



# RESEARCH PAPER 1

## DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION: RESEARCH TRENDS AND FINDINGS

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### Why is the downtown important?



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### 1. Introduction

This paper examines contemporary research related to downtown revitalization and related topics. The following questions are addressed: Why is the downtown important? What empirical research supports planning efforts to revitalize downtown areas? What are the advantages of downtowns over the suburbs or other metropolitan/non-metropolitan locations? Answers to these questions may support and justify appropriate planning and research efforts regarding the renewal of downtown areas.

The paper explores information contained largely in the academic literature, supplemented by books, research reports and conference papers, as to the relevance and importance of downtowns within six critical areas: i) demographic trends, ii) economic relationships between city and suburb, iii) economic geography of businesses, iv) infrastructure, v) symbolic landscapes, and vi) government policy and planning. Most of the reported research is drawn from the United States, but supporting evidence is also obtained from Canadian, European and Australian research.

Downtown has received considerable attention by academics, planners, politicians and various community groups. Researchers have focused on a wide variety of specific issues with respect to the renewal of downtown areas including, for example: planning efforts and strategies, case studies, and political analysis.<sup>1</sup> At times, however, the reasons and rationales for organizing and revitalizing the downtown areas are not directly addressed.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this report will highlight research findings that support downtown revitalization as a legitimate planning strategy.

### 2. Terms and Concepts

The downtown as a spatial concept can take on many different meanings. Research on downtown revitalization does not always share common definitions, nor are such definitions clearly stated in published research. Thus, it is important to understand the varying definitions of "downtown" as this will influence both generalizations and comparisons among various research papers and planning reports.

#### 2.1. Statistical Definition

The US Census Bureau provides a definition of a central city as the urban and economic nucleus of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA). The MSA is defined as an area containing a large central city and adjacent areas that are economically integrated as measured by commuting patterns and population density. The central city is defined as:

- (a) all cities with populations of at least 250,000 or at least 100,000 people working within the city limits;
- (b) all cities with populations of at least 25,000 that have employment/residence ratios of at least .75 and in which at least 60% of the residents work in the city;
- (c) cities with populations between 15,000 and 25,000 that are at least one-third the size of the largest central city.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, this definition of the central city is used to measure the demographic and other changes within and among MSAs (See section 3.0). So when population declines in the central city versus population gains in the suburbs are measured it is usually based on the above definitions. It is unfortunate that the US Census Bureau does not provide a definition of “downtown”. The Bureau’s definition of a central is merely one or a combination of incorporated places (i.e., cities and counties).

## 2.2. Political Definition

As mentioned above, the downtown areas are also commonly equated with a political definition of local governments. Here, the central city is an incorporated place, usually the oldest municipal government with the suburbs consisting of newer units of government. Political definitions represent the building blocks for the Metropolitan Statistical Area. Here the downtown (or central city) is equated with an incorporated place. Research using political definitions of the downtown trace demographic and economic patterns from one political unit to another.

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The political definition is used to measure trends and changes in central city versus suburban growth. The well-cited book by David Rusk, Cities Without Suburbs, uses such a definition. Rusk argues that the use of annexation is important in dissolving the political division of the central city and suburbs by creating elastic cities that can expand to include the entire metropolitan area, i.e., rural, urban and suburban landscapes, under one political jurisdiction. This will create what he has termed “cities without suburbs” thereby solving problems of growth management and fiscal, racial and political inequalities between the central city and the suburbs. His research shows that American cities which annex, or have what he terms elastic boundaries, are more prosperous and enjoy substantially stronger population growth rates than inelastic cities, i.e., cities that have not extended their municipal limits. From this perspective, expanding the boundaries of a city can be used as a planning tool to revitalize and redistribute funds/planning efforts at downtown revitalization.<sup>4</sup>

