brookings Institution dedicated considerable attention to the problems of first-tier suburbs about ten years ago (Puentes and Warren, 2006). Their work was embraced by regional coalitions mostly in the midwest. These coalitions were aimed at calling attention to the problems experienced by those inner-ring suburbs and at devising appropriate policy responses at the state and federal levels. The First Suburbs Consortium, the Ohio First Suburbs Consortium, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, the Mid-America Regional Council’s First Suburbs Coalition were all examples of organizations interested in strengthening inner-ring neighborhood redevelopment and in fostering higher levels of social capital (Mitchell-Brown, 2013). Contrarily to the urban growth machines created to revitalize downtowns or the outer suburbs, these coalitions tend to rely on technical assistance, regional clearinghouse schemes, industry partnerships, and community economic development programs to advance their mostly regional agendas. The global financial crisis created many housing foreclosures not only in inner-ring suburbs, but also in outer suburbs (Adhya, 2013).
CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

The Phoenix metropolitan area is known for its unregulated fast growth (Gober, 2006). Phoenix grew exponentially after WWII, mostly due to annexation. The valley’s natural conditions of flat desert land without too many physical constraints, pleasant weather during most of the year, burgeoning environment in the construction and tourism industries, together with advances in water and irrigation management, and climate controlled living conditions have traditionally allowed the growth of this southwestern metropolis (Bahr, Guillory, and Campbell, 2013). The numbers are quite revealing: in 1940 the city covered only 9.6 square miles, by 1955 it covered 29 square miles, and by 1960 it covered 187 square miles (Gammage, Jr. 2016, p. 100). Only in the decade following 1950, the area of the city increased by a factor of ten while the population increased by a factor of four (Dantico and Svara, 2015, p.109). Now it occupies over 600 square miles.

The city of Phoenix had a population of 1.6 million in 2016 while the metropolitan area had a population of 4.3 million people. Most of this growth has been dominated by sprawl, low density and auto-oriented suburban development (Jackson, 1987; Bruegmann, 2005). In addition, much of this growth has produced “a durable racialized landscape, with minorities concentrated in an environmentally degraded urban core and a largely white and relatively privileged population in the expanding zone of peripheral suburbs” (Bolin et al., 2013, p. 159). This characteristic has given it the epithet of the “least sustainable city” (Ross, 2011), which might also have contributed to place it at the epicenter of the global financial crisis (2007-2008).

In fact, according to Hollander (2011, p. 78-79), “the number of single family permits issued increased by 69% between 2002 and 2005 and the total number of building permits increased by 59% from 8,631 in 2002 to 13,221 in 2005.” The valley’s real estate is known for its boom and bust cycles and investor speculation. But the severity of this crisis was well observed in the number of foreclosed properties, which according to Hollander (2011, p. 79), “when the housing market collapse in early 2006
foreclosures skyrocketed (and), [f]oreclosures filings increased from a few hundred in 2005 to 8,000 in 2009.”

It was in this scenario of boom and bust that the author taught urban and regional planning at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe from 2004 to 2011. With more than 70 thousand enrolled students in 2012, ASU is one of the largest university systems in the United States. The university’s vision is centered on the New American University design principles of leveraging place and community embeddedness. One of the institution’s boldest initiatives was it expansion into downtown Phoenix with the creation of a new 15-thousand student campus, which coincided approximately with the global financial crisis. This expansion was the result of various partnerships between the city and the state which aimed at revitalizing downtown, while attracting more residents and businesses to the core area (Ross, 2011).

The former College of Design at ASU had been doing service learning education for many years not only as part of the regular course offerings in architecture, planning and landscape architecture, but also through extension programs to the community. Design charrettes were conducted with various neighborhood organizations in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Examples of these mostly participatory urban design processes had been in the early 2000s the Wilson and the Balsz/Gateway community design charrettes. Balsas and Dandekar (2006) were involved in the creation of a Plan for Planning the west side of Phoenix during summer 2005. This project was part of the city of Phoenix’s commitment to improving the West Phoenix Revitalization Area (WPRA), a large and socially diverse area encompassing more than 50 square miles and home to a mostly Hispanic population.

The WPRA was in the words of Dantico and Svara (2015, p. 128) “a tribute to the respect [that] the earlier [Neighborhood Initiative Areas] program ha[d] garnered.” The WPRA planning program is still in place and has been led by the city council with the support of bond funds. Balsas and Dandekar (2006) categorized and prioritized revitalization strategies into three thematic areas: Physical, economic, and social. The analysis revealed four significant issues on the west side of Phoenix: Transit,
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housing, inclusion, and crime. This planning effort was a complement to the work of ASU’s Partnership for Community Development (PCD) at ASU West (Burk and Knopf, 2009).

