

# COLD CLIMATE NEO-TRADITIONALISM

By

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Experienced mountaineers look at the big picture first and foremost. Prior to attempting any climb, they seriously examine the long view well before they even consider the specifics of a certain route. They know that once on the mountain the nooks and crannies, that seemed to minuscule from a distance, will engulf them. Without having perspective and knowing how the mountain relates to its surroundings they will be lost. The point is that before plunging into the infinite details of urban planning it is prudent to deal with the generalities first and that, in turn, leads to one question: What is a good community?

A good community is organic. It is based upon its physical surroundings and the people who occupy them. This foundation creates a dynamic and responsive relationship. The community nurtures and encourages by recognizing the specific needs and character of both the populace and the environment. This situation regards all people as equal and ensures that every person has access to the same quality of existence. In much the same manner, the true nature of the habitat is integrated into the fabric of the community. These basic characteristics must be considered in order to keep perspective on the true purpose of planning.

If the good community model contains the aspects fundamental to all planning, why then must multi-seasonal regions receive further regard? Winter communities are unique. Their extremes of climate require solutions since they place additional burdens on the already monumental task of effective planning. A wide range of environmental conditions effectively adds another dimension to the variables involved in creating a good community. Whereas other regions are essentially static in the stresses, multi-season realms each take on their own kinetic, demanding personality.

Essentially the solution to circumpolar community planning lies in flexibility and accordingly treating each situation as unique. Effective and economical resolutions can be created for all seasons. The answers come by paying strict attention to natural context. For example, through developing an initial understanding of indigenous energy and water flows, the planner cannot only avoid traditional pitfalls <sup>and</sup> but make the community at harmony with the environment. On a strictly human level, this is illustrated by balancing the transition between the outside and inside. In either case, an adaptable approach allows for the full incorporation of seasonality into the identity and function of the community.

Neo-Traditional Community Design (NTCD) “encourages the creation of a pedestrian-friendly center, establishing a sense of place and community in addition to complex, geometric street layouts, slower speed street design, and mixed land use.” It was developed in the early 1980’s as a response to communities spawned by post-war zoning regulations which, because of their total separation of land uses, created dependence on the automobile. This new approach to community planning was structured to alleviate the wasteful, environmentally detrimental and socially destructive effects of the previous model.

Does NTCD meet the requirements for a good community? Currently it is all the rage and fits in conveniently with the prevailing fronts of the New Conservatism. It is touted as a return to small town living and values. However, behind the marketing noise and professional jargon lie principles which are quite sound. NTCD promotes a greater compaction of activities, a balance between different modes of transport, mixed land use and an emphasis on communal socialisation. In effect, the NTCD attempts to directly address the needs of the people and provide balance with the environment. That, in effect, is how one plans a good community.

NTCD certainly is an effective means of creating a community which serves its inhabitants rather than enslaving them. However, certain factors must be considered before this concept can be effectively applied to multi-seasonal regions. Severe climatic conditions have an immense impact and each season has its own unique requirements; thus, sensitivity is required. Building a Neo-Traditional community in Tromsø, Norway based upon a neighbourhood in Florida (where NTCD originated) would eventually create a situation akin to the one that NTCD

was developed to rectify. The successful NTCD based cold climate community would take into account factors such as: protection from the elements; snow and management; optimisation of solar energy: and protecting continuity of access.

There are overlays between NTCD and appropriate circumpolar design. However, if a blueprint is created based upon a situation that does not exist then it will ultimately fail. It takes introspection to arrive at an identity and strength to chart out a unique future. By denying regional realities the cycle of mindless appropriate southern 'solutions' is perpetuated. Only by being true to both self and place can any community plan be ultimately valid.