Rusk’s argument is to politically link the central city with the suburbs has found some criticism. First, the notion that increases to central city population and economic functions can be gained through elastic boundaries is really a false notion of growth. It merely expands, in a geographic sense, the definition of a central city; a shell game of how people are counted as part of the central city or suburbs. Other researchers have questioned whether elastic cities really do enhance the economic and other prospects of both the central city and suburbs. Indeed, the elasticity hypothesis is premised on the development of greenfield sites which is where the bulk of a metropolitan area’s economic development will and should take place. Blair et al., argue that Rusk’s hypothesis does not adequately take into account the reuse, redevelopment or conversion of central city properties as a means to economic development. They propose an alternate theory of land redevelopment.<sup>5</sup> Such ideas are revisited in the Section 4.

## 2.3. Geographic Terms

Although, both statistical and political definitions, noted above, have a geographic component, there are a number of other terms, developed by urban scholars, to define the ‘downtown’.

### 2.3.1. Central Business District

The central business district is a geographic term used to identify the commercial core or economic ‘heart’ of the city. This area usually contains the highest density, market rents and service functions of commercial and office activities. The links with the economic core of the central city with emerging post-industrial suburban employment trends has received much attention in the literature and is reviewed in Section 4.

### 2.3.2. City/Core/Urban Neighborhood

The area surrounding the central business district is usually referred to as the inner city. This area is dominated by low income residential land use, decaying industrial land and much vacant land. This is coupled with the real and perceived severe and high concentration of social ills (poverty, crime, homelessness etc). It is this inner city area that has received a great deal of attention from researchers and policy makers regarding the improvement and renewal of such degraded residential areas. The well documented flight of middle-upper class white Americans and the restructuring of the economy from industrial production to post-industrial information/service based functions are two primary causes leading to a decline of inner city urban neighborhoods. There is considerable research on the ills of such decaying neighborhoods and volumes of policy and plan-

ning prescriptions, but little research has been conducted on what are the inherent or latent potentials of such areas.<sup>6</sup> What is generally offered in the published research are a few studies reviewing “best practices” of apparently successful case studies or pilot projects in urban renewal. Further, the relationship between inner city neighborhoods and the central business district has also received some attention from urban scholars. These studies are reviewed in various section below.

### 2.3.3. “Edge Cities”

Fantastic demographic and economic trends in the suburbs and areas beyond have required urban researchers to build a new vocabulary to adequately describe such developments. Edge Cities is a term coined by Joel Garraeu. He defines ‘edge cities’ as a substantial concentration of office and industrial complexes located some distance from the central business district. He conceptualizes such ‘edge cities’ as existing more or less autonomously from the established urban core, i.e., the traditional central business district.<sup>7</sup> Researchers studying new urban forms, such as Garraeu, however, have concentrated on defining these new peripheral entities, but have paid little attention to their economic inter-connections with other locations, particularly the central city. In this vein “...the policy implications of edge-city hypothesis are that edge cities need not be particularly concerned with the economic vitality of central cities”<sup>8</sup> must be challenged by researchers interested in downtown renewal. Thus, research on downtown revitalization is justified when couched in a comparative study of the larger metropolitan economic framework, something neglected by urban scholars anxious to study only newer forms of development on the periphery of metropolitan areas. Specific research that has investigated the complex ties between the central city and suburb is examined in Section 4 of this report.

## 3. Demographic Trends

This section examines the demographic trends in both the suburbs and the central city. It reveals a body of research that has shown a significant reversal or turnaround in the dominant post-war suburban population growth. The recent and projected increases in central city populations warrant the study of downtown revitalization.

### 3.1. Suburban Population Explosion

Clearly the trend over the post-WWII decades has witnessed a rapid decline in central city population growth and a corresponding boom in suburb residential growth. (Indeed, some cities have experienced absolute declines in inner city populations). In 1950 more than half of Americans that lived in metropolitan areas were central city residents, but by 1990 this proportion declined to less than a third.