The first of the three studios (Figure 1) analyzed in this chapter took place in Spring 2006 and emerged from this applied community project. Since WPRA was too large and encompassing for a planning capstone studio, we decided to focus on the old core of Maryvale village, which had been master planned during the 1950s and 1960s and was in need of an adequate revitalization strategy. The two other studios took place in neighborhoods east and south of downtown Phoenix. They followed similar methodologies with slight variations in terms of the interactions with the stakeholders and the scope of the analysis and suggestions. Students were allocated to various thematic groups and asked to conduct various analyses ranging from land use, transportation and housing, to economic development, social programs and incentives.

Figure 1. Location of the three planning capstone studios.
The three studios had the following five goals and objectives: (1) To have students gain a thorough knowledge of planning processes, the role of key participants, and experience in the establishment of participatory procedures, (2) to master techniques concerning data collection, interviewing, field work, map making and report writing, (3) to apply inventory and analytical techniques needed to create an understanding of the state of the community and the problem at hand, (4) to gain experience in developing recommendations for implementation in the following areas: regulation (e.g., zoning), process (e.g., special permits), and funding (e.g., capital improvements, grants), (5) to prepare near-professional quality reports and graphics, and (6) to present the materials to client groups.

The goal of each studio was to produce a properly researched, edited, illustrated, and sourced report identifying the main problems of the respective neighborhood and proposing planning recommendations to resolve those same issues. The work in progress and the final reports were presented to the classes and to invited guests and stakeholders. Although the boundaries of certain neighborhoods in Phoenix are clearly demarked, others are delineated according to informal associations. Chaskin (1998) has concluded that defining target neighborhoods is a highly political and negotiable process. The study areas for the three studios were defined by the instructor in consultation with colleagues and neighborhood leaders. Critical to the instructor’s selection was an understanding of the city’s village planning model. As it was recognized by Ross (2011, p. 83), “Phoenix was the first American city to institute an urban village model in 1979, largely to combat the sense of placelessness generated by metro sprawl and also to reduce commuting.” The planning goal for each village is to offer a variety of housing, job opportunities, education, recreation, and shopping facilities. Each city village has a core which serves as the focal point of the village by combining the most intense land uses with a great variety of uses. It was hoped that this village “downtown” would create a physical identity for the residents. Although such model is highly adequate from a conceptual perspective, its results on the ground have been relatively ineffective.
The utilization of the place, non-place and placelessness triad to refer to the various neighborhoods reflects the author’s reading of those specific study areas. However, it is important to keep in mind Augé’s (1995) cautionary note that what might appear to be a place to one person, might be a non-place to another person and vice-versa.

**PLACE – MARYVALE**

Maryvale is one of the first large scale post-WWII master planned communities in west Phoenix with more than 25,000 homes. It was designed by Gruen and Associates out of Los Angeles (Figure 2) and built by developer John F. Long during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Figure 3 shows how agricultural fields were transformed into suburban subdivisions within a relatively short period of time. Maryvale had many innovations for its time: affordable housing; a community center and shopping mall in the village core, which to this day provides the neighborhood with retail opportunities; a school and later on a library and golf course (Gammage Jr., 2003).

![Figure 2. Maryvale’s original master plan.](image)

More than fifty years later, this community has experienced many physical and demographic changes (Figure 4). Physically, the homes have aged and in certain cases they suffer from overcrowding and illegal additions, which require proper rehabilitation (Pader, 1994). The neighborhood roads were very congested, especially with cruising, and

Source: 2006 Maryvale studio.
Revitalizing Phoenix’s Inner-Ring Suburbs

neighborhood residents also complained about the limited number of open spaces.

![Map of Maryvale neighborhood core in 2004.](image)


Figure 4. Maryvale’s neighborhood core in 2004.

Demographically, the area has experienced changes in population. White flight to other more peripheral neighborhoods has occurred and now Maryvale is inhabited by a mostly Hispanic population (Collins, 2005).

![Shopping plaza in Maryvale’s village core.](image)

Source: Author, 2010.

Figure 5. Shopping plaza in Maryvale’s village core.
The present population has low incomes, different lifestyles and a different involvement in community development issues (Balsas and Dandekar, 2006; Grineski, 2006). The area has low skilled jobs and the crime rates have traditionally been higher than city wide, which led the city to start a Department of Justice Weed and Seed program. Some of the other socio-economic transformations have included attracting big box retail to the village core (Figure 5), converting one commercial plaza into a mega-church, and implementing a housing retrofit program, aimed at energy cost savings through energy insulation. The neighborhood still possesses a distinct identity, “a legacy of the developer’s intention to build not only homes but an entire community” (Collins, 2005, p. 316). In addition, there are some unique ethnic retail establishments and a rich variety of neighborhood organizations. Community activism has been marked by the organization of regular block-watch programs, which have strengthened the social capital and leadership potential of the neighborhood (Burk and Knopf, 2009; Mitchell-Brown, 2013).

