

SHOPPING CENTER DEVELOPMENT AND THE DENSIFICATION OF NEW SUBURBAN CORES

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Overview

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the evolving relationship between shopping centers and their immediate surroundings, in particular as large malls are acquiring characteristics of town centers in their own right. This transformation suggests that shopping centers may serve to anchor suburban areas, both physically and socially, and thereby help to foster smarter growth. Yet despite the interest in creating more mixed-use environments with distinct identities, the quality of the interface between commercial and residential areas has remained fairly neglected, both in practice and in research.

The research focuses on Laval, a suburb of Montreal, and Sainte-Foy, a suburb of Quebec City, in Quebec, Canada. Through a study of spatial forms and land-uses (morphological and functional analysis), it documents how five shopping centers and their environments changed over time and how the interface between them evolved. In so doing, it highlights the critical role of shopping centers in creating suburban nodes characterized by higher densities and mixed uses.

In Laval and Sainte-Foy, as in other suburbs of the North

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American continent, adding entertainment venues and institutional functions to shopping centers, attracting multi-family housing, office space and public facilities around them, and tying public-transit routes to them have all helped to turn regional shopping facilities into focal points of suburban life, fostering development along more sustainable lines. Yet the diversification and intensification of land-use has not been accompanied by corresponding changes in the urban fabric, in particular in the links between shopping centers and their immediate environment. This lack of private and public action with respect to local urban form has prevented the shopping center from becoming a true community focus and from contributing to a distinct sense of place.



■ Introduction

In the 20th century, the appearance of the automobile as a means of mass transportation radically transformed the distribution of urban commercial space. As a result, cities have become more scattered in both form and population, and the process of locating commercial buildings has had to adapt to this new situation of progressive dispersion. Longstreth's analysis of the transformation of commercial buildings in Los Angeles during the first half of the 20th century underlines the adaptive nature of commercial development, as illustrated by the adaptation of new building types to the automobile era (Longstreth, 1997, 1999). The shopping center eventually emerged in response to the new demands of a scattered suburban population. In turn, by overriding the growing division between home and commerce, it gave suburbia a more mixed-use character (Dyer, 1998).

During the past few decades, shopping centers have acquired a new character with the densification and progressive transformation of their internal spaces. Instead of being mere agglomerations of stores, they have become true central places in the suburbs (Roulac, 1996). Shopping centers house an increasing number of activities, making them increasingly animated and extremely attractive to suburban populations (Kass, 1994; Spellmeyer, 1993). Additional service functions such as restaurants, cinemas, amusement parks, night clubs, and even certain public activities such as libraries, banks, post offices and municipal offices have appeared alongside existing commercial functions. This multi-purpose functionality accentuates the dominant position of shopping centers in the contempo-

rary suburban milieu. There is, however, still much room for improvement.

The evolution of the shopping center into a larger, more varied and more public place is also linked to the densification of the surrounding urban fabric. The first suburbs, which were essentially bedroom communities, have been densified through time and have become, in their actual make-up, partially self-sufficient urban entities. The presence of work places, schools, university campuses, amusement venues and commercial facilities gives these suburbs an autonomy that their predecessors did not have.

These new urban poles, independent of the traditional downtown cores, are not only service centers but also locations for residential building types that, until recently, were generally not seen outside of central cities. While single-family dwellings dominated the landscape of early suburbs, mid- and high-density residential buildings have gone up in increasing numbers near commercial centers. In a study of the Seattle region, Vernez Moudon and Hess (2000) observed this phenomenon of mixed land uses and mixed housing types around medium-sized commercial developments. This new reality challenges our traditional perception of suburban commercial environments and of suburbia in general.