### 3.2. Cities Bucking the Suburban Trend

Research is beginning to document a reversal of past trends of suburban gain and inner city decline. Researchers are now finding that recent trends and future population projections reveal the downtown to be a growing destination for an increasing number of residents. In general, the research, discussed below, suggests that suburbs are not autonomous economic and demographic entities, but continue to have important relations with the central city.

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A survey, undertaken by the Brookings Institution, of projected population growth in selected downtowns found that there is a population boom projected for many US downtowns. This survey examined a sample of twenty-four US downtown areas. A conservative definition of downtown was used that included the traditional financial district (CBD), but excluded surrounding residential neighborhoods. Based on this definition, the survey discovered that all of the sampled cities were projecting increases to their downtown residential populations. Highlights of this survey are as follows:

- downtown gains are being made for older industrial cities (e.g., Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit) that have traditionally seen dramatic inner city population declines since WWII
- trend in projected downtown population gains include cities from all regions of the US including the northeast, midwest, and sunbelt cities
- some cities are expected to make dramatic gains in downtown populations. For example, the city of Houston’s downtown population is expected to quadruple, while Memphis and Seattle project a doubling of downtown residents in the next ten years.<sup>9</sup>

Research published by Adams et al. reveals interesting inter-relationships between city and suburb population growth and migration trends. In this research, twenty-nine northeastern SMAs and twenty-two southwestern SMAs were examined with respect to migration rates (city-to-suburb, suburb-to-city, outside-to-city, and outside-to-suburb) as compared to urban hardship conditions for two periods, 1975-80 and 1985-90. Urban hardship conditions measured the strength or weakness of central cities, e.g., agglomeration economies, waterfront parks, cultural districts and pedestrian malls etc. Thus, the research reveals the relationship between migration patterns and the strength and weakness of the central city.

Their key findings are summarized as follows:

- evidence of a strong complementary relation between central city and the growth and vitality of its suburbs....
- city-to-suburb migration in the Northeast and North Central regions and outside-to-suburb migration in the South and West continue to be positively reinforced by the relative strength of the central city.
- metropolitan suburbs benefit from associating with strong, not weak, central cities
- strong central cities appear to positively reinforce naturally evolving patterns of suburbanization...
- weaker central cities appear to exert a negative influence on metropolitan suburbanization, with a higher proportion of those migrating out of the central city moving to locations outside the SMSA.<sup>10</sup>

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The findings of Adams et al. have important implications for understanding city-suburb demographic and economic inter-relationships. The upshot of their research is that a strong and healthy central city will attract people to its surrounding suburbs both from its own downtown core as well as other metropolitan areas. Thus, investments and strategic planning efforts at revitalizing and improving central cities will also help to stimulate growth in adjacent suburbs. Whereas central city population reductions will not be gained by the adjacent suburbs, but more likely to other metropolitan areas. This research, therefore, raises important questions regarding the nature of city-suburban economic links and inter-relationships. This is the topic of the next section.

#### 4. Economic Inter-Relationships Between City and Suburbs

Researchers have also studied the economies of both central cities and suburbs to examine trends, connections and relationships. The traditional view has posited the idea that businesses (e.g., manufacturing, retail and commercial enterprises) have also left the central cities for the suburbs following established demographic trends. This traditional view of the suburbs replacing the economic functions of the downtown is challenged by a number of researchers.

To begin with, Brennan and Hill provide an analysis of private sector job growth in both the central cities and suburbs of ninety-two large US metropolitan areas between 1993 and 1996. They use the US Census Bureau's definition of central city coupled with data from Social Security tax payments by employers to calculate the number of city and suburb private sector jobs. Their research divides metropolitan areas into three types:

- *central cities that gained jobs, but their suburbs gained them faster* - half of America's largest central cities had positive employment growth rates from 1993 to 1996 but their suburbs grew at a faster rate;
- *central cities lost jobs while suburbs gained them* - one quarter of the central cities experienced employment losses while their suburbs enjoyed employment gains; and
- *central cities outpaced suburbs in job growth* - nearly 20 percent of the cities had positive employment growth rates that exceeded the growth rates in their suburbs.<sup>11</sup>