**NON-PLACE – EAST VAN BUREN**

![East Van Buren study area in the 1930s.](image)

Source: Courtesy of the Maricopa Flood Control District, 2008.

Figure 6. East Van Buren study area in the 1930s.
Figure 7. Wilson Neighborhood centered on the East Van Buren Avenue in 2006.

This area located east of downtown Phoenix and just north of Rio Salado was agricultural land more than a hundred years ago (Figure 6). Its evolution happened eastwards from downtown Phoenix along three major east-west thoroughfares: Washington Street, Van Buren Street and Roosevelt Street. Housing subdivisions, public facilities such as the Arizona State Hospital (built in 1887) and the Sky Harbor International Airport (built in 1928), and commercial developments were all built as the city expanded outwards. The Wilson neighborhood is roughly bordered by the Garfield neighborhood to the west, and the Balsz neighborhood to the east, and Sky Harbor International Airport to the south and the Loop 202 expressway to the north (Figure 7).

The East Van Buren Street was the main commercial corridor through the neighborhood. This corridor (formerly Highway 60) had a prominent role in the transportation network prior to the building of the city’s freeway system. Highway 60 was Phoenix’s connection to cross-country traffic and the main route from points east to California. From the 1920s onwards many motels were built in this part of town to serve travelers and vacationers going west (Figure 8). Even though many of the early motels
were demolished or converted into housing and commercial spaces, some of those motels can still be found along East Van Buren Street.

Figure 8. Example of a typical Phoenix motel on East Van Buren Street.

Source: 2008 East Van Buren studio.

Figure 9. Street scene along East Van Buren Street during the early 2000s.

Source: 2008 East Van Buren studio.
The neighborhood area was historically a residential area for farm and migrant workers, and contrarily to the better housing in the well-established historic Garfield neighborhood to the east (Arreola, 2012), its housing stock was interspersed with light industry establishments, warehouses, airport-related ancillary businesses, commercial developments such as the Greyhound dog race park and the Phoenix Park 'n Swap shopping venue, and other retail outlets. The area is also bisected by the Arizona Grand Canal built in 1893.

The decline of the neighborhood was caused by the construction of the freeway interstate system in the 1970s, the large resorts and modern housing subdivisions in other parts of Phoenix and in suburban cities and towns. The growth of the airport displaced many families to the west side of Phoenix during the boom years. Even after its most recent expansion in the late 1980s and 1990s, the airport facilities kept on impacting the neighborhood quite adversely. Many vacant lots were converted into surface parking to serve airport demand, and the noise and constant take-off and landing operations did reduce the redevelopment appeal of the area. The more central areas along East Van Buren Street were converted into used car dealerships (Figure 9) and many lots remained expectantly vacant.

Socially, the area experienced high crime levels including burglaries, home invasions, physical assaults and prostitution. There was an overabundance of gang “tagging” and graffiti. The large majority of the population in the 2000s was minorities, including a large Hispanic population. There was also a high incidence of pedestrian traffic fatalities compared to the rest of the city of Phoenix and a poor physical environment, which discouraged walking (Machler and Golub, 2012). Despite this depressing conditions, the neighborhood had a strong group of committed residents, local civic and business leaders who worked with the authorities to improve housing conditions, eliminate crime and prostitution, and promote infill development (Figure 10), especially in connection with the newly built light rail line on Washington Street.
PLACELESSNESS – SOUTH PHOENIX

The South Phoenix village is located south of downtown and physically separated from the rest of the city by Rio Salado (Dantico and Svara, 2015). The northeast corner of this village is just south of the Sky Harbor International Airport and adjacent to the city of Tempe on the east. Prior to the building of the interstate highway system, accessibility to this part of Phoenix was very limited. This part of South Phoenix was literally in an “out-of-town” location and for that reason it grew very haphazardly with landfills, light industrial uses, small businesses, warehouses, construction headquarters and depots, parking lots for heavy construction machinery, and sexual oriented businesses.
Figure 11. Evolution of the Wedge in South Phoenix 1959-1979-2008.