Many researchers (e.g., Vernez Moudon, 1992) have analyzed the modifications of urban peripheries. As said, suburban areas have grown more complex and have acquired a larger autonomy from the city core. This suburban development has resulted in the appearance of multi-functional and specialized urban fabrics with shopping centers, office buildings and community services. "Technoburbs" (Fishman, 1987) and "edge cities" (Garreau, 1991) have turned urban agglomerations into poly-nucleated metropolitan areas. A similar change can be witnessed at the level of the shopping center itself. During the past few decades, it has been modified profoundly, in large part to meet public demand for additional goods and services, and it has become a preferred location of entertainment in the suburb (Evans, 1999).

If the arrival of the shopping center altered the composition of the early suburb, the subsequent consolidation of the suburb also drove the transformation of the shopping center. In turn, as malls became privately owned, public spaces that cater to the varied demands of the community, they helped to consolidate suburban areas. The contribution of shopping centers to the birth of urban poles away from the traditional city center has been documented, for instance in the case of Quebec City (Moretti, 1999), where density and multi-functionality have emerged on the interface between shopping centers and adjacent suburban areas. Thus shopping centers may be seen as a catalyst not only for suburban growth, which is often negatively perceived as sprawl, but also for suburban

densification, which is taken to be a means of growth management. In the new “downtowns” that many municipalities want to acquire as a means of competing against other suburbs farther out in the periphery, large shopping centers are often key elements of the scheme (Boughton, 2001).

The literature on the physical development of shopping centers focuses mainly on locational factors (Berry, 1967 and 1988; Christaller, 1966; Losch, 1954) and on their internal organization (Gruen and Smith, 1952 and 1960; Maitland, 1985 and 1990; McKeever and Griffin, 1977; Casazza, 1985; Beyard and O’Hara, 1999). The relationship of shopping centers to their immediate surroundings, both at the time of construction and in subsequent stages of growth, has been largely neglected. Few studies (e.g., Scheer and Petkov, 1998) have scrutinized this increasingly important aspect of contemporary suburban development. Yet the physical interaction of commercial areas and residential neighborhoods is of the utmost importance to the transformation of shopping malls into centers of suburban community life.

The problem is very much one of urban planning and design, in particular the design of the site on which shopping centers sit. Even though centers have expanded considerably in size and offer an ever-increasing range of services, their relationship to the surrounding environment is generally limited and they are accessible only through selected links, mostly by automobile. This lack of access limits the shopping center’s role as a real public space in the suburb, especially for younger and older people. The absence of integrated linkages to the surrounding suburban fabric also reduces the potential of the shopping center as a magnet for residential densification and suburban regeneration. Until quite recently, renovation efforts have been limited to changing the internal spaces of malls, even though their leasing area could be vastly increased by opening them up towards their environment.

That environment has been conceived exclusively for access by automobile. Shopping centers, as with the other buildings around them, are in fact islands unto themselves, despite the fact that they may be located immediately adjacent to one another. Even if new malls aim to function as “suburban downtowns,” they are generally plagued by uninhabitable spaces between buildings. This characteristic differentiates them from traditional downtown cores and deprives suburbanites of livable collective spaces.

Under the influence of New Urbanism and similar trends in contemporary urban design and planning, professionals and officials have come to realize more clearly the importance of ensuring a proper interface between commercial sites and their surroundings, both in terms of site design and in terms of area planning. A growing number of developers understand that a growth in size and a diversification of functions may not

be sufficient to make their projects successful in a competitive environment, and that what may be required is “putting some urb in the suburbs” (Lockwood, 1997). One way of injecting a sense of urbanity and a sense of place into a commercial development is to design it as a small downtown (Gose, 1999). Another, complementary, measure would be to tie the shopping center more clearly to the surrounding environment, making it more accessible to a variety of consumer groups. This might encourage a denser use of the surrounding area and thereby contribute, however modestly, to the fight against suburban sprawl.

The present study will focus on the following question: In what way has the growth of shopping centers influenced the physical and functional densification of suburban areas? Thus, at the same time as it would help to fill a gap in the understanding of how shopping centers relate to their surroundings, the inquiry would help to assess their role in fostering more sustainable development in the form of denser growth patterns.