Brennan and Hill also calculated the city/suburban market share of metropolitan jobs. They found that 82 percent of all sampled metropolitan areas experienced a reduction in the city's share of jobs between 1993 and 1996. Although, this research paints a bleak picture with respect to the economic health of downtowns versus the suburbs, it does present data on cities that increased their number of jobs over the study period and in some cases this was faster than suburban employment gains. Thus, suburban employment gains and central city employment losses are not a phenomenon experienced by all<sup>12</sup> metropolitan areas in the United States. This fact raises a number of questions regarding the reasons why a sample of central cities "bucked" the suburban job growth trend. What factors, conditions and circumstances led to a central city victory in job

gains over the suburbs? Could such factors be replicated by central cities experiencing absolute and/or relative declines in jobs? Should researchers and policy makers think twice before assuming that economic trends favor the suburbs over the central city?

Research by Savitch et al., also found that central cities and suburbs are highly interdependent and that "...neither suburbs nor central cities are self-sufficient". Their research examines key economic variables such as income, price of suburban/downtown office space, etc. They conclude the following:

- suburban per capita income is linked to central city per capital income;
- the price of peripheral "edge city" office space is linked to the price of office space in the central business district;
- the mark for a healthy suburb is not self-sufficiency, but interaction with a high-density, prosperous urban core.

Thus, research by Savitch et al. lends support to planning strategies and efforts since the fortunes of the suburb and central city are closely interwoven.

## 5. Economic Geography of Businesses: Comparative Advantages of the "Inner City"

The above section examined the larger trends and economic relationships between the central city and the suburb. This section will take a finer look at location and investment trends with respect to key businesses, such as retailing, service economy etc.

What kind of comparative or competitive advantage does the "inner-city" have over other locations, e.g., suburbs, edge cities, metropolitan/nonmetropolitan? What types of businesses and other activities can benefit from the apparent advantages of the inner city? There is a body of literature that suggests the continued agglomeration economies still accrue to the downtown area with respect to certain key industries. In particular, Michael Porter presented a major polemic on the advantages of the inner city in an 1995 article published in the *Harvard Business Review* and subsequently elaborated upon in a book edited by Boston and Ross. This edited volume also includes a number of critiques and commentaries on Porter's original article.<sup>13</sup> In brief, Porter's develops an argument regarding the competitive advantages of the inner city by identifying four key areas: strategic location, local market demand, relations to regional clusters and human resources.

### 5.1. Services, Office Functions and Retail Functions

A major study by Schwartz examined the service linkages between companies located in the suburbs and the central city. His database consisted of five thousand major public and private corporations. These corporations were mapped to the geographic locations of central cities, satellite cities, suburbs and nonmetropolitan areas and their service (e.g., financial and producer) linkages with other firms in the same or other locations were measured. His findings are summarized below:

- central city companies seldom rely on service providers based in suburbs or satellite cities
- central city companies rely considerably more often on firms in other metropolitan regions than on firms within their own city....
- suburban companies remain far more dependent on central city service providers than on suburban service providers
- the nation's suburbs...remain dependent on the central city for certain financial and professional services. Suburbia does not yet comprise an economically autonomous "outer city" or "edge city"
- with suburban and satellite city companies relying mostly on service firms located in their central city or in other metropolitan areas, suburban development may not undermine the vitality of the central city as a service center.
- the main competitors for central city-based service firms are located not in the suburbs of their metropolitan area but in the central cities of other metropolitan areas.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, research by Schwartz, clearly shows that central cities continue to enjoy the benefits of agglomeration economies with respect to corporate services. Thus, future planning efforts and strategies should work to maintain, foster and even enhance such economies of scale accruing to service activities in downtown locations.

Other research has shown that recent retail investments in the inner city reveal that corporations are beginning to realize the advantages of a downtown location. In particular, Gentry documents a number of positive trends in downtown retailing.