Source: 2010 The Wedge studio.
Figure 11 shows the evolution of the neighborhood from a sparsely populated, mostly agricultural area, in 1959 to a hodge-podge commercial and industrial city district in 2008 with a variety of uses ranging from junkyards and body-shop businesses to company headquarters, hotels, private university campuses, to state-of-the-art warehouses, given the area’s now good freeway accessibility and close proximity to the airport. University Avenue running east-west is the main road through the area with direct connections to downtown Tempe to the east (Balsas, 2014), and South Phoenix village to the west (Figure 12). In fact, its location in the center of the Phoenix metro area, immediately south of the international airport and with good highway accessibility, make it a prime redevelopment spot.

However, growing redevelopment pressures tend to increase the risk of displacement for light industrial uses (Lewis, 2004). The main purpose of the planning capstone studio was to research the redevelopment potential of the area and to identify how it could evolve in the future.

Figure 12. Street Scene of University Avenue through South Phoenix.
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND POST-STUDIO REFLECTIONS

The participants in the three studios were undergraduate students from the Bachelors of Science (B.S.) in Urban Planning at Arizona State University. This was their second and final planning studio before graduation. The study areas had to be near campus or within a reasonable public transportation distance of campus. Each studio was subdivided into thematic groups and students were advised to create their own individual group contracts in order to perform the work accordingly and to comply with established tasks and deadlines. The themes were identified by the instructor based on his knowledge of the area and students’ professional interests.

The Maryvale studio had these five groups:

1. Housing,
2. Public spaces and transportation,
3. Social issues,
4. Economic development and job creation, and
5. Neighborhood governance.

The East Van Buren corridor also had five groups:

1. Land use,
2. Transportation and circulation,
3. Housing,
4. Economic development, and
5. Social issues.

Finally, the South Phoenix Wedge studio was subdivided into: (1) Land use, (2) Transportation and utilities, (3) Built environment, (4) Economic development, and (5) Incentives and regulations.
### Table 2. Comparative analysis of the neighborhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maryvale Village Core</th>
<th>East Van Buren Corridor</th>
<th>The Wedge Industrial Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (U.S. Census, 2000)</td>
<td>~ 28,000</td>
<td>~ 15,000</td>
<td>Technically non-existent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Maryvale Village core (~4 square miles)</td>
<td>Wilson and Balsz neighborhoods (~3.4 square miles)</td>
<td>South Phoenix industrial area immediately south of Sky Harbor International Airport (~1.7 square miles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Master planned neighborhood</td>
<td>Pre-war inner-ring mixed-use suburb</td>
<td>Semi-commercial and industrial suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement date</td>
<td>Late 1950s &amp; early 1960s</td>
<td>1920s and 1930s</td>
<td>1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoning</td>
<td>Residential with mixed-use in the village core</td>
<td>Commercial along East Van Buren and Washington Streets, light industrial adjacent to the airport and residential close to the Loop 202 expressway</td>
<td>Industrial and commercial zoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other indicators (U.S. Census, 2000)</td>
<td>7,790 dwelling units, 99% occupancy rate, average household size of 3.8 people per home, average household income of $41,181.</td>
<td>3,739 dwelling units, 94% occupancy rate, average household size of 3.9 people per home, 35% of families with incomes below the poverty level, 55% have an average annual income below $25,000</td>
<td>~450 businesses with a workforce of 21,726 employees, 16% of 823 land parcels were vacant (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows a comparative analysis of the three neighborhoods and some of their basic indicators. Their areas had to be relatively small (1.7 to 4 square miles) to allow enough depth in the analysis and in the proposals. The three studios produced comprehensive reports comparable to official neighborhood studies and site plans with textual narratives, graphics, charts, maps, and other professional and near-professional elements.

The three study areas were from different eras and had very different characters, Maryvale – a completely designed post WW-II master planned subdivision, the East Van Buren corridor – a 1920s and 1930s inner suburb, and the South Phoenix Wedge area – an inner industrial suburb from the 1960s. Table 2, also shows comparable indicators for the first two studio areas, including the numbers of dwelling units, occupancy rates, average household size, and average annual incomes, and in the case of the industrial area, it specifies the number of businesses and employees in 2007.

The Maryvale studio started at a time in Spring 2006 when there were many marches and protests in hundreds of cities in almost all states, mostly “motivated by the prospects of the U.S. Senate passing legislation which would have criminalized assistance to immigrants who were in the country illegally and who were seeking food, housing or medical services” (Engler and Engler, 2016). This climate of ethnic unrest later became more complex not only due to the exodus of mostly Hispanic workers out of the state of Arizona into other parts of the country, but also because of the expatriation of a considerable number of undocumented immigrants back to their countries of origin. Since both the Maryvale and the East Van Buren corridor studios had high concentrations of Hispanic residents (Luckingham, 1994; Diaz, 2005), we experienced some difficulties in reaching out to some of those individuals.