■ Methodology

This research is based on the study of regional shopping centers in the Montreal suburb of Laval (Carrefour Laval, Centre Laval) and in the Quebec City suburb of Sainte-Foy (Place Sainte-Foy, Place Laurier, Place de la Cité). By analyzing the evolution of these shopping centers and of their respective contexts, one can shed light on the role that shopping centers in general have played in the development of suburban cores in North-American suburbs.

The analysis proceeded on two levels, formal and functional. The formal analysis was conducted according to the principles of urban morphology. This approach focuses on built forms at different scales and on their transformation over time. It has been developed by different schools in the fields of architecture, city planning and urban geography, first in Italy (Caniggia, 1963; Caniggia and Maffei, 1979; Muratori, 1959; Muratori et al, 1963; Aymonino et al., 1970), in France (Castex, Cèleste and Panerai, 1980) and in England (Conzen, 1960; Whitehand, 1987) and later in the United States (Vernez Moudon, 1986 and 1992).

The physical characteristics of the selected sites were recorded by means of plans and aerial photographs. Using plans and pictures from different years allowed us to reconstruct the evolution of the urban fabric over time and to identify the spatial dynamics that characterize the relationship between the shopping center and the surrounding urban fabric.

A more detailed reading of urban form pertained to the relationship between the building and its plot. The transition between the shopping center and the surrounding fabric plays a major role with regard to the urban integration of the building and the character of surrounding streets.

The functional analysis entailed a survey of the land uses around the shopping centers, at different points in time. The following building types were identified separately: shopping centers, office buildings, public facilities and multi-family housing. It is the agglomeration of these different building types, alongside the ubiquitous single-family home, that has given the chosen sites their special status within the suburban environment and has fostered the creation of new poles at the regional scale.

The morphological and functional analysis was complemented by demographic observations based on decennial census figures from Statistics Canada. The examination of changes in the local population allowed us to link the physical densification and diversification to the general process of suburban development in the region.

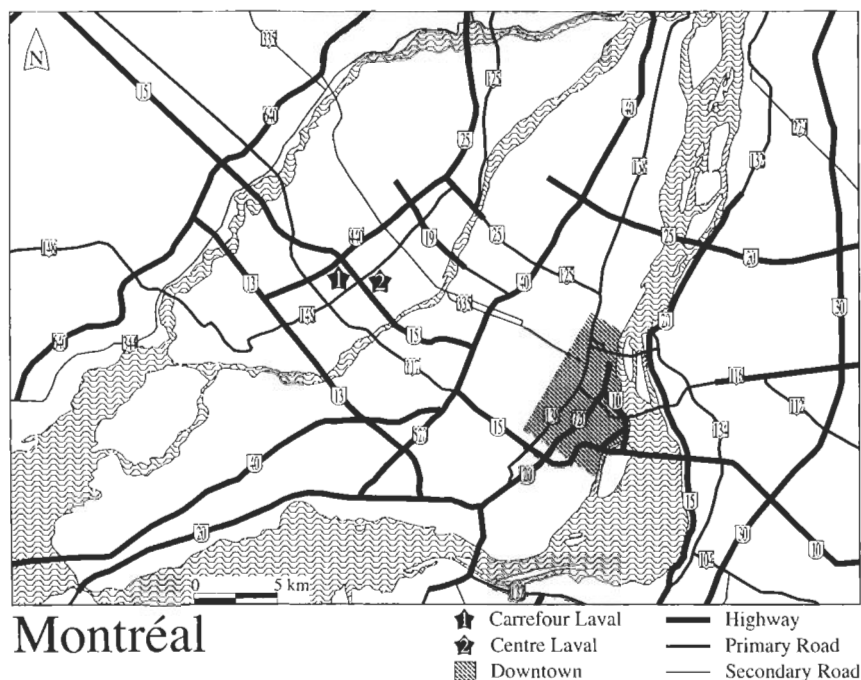
■ Suburban Development and Shopping Center Development in Laval and Sainte-Foy, 1950–1970

The end of World War II marked the beginning of important developments that deeply transformed the structure of North American cities. Fueled by renewed prosperity, a massive baby-boom and the rapid spread of the automobile as the predominant means of transportation, low-density development on suburban land marked a transition towards new urban forms (Rowe, 1991).

