



## URBAN MAGNETS

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Mark lived close to Granville Island in Vancouver for years and became fascinated with why it had so much vitality and success, when so many other commercial areas and community downtowns struggled or failed. Following years of considering its design, land use, regulatory and other aspects, he created the Urban Magnet concept and equation. (It was originally called “activity precincts” but renamed to “Urban Magnets” by Norbert Jakube).

Mark then began working with other colleagues and the architects for Granville Island to further explore and develop the concept. He and his colleagues have now written a book on the topic, which is expected to be published in 2018.

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## The concept of an urban magnet is built on the following core principles:

### **ACTIVITY IS THE NEW COMMUNITY**

In a fragmented world, we now identify and spend time with people who like to “do” the things we like to do, more than those who simply live near us (old style community), and thus, our culture is now a mosaic of “activity subculture” of which each of us identifies with and belong to several.

### **THE GAWKING PRINCIPLE**

When an activity subculture begins to occupy a specific urban location and live out loud, the rest of us come to watch – and sometimes join in.

### **THE BONFIRE PRINCIPLE**

Places in cities that are highly attractive to and populated by subcultures who “live out loud,” become very interesting, unique and attract others. This builds a small fire into a bonfire, triggering more attention, business growth, social activity and success.

### **THE LIVING ROOM PRINCIPLE**

In order to attract an animating subculture, we need to make small areas of the city into “living rooms” or “recreation rooms” for these subcultures – places that support their desired activities and that reflect their identity and values in its urban form.

### **THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF AN URBAN MAGNET**

Creating a small place that becomes a major source of vitality in a community involves planning, zoning, designing and operating to address or provide six things:

#### **1. A CORE ANIMATING ACTIVITY SUBCULTURE**

Each magnet needs a core animating activity subculture, usually based around leisure or hobby activities that they love to do, such as music, mountain biking, making beer, quilting, skateboarding, or many others.



## **2. SPECIALTY RETAIL**

Each activity subculture needs specialty equipment or materials and a Magnet will have specialty retail that sells these unique goods.

## **3. A PRODUCTION OR REPAIR OF EQUIPMENT OR OTHER GOODS**

The materials, goods or equipment that is needed needs to be created and repaired and a deep sense of identity and a diverse economy can be created by including these uses in the Magnet, such as making bicycles, food, beer, clothing, furniture, and others.

## **4. EDUCATION AND INSTITUTIONS**

There are many skills involved in these activities and the teaching of that knowledge and those skills combined with organizations that promote the activity or related issues, creates a continuity of knowledge, organized action, and the ability of people to learn and join the subculture.

## **5. EVENTS**

Events are critically important to draw the subculture together in a highly visible way to celebrate, show off, generate money and become known for what they do. This is one of the key ways a subculture can take over public space, become seen and attract new subculture members.

## **6. UNIQUE URBAN FORM**

Finally, in order to be attractive to the subculture and be visible to the rest of us, it helps if the Magnet has some unique urban formal elements that support the activities and appears somewhat different than its surrounding urban fabric.