The research methods included basic and advanced participatory techniques centered on group work, guided tours, focus group meetings with stakeholders, data collection, windshield surveys, quantitative surveys, SWOT analysis, technical analysis, best practice reviews, map making, visioning exercises, report writing, mid and final presentations, and the use of rubrics. During the guided tours (Figure 13), students were
able to observe the area in loco, ask exploratory questions to the neighborhood leaders, to residents and business owners, and also to conduct preliminary visual assessment surveys, and brainstorm about possible revitalization strategies. In addition, we also held focus group meetings with village planners and elected officials (Figure 14), and with residents, business owners, and community leaders (Figure 15).

Source: 2006 Maryvale studio.

Figure 13. Guided tour of Maryvale in February 2006.

Source: 2006 Maryvale studio.

Figure 14. Maryvale Village Stakeholders meeting in early 2006.
In the 2008 East Van Buren corridor studio, the first pedagogical activity was to understand the neighborhood according to a chosen persona and to observe the neighborhood according to the needs, fears and problems, motivations, expectations, and potential recommendations of that persona. The roles available included: resident, small business owner, developer/investor, tenant, airport user, worker, neighborhood organizer, police officer, city councilor, airport planner, and city planner. This pedagogical technique enabled students to have a much more active role in their education than simply and passively attending meetings with professionals and neighborhood leaders. Post neighborhood observations were followed by debriefing exercises in the classroom and the sharing of impressions and diverse opinions about what we had seen, heard, experienced, and acquired in the neighborhood.

Table 3 provides a synthesis of the studios’ SWOT analyses as well as the best practices and case studies identified from elsewhere, which could serve as references in identifying specific recommendations for their own study areas. Table 3 also summarizes some of the main revitalization activities with before and after illustrations, together with spatial and public policy recommendations (Figures 16-21). Other methods included visual assessment surveys, housing quality inventories and conditions evaluations, literature reviews, overall and thematic vision statements, revitalization goals and recommendations according to phased implementation schedules. In certain cases, students also had to identify funding sources and the stakeholders responsible for the implementation of their proposed projects and activities.

All three studios had four deliverables (3 interim progress reports and 1 final report) and various informal presentations throughout the semester with a mid and a final studio presentation for invited guests (Figures 22-24). At the mid and final presentations students not only synthesized findings, practiced public speaking, but also presented their suggestions and received feedback from the invited studio guests.
Table 3. Comparative analysis of main problems and recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWOT Analysis</th>
<th>Maryvale Village Core</th>
<th>East Van Buren Corridor</th>
<th>The Wedge Industrial Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Sense of community, proximate distance to downtown and edge of town shopping malls</td>
<td>High degree of city and metropolitan centrality, close proximity to downtown Phoenix and downtown Tempe</td>
<td>Dynamic industries (e.g., construction and storage), centrality, accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>Housing blight, code violations, illegal additions and deterioration, lack of housing diversity, overcrowding, low-skilled labor force, inexistence of home owner associations (HOAs)</td>
<td>Crime, minimal community amenities, white-flight out of the area, vacant and underutilized properties, conflicting land use patterns, limited neighborhood support services, low self-esteem and sense of place, high road traffic, lack of jobs, lack of external investment</td>
<td>LULU, deactivated city landfill, air and noise pollution, lack of design guidelines, poor aesthetics, adult entertainment businesses, lack of buffer zones, lack of business incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Good structural homes, committed neighborhood leaders, revitalization partnerships, dynamic neighborhood organizations</td>
<td>Stable housing, good accessibility, moderate transit service, housing infill opportunities, light rail redevelopment opportunities</td>
<td>Industrial core interspersed with some services and specialized commerce (i.e., mail-order and catalog businesses), city’s planned interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>Preconceived stigma associated with ethnic populations, high crime rate, language barriers, low-incomes, lack of youth participation</td>
<td>Airport expansion, environmental nuisances (i.e., noise and urban blight), street neglect</td>
<td>Poor economic growth, competition from industrial districts elsewhere in Phoenix, freeway congestion, potential displacement of small family owned businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best practices from elsewhere</td>
<td>Maryvale Village Core</td>
<td>East Van Buren Corridor</td>
<td>The Wedge Industrial Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayward, CA; Chicago, MI; Tempe, AZ; Miami, FL; Dallas, TX</td>
<td>Scottsdale, AZ; Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis, MN; Boston, MA</td>
<td>Kansas City, MI; Buffalo, NY; Seattle, WA; Portland, OR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy insulation of residential buildings, strengthening the Maryvale core with mixed use development and jobs, an arts and culture center, supporting the neighborhood organizations with effective governance</td>
<td>Take advantage of existing assets (land for redevelopment), upgrade of old motels to newer functions, multimodal station at 44th Street and Washington Street, empower the local neighborhood organizations to deliver social services</td>
<td>Preserve small business activities, modernize neighborhood along industrial park settings, green and environmental strategies (i.e., parasols and solar panels), encourage growth in the technology manufacturing sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Justice Weed and Seed safety program, increase service rates, attract employment, implement after school programs</td>
<td>Emphasis on Washington Street transit oriented development (TODs), housing infill projects, various affordable housing developments</td>
<td>Conversion of small light industrial parcels into warehousing and airport related businesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The area was not as impacted as some of the outer suburbs</td>
<td>Closure of construction related businesses, decrease in the number of used car dealerships, business relocations to other areas</td>
<td>Reduction in business activity due to the economic slowdown and less construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: 2008 East Van Buren studio.