It is in this context that the Montreal and Quebec City suburbs developed. Here, as in countless other urban areas, the population left the central city in large numbers. Young families gave up their traditional urban housing environments for new suburban neighborhoods that were dominated by the single-family home. The presence of a growing number of households prompted the development of new commercial activities along with increased commuting to and from the central city.

These transportation patterns were a determining factor in the location of the first shopping centers. Sites along existing boulevards and new highways and especially at the intersection of major routes were places of choice for commercial development. In the Montreal suburb of Laval, the construction of the Laurentian Highway contributed to the location of Centre Laval, at the intersection with a major boulevard (Figure 1). In the Quebec City suburb of Sainte-Foy, Laurier Boulevard received the two first two shopping centers, Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier (Figure 2).

But if road patterns explain the location of shopping centers, their

FIGURE 1 MONTREAL REGION AND THE LOCATION OF LAVAL SHOPPING CENTERS.

(MAP BY PHILIPPE PAQUIN)

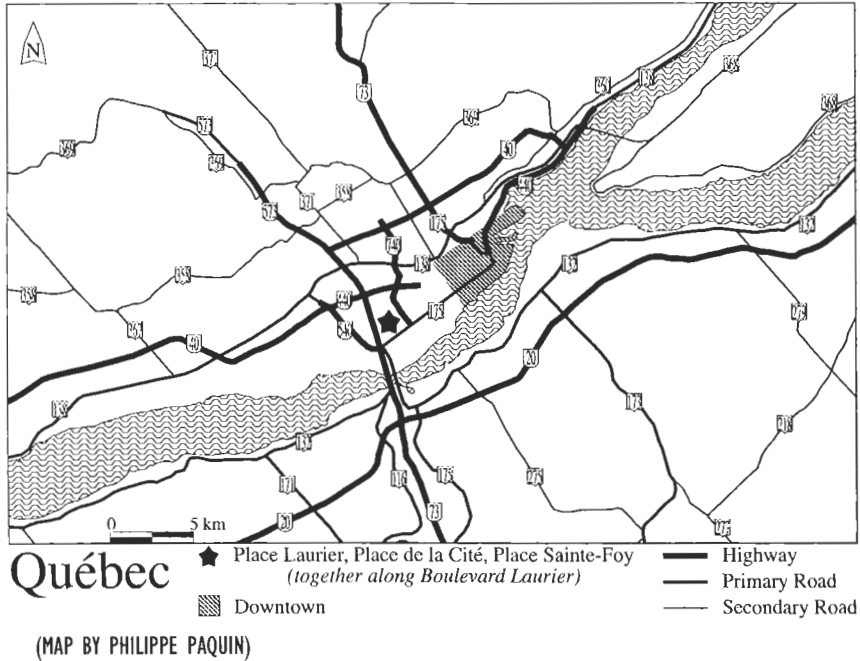
construction in turn marked the emergence of new poles, or destinations, in the scattered suburban territory. In Sainte-Foy in particular, this territorial polarization was strengthened by the arrival of other facilities, most notably public institutions. In both cases, office building and multi-family housing added to the functional mix of the new growth poles, and official Master Plans confirmed the role of these sites as new city centers in the growing suburbs.

Suburban Development on Jesus Island (Laval)

At the end of World War II, Jesus Island near Montreal was a predominantly agricultural region comprised of 14 municipalities. The pastoral nature of this land made it very attractive to Montreal's population, which had recently acquired a heightened level of mobility as a result of the automobile's surging popularity. The south bank of Jesus Island, along the Rivière des Prairies, became a favorite site for Montrealers to build their country cottages in the 1950s.