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She notes that retail developers are beginning to understand inner-city demographics, economics and market opportunities. There is an untapped market potential in inner-cities as she notes that "...less affluent does not necessarily mean less money spent on retail." She also quotes a retail survey that concludes that the "...boroughs of New York have some of the most under served markets in the country." Thus, the misconceptions of the retail industry regarding the market potential are breaking down. Furthermore, retailers such as Walmart, long known from their large horizontal single story "big box" suburban retail developments, are beginning to realize the advantages and marketing of vertical (i.e., multi-story) retail structures in downtown locations.

Gentry also notes a number of recent advantage of inner-city retailing: young professionals residing in inner city neighborhoods, increased commuter and convention traffic, and a sizable shortage of both retailers and retail space. The population density and discretionary income of inner city neighborhoods also create a favorable investment climate for retailers.<sup>15</sup> This is discussed further in Section 5.3.

## 5.2. Strategic Location

Strategic location, notes Porter, refers to the proximity of inner city neighborhoods to high rent areas, major business centers, and transportation and communication nodes. Research has shown that neighborhoods adjacent to the central business district are upgrading. Dennison notes the specific advantages of brownfield sites (discussed also in Section 5.4) which include its strategic proximity to labor, materials and final output markets, access to transportation facilities, access to exiting roads, water, sewer, and electric power as well as exiting structures.<sup>16</sup>

Understanding the geography of businesses is also critical to any research on downtown revitalization. The geography of business has two important aspects: i) geography of function and ii) lifecycle stage.

### 5.2.1. Business Geography by Function

Studies of the geography of business note that different businesses have different locational needs, with some businesses separating their operations spatially among several locations within one metropolitan area or among several metropolitan areas. For example, corporate headquarters have specific locational priorities that can be satisfied best in the central city:

- accessible international air service;
- high-end hotels, restaurants, entertainment, cultural events; major league sports teams/stadium with skyboxes to facilitate heavy inter-company face-to-face interaction;
- professional support services;
- diverse professional employee base;
- attractive housing for executives, affordable housing for managers and support staff within reasonable commute; and
- strong educational system for employee's children and continuing adult education<sup>17</sup>

Thus, downtown revitalization strategies could cater to the locational needs of headquarters. Other business functions that seek out central city locations include research and development. Such functions usually require proximity to universities, highly educated workforce and lifestyle amenities that are attractive to high technology workers - a good example is New York's "Silicon Alley". Other business functions such as back office, manufacturing and distribution are more sensitive to real estate costs as well as require more space and thus avoid central cities in favor of suburban or nonmetropolitan locations. Thus, research on the geography of businesses shows that the central city holds certain advantages for some business functions but disadvantages for other types of functions. Thus, the trick in revitalization strategies will be to correctly identify the business functions that the central city can best satisfy.

### 5.2.2. Lifecycle Model of Businesses and Products

The lifecycle model of business and product development suggests that "...location requirements differ depending on the maturity of a company's product."<sup>18</sup> In the research and development stage a company will value a downtown location since it is young and requires external links to producer services as well as the premium placed on an urban lifestyle by its youthful employees. In this early stage space is not very important. However as a product and its company moves toward standardization and mass production the company shifts to more periph-

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## US inner cities have a “vast and untapped market potential”.

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eral locations such as the suburbs, nonmetropolitan locations or even overseas. Such locational shifts are necessary as the company requires low cost and less skilled labor as well as more land for factory production. Thus, downtown revitalization strategies are important in targeting and benefiting small, upstart, young companies who are desiring a central city location.