Figure 15. East Van Buren stakeholders meeting in early 2008.

Source: 2006 Maryvale studio.

Figure 16. Composite land use map for the Maryvale Village Core.
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**Figure 17.** Housing brochure for the Maryvale Village Core study area.

**Figure 18.** Proposed transportation improvements for the East Van Buren corridor.
Figure 19. Before and after streetscape improvements on East Van Buren Street.

The ongoing activities, both planned and market-led, included using the studio knowledge to leverage additional investment to the
neighborhood in the form of a Department of Justice Weed and Seed safety program grant, and additional commitments by the city of Phoenix to increase service delivery rates in the area, while creating employment and implementing after school programs. In the case of the East Van Buren corridor studio, we observed an emphasis on redevelopment efforts on Washington Street through the use of transit oriented development (TODs) and station area plans, housing infill projects, and various affordable housing developments. In the South Phoenix studio area, we observed the conversion of small light industrial parcels into warehousing and airport related businesses.

The first two studios coincided with the bursting of the real estate housing bubble and the beginning of the Great Recession (Florida, 2010). The declining economic activity in the mid-2000s resulted in a change of public policy orientations from mostly playing the “outside game of suburban development” to playing the “inside game of urban revitalization” (Balsas and Dandekar, 2006). At that time, Downtown Phoenix experienced the beginning of a major revitalization overhaul not only because of this change in public policy (Turner, 2002; Wachs, 2013), but also due to a growing national trend toward downtown livability motivated by “historic preservation and a new appreciation for downtown living” (Danielsen and Lang, 2010, p. 91).

Kane et al., (2014, p. 502) have argued that they found “some evidence to support the theory of a recession-induced “urban inversion”. Moreover, the same researchers have also concluded that “fringe areas became less attractive for subsequent development (...) [which] represent[ed] a dramatic shift away from a development pattern, which had been extremely important throughout the city’s history” (2014, p. 503).

According to Ross (2011, p. 9), the Great Recession “dropped the country’s fifth largest city into the deepest of holes”. New and different forms of environmental insecurity were suddenly quite evident. For instant, “some peripheral populations [began to] face an emergent double exposure to both imminent water resource shortfall as a result of regional climate change and localized effects of the crisis of finance capital and resultant foreclosures and plunging home values” (Bolin et al., 2013, p. 159).
Furthermore, Arizona lawmakers passed the “far-reaching anti-immigrant bill SB1070 that pushed well beyond the nation’s legal mainstream” (Ross, 2011, p. 6) and resulted in economic inequality, weakened labor rights, and police violence against people of color.

The three studio areas were impacted differently by the global financial crisis. For instance, the Maryvale village area was not as impacted by foreclosures as some of the outer phoenix suburbs. The East Van Buren corridor experienced the closure of construction related businesses, a decrease in the number of used car dealerships, and the relocation of businesses to other areas of the city. Finally, The South Phoenix industrial area underwent a reduction in business activity due to the economic slowdown and considerable reductions in single family home construction.

Source: 2010 The Wedge studio.

Figure 21. Before and after streetscape improvements on University Avenue.
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Source: 2006 Maryvale studio.

Figure 22. Final Maryvale Village Core studio presentations.

Source: 2008 East Van Buren studio.

Figure 23. Final East Van Buren Corridor studio presentations.
Table 4 shows a comparative analysis of teaching methods, outcomes, and lessons learned. Although the teaching methods were already discussed above, it is important to also emphasize the value of a learner-centered educational (LCE) perspective and the use of guiding rubrics in helping students learn and improve the necessary urban planning skills. Learner-centered education places students at the core of their educational paths. Contrarily to other pedagogical methods, which emphasize exposing materials and transferring content from the instructor to students, CLE requires students to take a very active role in their own learning processes (Balsas, 2012).

Table 4. Comparative analysis of teaching methods, outcomes, and lessons learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching methods</th>
<th>Maryvale Village Core</th>
<th>East Van Buren Corridor</th>
<th>The Wedge Industrial Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group work, guided tours, focus group meetings, data collection, windshield surveys, quantitative surveys, SWOT analysis, technical analysis, best practice reviews, map making, visioning exercises, report writing, presentations, and the use of rubrics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2010 Best Student Project Award from APA’s Arizona Chapter for the 2008 East Van Buren Revitalization Plan, and the 2010 Wedge, South Mountain Industrial Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and service outcomes</td>
<td>Leverage of findings to advance neighborhood priorities and to implement specific recommendations, including obtaining revitalization grants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
<td>City’s split between commitment to downtown revitalization (i.e., area with the highest visibility) and to the West Phoenix Revitalization Area (i.e., lower political capital)</td>
<td>Expectation that revitalization efforts in the Garfield neighborhood would permeate to the adjacent area along East Van Buren Street, relatively low commitment to the area by city officials</td>
<td>Low priority area from a city’s revitalization standpoint, public policies aimed at complementing the airport’s niche market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 24. Final South Phoenix the Wedge studio presentations.

Rubrics are critical instruments both in traditional and LCE methods. In these studios, three distinct rubrics were utilized to help students with their (1) written reports, (2) teamwork, and (3) presentations. The first rubric was used to cover such issues as content, structure, grammar, critical thought, ample evidence, justifications and examples, and application of previous knowledge. The second rubric was utilized to assess teamwork. Students had a chance not only to assess their colleagues’ work but also to assess their own in terms of how often they attended studio meetings, and the extent of their own contributions to team activities, complying with deadlines, creating quality work, helping to keep the team organized, showing positive attitude, listening to the ideas of the other team members, while encouraging other members to contribute to the discussions.

Finally, the third rubric was used to assess the students’ oral presentations by addressing these aspects: Delivering a short introductory overview of the topic, letting the audience know the structure of the presentation in advance, presenting the main findings and analysis, concluding the presentation, summarizing the main findings, using an appropriate delivery style, managing time wisely, and answering questions appropriately.
The learning and service outcomes included the leveraging of findings to advance neighborhood priorities and to implement specific recommendations, including obtaining other revitalization grants for some of the studio areas. Furthermore, two of the three studio reports (2008 East Van Buren Revitalization Plan and the 2010 Wedge, South Mountain Industrial Plan) won the 2010 Best Student Project Award from the American Planning Association’s Arizona Chapter. This professional award was an excellent recognition of the work performed in relatively short periods of time and was likely to benefit the students throughout their professional careers.

Burk and Knopf (2009, p. 21-22) have reported three lessons learned from their engagement with community leaders in Maryvale: (1) Empowering residents and organizations, (2) short-term versus long-term investments, and (3) multi-sector partnerships. Table 4 also synthesizes three lessons learned, mostly derived from teaching these capstone studios. The Maryvale studio revealed that the city of Phoenix was split between embracing a full commitment to revitalizing downtown Phoenix (i.e., the area with the highest visibility and identity) versus addressing the highly visible and quite urgent social needs in Maryvale Village and throughout the West Phoenix Revitalization Area – WPRA (i.e., perhaps the area with lower political capital), despite a well thought out plan for planning the WPRA produced by Balsas and Dandekar (2006).

The second lesson demonstrates that there were growing expectations that the revitalization efforts in the Garfield neighborhood (Arreola, 2012) would permeate to the adjacent area along East Van Buren Street, which also suffered from relatively low political commitment by city officials. It is important to note that the city councilor for most of the East Van Buren capstone studio area was an African-American politician who served three terms in office. Finally, and despite its considerable economic impact in the city, the South Phoenix industrial area was perceived as being a low priority area from a city’s revitalization standpoint, regardless of other public policies aimed at complementing the airport’s expanding niche market.
CONCLUSION

This chapter attempted to utilize a conceptual mechanism of place, non-place and placelessness to discuss some of the most recent transformations in three inner-ring suburbs in the city of Phoenix: Maryvale, East Van Buren, and South Phoenix. Strom (2017, p. 200) has recently concluded that prerecession population growth has returned to many of the Sunbelt states. In fact, Strom found that “since 2010, Texas, Florida, and Arizona are among the top 10 fastest growing states.”