### 5.3. Market Potential

The business potential of central cities, mentioned in the research by Gentry, noted above, has been the specific attention of other researchers. Porter argues that inner city markets are poorly served and represent “immediate opportunities for inner-city-based entrepreneurs and businesses”. He confidently states that, “...inner city consumers...represent a major growth market of the future...”.<sup>19</sup> He bases this optimistic view on a number of factors: i) the lack of retail establishments in the inner city, ii) the large size and density of consumers more than makes up for the lower average incomes when compared with suburban consumers, iii) market character is very heterogeneous in terms of ethnic and social characteristics providing opportunities for inner city business to development niche markets, iv) given the diverse consumer base... inner cities will challenge businesses to be innovative in product development and marketing - a key advantage in an increasingly competitive global economy and iv) inner-city business have the ability to conduct businesses world-wide.

Weissbourd and Berry have examined the market potential of inner-city neighborhoods. Their research supports many of the claims made by Porter as noted above. They also identify inner city neighborhoods as “emerging markets” that have an “... enormous potential for attracting business.” Their research can be divided into three components: i) understanding emerging inner city markets, ii) lack of market information, and iii) market responses.<sup>20</sup>

Weissbourd and Berry state that US inner cities have a “vast and untapped market potential” which is currently not well understood by the business community. One component of this potential is density which improves the buying power of inner city neighborhoods in the face of depressed or lower than average incomes. For example, Chicago’s South Shore, a poor inner-city neighborhood, has a median family income of \$22,000 which is far lower than the \$124,000 recorded for the affluent suburban neighborhood of Kenilworth. Yet, the South Shore’s retail spending power per acre is \$69,000, far higher than that of Kenilworth which is only \$38,000.

Weissbourd and Berry also note that annual income and other more traditional estimates of market potential work to severely underestimate the economic strength of inner city neighborhoods. They specifically note that the unreported economy of the inner city is not easily measured nor factored into consumer expenditure data and market analysis. They conclude that the underestimation of inner-city markets leads to under-investment and lack of business confidence in downtown areas. This contributes to the continued poverty and decay of many inner city neighborhoods.

This research also found that the absence of strong inner-city competition or even availability of services and goods drive inner city residents to establishments in peripheral locations. Their research on inner-city neighborhoods in Chicago found that between 62 and 72 percent of inner city residents expenditures were made outside their own neighborhoods. This is considerably higher than the 37 percent of outside expenditures by residents of suburban neighborhoods. This “leakage”, the authors conclude, represents a significant opportunity for businesses willing to invest in the inner city. In fact, the researchers present a number of case study businesses that have reported substantial demand for their goods and services in inner city neighborhoods.

Weissbourd and Berry’s research also note that a significant barrier to business investment in the inner city is a huge “information gap.” What is needed is reliable data on the overall market potential of the inner city as well as on the niche market opportunities. They note two specific areas leading to this “information gap”: i) the US Census Bureau and the reliance on reported income provides a negative bias on market potential for inner city neighborhoods - this in the face of clear evidence that “...less affluent consumers spend more than their reported incomes.” A need is thus established for more sophisticated measures of income as well as expenditure data. ii) Data on consumer expenditures such as the Consumer Expenditure Survey provides results at the national scale, but a finer break-down of urban neighborhoods is not possible - making it useless to estimate market demand within inner city neighborhoods.

All in all, researchers have shown that the inner city is an emerging and untapped market. This justifies a research agenda that can provide a better understanding of the economy of inner cities to support business investments. Without such an understanding the information gap will continue and the investment community (banks, businesses etc.) will continue to shy

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away from downtown areas. In short, better economic information is needed.

#### 5.4. Urban Land Values and (Re)Development Potential

Does the redevelopment of central city land (sometimes referred to as brownfield sites) hold any advantages to the development of vacant land or greenfield sites located in the suburbs or beyond?<sup>21</sup> More research is required to adequately answer this question. As it stands there is merely anecdotal evidence that the reuse, redevelopment and renewal of older inner city properties and buildings is economically, environmentally and culturally more beneficial than constructing newer buildings on vacant suburban or nonmetropolitan locations.

For example, Dennison concludes that the “...site preparation costs of a brownfields redevelopment project are significantly lower than cost associated with developing raw land” and he goes on to state that “...potential profits realized from the recycling of a brownfield site may be greater than those available from the development of a ‘greenfield’...”<sup>22</sup> Two factors contribute to this potential profit: i) brownfields have a prime location but land prices are discounted by the uncertainty or stigma regarding its environmental context and conditions and ii) the numerous financing strategies offered by both state and local governments.

Although Barrnet states that due to abandoned sites and open tracts of city land the redevelopment potential of American inner cities is greater than it has been since the 1960s, many of these sites contain a number of unknowns such as legal ownership, environmental contamination, and other liabilities.<sup>23</sup> In any event most attempts at revitalizing central cities must determine the costs and benefits of (re)developing brownfield properties.

However not all brownfield sites should be treated equally in terms of their redevelopment potential by both the private and public sectors. For example, Page and Rabinowitz hypothesize that “...the potential for redevelopment becomes less as the risk of contamination increases, with risk of contamination measured by the costs of environmental cleanup plus the risks of environmental liability and potential delay.”<sup>24</sup> They propose a redevelopment threshold for brownfield sites that measures risk of contamination against the expected return on investment. Similarly, Dennison identifies three broad types of brownfield sites:

- i) *viable sites* - sites that either have very low potential environmental liability or such high potential rates of return that the advantages clearly outweigh the financial risks;
- ii) *threshold sites* - sites that are only marginally viable and will not be redeveloped without some type of public assistance; and
- iii) *nonviable sites* - sites that have a strong potential for environmental liability and/or have minimal economic advantages.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the assessment of risk potential of brownfield sites is found to be exaggerated by the private sector. Research conducted by Yount and Meyer found that “...bankers and developers may act on the bases of distorted judgments...Brownfield sites tend to exhibit characteristics that lead individuals to overstate the risks associated with them (i.e., uncertainty and lack of controllability).”<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the advantages of brownfield sites may be minimized by perceptions of the business community. Overall, published research on brownfields suggest that the inner city is not a complete write-off in terms of renewal and redevelopment; certain key brownfield sites have clear advantages and redevelopment potential. Continued research is thus warranted to improve the accounting and assessment of cost and benefits of brownfield sites within a central city which is critical to any revitalization strategy.

## 6. Transportation and Other Infrastructure

### 6.1. The Pedestrian Advantages of Downtowns

Many researchers have found that, “the vitality and positive image of a downtown often are gauged not by economic indicators, but the volume of pedestrian activity.”<sup>27</sup> Robertson studied two popular planning innovations in downtown pedestrian movement: downtown pedestrian malls and skywalks. He noted that the pedestrian mall was able to improve the downtown image by capturing some of the ambience of European cities. While pedestrian skywalks created a more modern image and

assisted in the circulation of pedestrians among various buildings in the downtown area. Skywalks also helped to replicated some of the conditions of the popular enclosed suburban shopping mall.<sup>28</sup>

Waterfront Developments, Historic Districts/Streets and Festival Market Places have been developed as pedestrian retail environments that have given the central city an advantage over, or ways of successfully competing with, the suburban shopping mall. Waterfronts offer amenities and experiences not commonly found in the suburbs. Thus the planning and design of waterfronts is a major advantage that the city has in competing with the suburbs. However, the redevelopment of waterfronts is no easy task.<sup>29</sup>

History is another asset of the central city. The renovation of historic streets/districts or the creation of festival market places has proven to be one vehicle through which downtowns could be revitalized.

## 6.2. Urban Cultural Amenities

Downtowns have proven themselves to be great environments for entertainment and tourist facilities. Kasarda et al. noted that the "...central cities offer many amenities that large numbers of people find appealing. These amenities include a rich diversity of population groups and lifestyles, historically significant residential architecture, extensive nighttime entertainment options, ethnic restaurants, offbeat shops and services..."<sup>30</sup> The combination of historic streetscapes, waterfronts, theaters, sporting and other entertainment complexes has enable the central city to play a leading role in the provision of cultural amenities. The key economic sector of the post-industrial era is tourism and therefore the central city will play a leading role in supporting this economic generator.