In the Arizona capital, it is important to ponder about how the massive public investments in the downtown area fared in relation to the sparse investments in the inner-ring suburbs. The downtown investments included the expansion of the convention center, a new downtown campus for the largest state university, a medical campus, a whole array of mostly private-oriented condominiums, mixed-use and housing developments, and various hotels. This commitment to a relatively small area of the city with the use of public funds through voters’ “endorsed” bonds, at the expense of continued investment in the neighborhoods was perplexing, only obviated by the popularity of a very charismatic mayor.

There are very little doubts that the downtown revitalization efforts have changed the face of downtown phoenix and the urban fabric of the city’s core, mostly along the light rail corridor on Central Avenue. However, suburban postmodern sprawl is still the hallmark of the Phoenix metropolis (Dear and Flusty, 1998). In addition, there were very limited attempts at retrofitting and repairing the inner-ring suburbs. The very few “sprawl repair” projects implemented during and after the Great Recession were mostly centered on upgrading and beautifying strip-malls and commercial plazas, together with the densification of certain neighborhood centers in relatively well-off areas, such as the exclusive Biltmore neighborhood centered on 24th Street and East Camelback Road, and other urban nodes along the latter (Central Avenue and 19th Avenue, the latter in the vicinity of Christown Spectrum Mall – the original north terminus of the Phoenix light rail line).
Furthermore, the Occupy Wall-Street Movement (2011) was almost unseen in Phoenix during the high peak of the Great Recession. This was somewhat ironic given the hemorrhagic number of foreclosures experienced throughout the whole metropolitan area. On the other hand, there were massive protests against the deportation of immigrants (Engler and Engler, 2016), while the negative consequences of the crisis (i.e., job losses, foreclosures, reductions in city revenues) were continuously being reported by the mass media and felt very vividly by many residents and employees in the Valley of the Sun.

From a phenomenological perspective, it is recognized that the three inner-ring suburbs evolved differently over distinct periods of time. Arefi (2004, p. 112) recognized the interchangeability of these three constructs in the sense that “if place, non-place and placelessness at least conceptually represent different types of landscapes, the distinction between them need not be necessarily absolute or permanent.” When reading the city’s three different neighborhoods, the not so subtle distinctions among the constructs seem to hold true. However it is important to also recognize that they are all places in the same city, which can be studied according to the four ontological constructs of place: (1) place as a set of visual attributes, (2) as a product, (3) as a process, and (4) as meaning (Arefi and Triantafillou, 2005).

The three Phoenix studios represented distinct opportunities for students to learn various planning skills. Taken together they represent attempts at providing planning services that would not be delivered by other means, since the city was mostly preoccupied with the revitalization of the downtown area. The Maryvale studio was a follow-up to a city of Phoenix requested and an ASU President’s Office endorsed Plan for Planning the West Phoenix Revitalization Area in the second semester of 2005. Even though, this suburb was not technically a first-tier suburb, its role as the core of Phoenix’s largest planning village deserved a lot more attention and public concern. The two other studios both north and south of Sky Harbor International Airport could be approached according to the “aerotropolis” model proposed by Kasard and Lindsay (2011).
This model was not explicitly voiced during our consultations with neighborhood stakeholders, contrarily to other planning models, such as the Opportunity Corridor (centered on Washington Street’s light rail corridor), and the Discovery Triangle (involving Phoenix and the two adjacent cities: Tempe and Scottsdale).

It is still important to recognize that all three studios took place within the city of Phoenix and although they were not initially conceptualized as an “opportunity triangle” they analyzed the vertices of a triangle which covers the core of the metropolis, and includes not only the airport, the downtown area, an important segment of East Camelback Road, but also the Grand Avenue corridor – the only off-grid oblique major thoroughfare in the metropolis, and an example of the New Urbanism transect density gradient (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, 2000).

There are no doubts that students gained planning skills through the preparation of near professional planning documents delivered to the neighborhood leaders. On the other hand, the instructor was fully engaged in service learning activities and the various communities benefited from interacting with future planners in non-adversarial settings. Various authors have mentioned the opportunities to read the city, in this case the north-American city. In the Southwest Sunbelt this very often entailed the “New American City,” most of the times in conjunction with the “New American University” vision (Balsas, 2012). Service learning was supposed to have been integral to the mission of both the New American City and the New American University. However, such was apparently not the case, since the gap between planning theory and practice was not closed with applied learning, sustainability efforts and the integrated revitalization the city’s inner-ring neighborhoods (Robin, 1990). It is nonetheless important to urge decision makers to change the “urban revitalization” paradigm, which has put a lot of emphasis on consumption-oriented places, to attaining a truly “sustainable urban form” (Talen, 2011) through “sustainable urban regeneration” strategies (Balsas, 2008) centered also on work, residential, and recreational functions.
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