## 7. Smart Growth and Compact Development Planning Strategies

Redevelopment of inner city areas has been shown by some researchers to have proven economic, social and environmental advantages over continued developments in peripheral locations (i.e., greenfields). Revitalization of downtowns can be included as part of a broad planning strategy of achieving more compact developments and minimizing the amount of suburban/rural sprawl. The cost of sprawl is well documented. It should be noted, however, that some disagreements exist over how the cost of sprawl vis-à-vis the benefits of compact development can be accurately measured.<sup>31</sup>

Shore's research presents thirteen arguments supporting a strong downtown:

- lifestyle choice;
- solutions to traffic and congestion;
- energy saving;
- mobility for those who can't drive;
- conservation of investment, i.e., continued full use of existing infrastructure;
- conservation of land;
- environmental saving;
- more efficient business climate, i.e., power of face-to-face contact;
- more cultural activities and other services that require support by large communities;
- focus for a sense of community;
- logical areas for local government;
- aesthetic superiority; and
- better health.<sup>32</sup>

## 8. City Images and Symbols

New office, retail and industrial complexes emerging in the suburbs and edge cities lack the ability to define a city's or urban region's image. Many researchers have commented on the lack of uniqueness to such suburban/edge developments.<sup>33</sup> The images of new landscapes can not challenge or easily replace the symbolic landscapes found in the 'inner-city'. On this point, urban scholar Peter Dreier concludes that, "The reputation and viability of the entire metropolitan area is shaped by impressions of the central city."<sup>34</sup> In this respect, building upon the central city's "sense of place" was seen as an important strategy in the urban renewal of Cleveland and Phoenix.<sup>35</sup>

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**Redevelopment of inner city areas has been shown... to have proven economic, social and environmental advantages...**

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A growing number of studies have examined how and why cities are involved in image building and place marketing. Thus, as cities are becoming more entrepreneurial, the marketing of the city is becoming more important. This heightens the importance of downtown revitalization as it can work to build, foster and enhance a city-region's image on the national and global stage.<sup>36</sup>

central cities have the ability and potential to attract young and dynamic companies.

Successful redevelopment of waterfront areas of many central cities was based not just on improvements to the physical environment, but also the ability of change the image of the waterfront from an abandoned and derelict wasteland to an interesting and inviting place.<sup>37</sup> Thus, redevelopment of downtowns can be a major boost to establishing a positive and unique image of a city and its metropolitan area. This should help in promoting and marketing the city in a global economy that is seeing increasingly fierce competition among cities for external investment.

## 9. Conclusion

This report supports continued study and planning effort at revitalizing downtown areas. Several key points are highlighted:

- confusion over the **definition of downtown** needs to be sorted out. No uniform definition exists regarding the geographic, economic and political definition of "downtown". Continued disagreement will hamper research and will negatively affect policy choices with respect to downtown revitalization;
- **recent demographic trends** as well as projections show that the central city will increase in population. Research is needed to properly understand the causes, trends and policy implications of such demographic gains by the central city;
- previous research clearly establishes close and complex **economic linkages between the central city and suburbs**. Research on downtown revitalization is justified as efforts to renew inner city areas will aid the entire metropolitan area.
- through **agglomeration economies**, the central city maintains its advantage in the key economic sectors of producer/office services and functions;
- central cities have the ability and potential to **attract young and dynamic companies**.
- researchers have shown that the **inner city is an emerging and untapped market**. Yet more research is clearly needed to better understand this market potential;
- certain key **brownfield sites have clear advantages** and redevelopment potential
- downtown revitalization can be a key component to **realizing the economic, environmental and social advantages of compact development**; and
- **downtown revitalization** can work to build, foster and enhance a city-region's **image**.

**LIVABLE** communities don't just **HAPPEN**.  
The are **CREATED** by the **PEOPLE** who **LIVE** in them.

## ENDNOTES

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