The economic recovery of the 1950s marked a turning point in Jesus Island's history. Its population increased spectacularly, from 14,731 in-

FIGURE 2 QUEBEC CITY REGION AND THE LOCATION OF THE SAINTE-FOY SHOPPING CENTERS.



habitants in 1951 to 76,688 inhabitants in 1961. The country homes along the Rivière des Prairies became regular residences and the river bank was rapidly urbanized.

The first suburbanization of the island was marked by the inherited territorial structure, in particular by the presence of old roads such as the Laurentides and Curé-Labelle boulevards. Via their respective bridges over the river, these axes linked Jesus Island to the Island of Montreal and facilitated access to the newly developing suburban areas.

At the end of the 1950s, the construction of the Laurentian Highway, which is the major axis into regions north of the Montreal metropolitan area, accelerated the suburbanization of Jesus Island. The residential build-up that began in a spontaneous manner along the Prairies River was intensified, spreading into the heart of the island. Until the 1960s, development occurred without overall planning, in the form of typical single-family subdivisions. Only the southern portion of the island, closest to Montreal, experienced much urbanization.

Yet ongoing growth led the provincial authorities to adopt an important measure in 1965. In the hope of fostering a more efficient and more orderly development of the island, the government decided to merge all 14 municipalities into a new municipality of Laval. Though the

amalgamation did not yield all the benefits expected of it (for instance in terms of infrastructure development and city finances), it did make it easier to plan for Jesus Island as a coherent whole.

In 1970, after lengthy debates, the new city of Laval adopted a master development plan. Its main goal was to foster the creation of a strong city center for a widely dispersed population. The new urban core was to be located to the north of the areas that urbanized during the 1950s and 1960s along the length of the Prairies River. This location was supported by the presence of existing infrastructure such as the Laurentian Highway, but also by that of the Centre Laval shopping center, built alongside the highway in 1967. The construction of this shopping center, strategically located in relation to the new residential neighborhoods, preceded the planning scheme for the City of Laval. In effect, the plan only strengthened an emerging reality.

Early Evolution of the Centre Laval Shopping Center

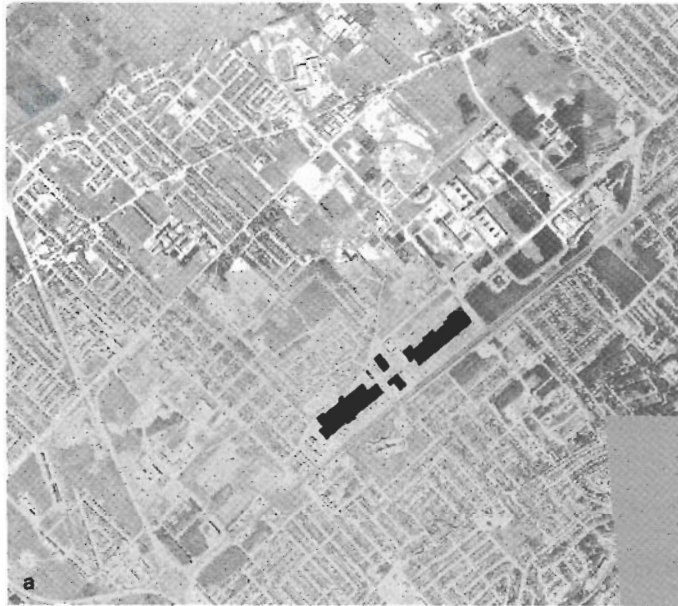
In 1967, only two years after the founding of the municipality of Laval, the Centre Laval shopping center was built at the intersection of the Laurentian Highway and Saint-Martin Boulevard, which was the only major east-west route on the island at that time. Thanks to its location, the new shopping center could attract shoppers coming from four directions. At the time of its creation, though, only the areas to the south were built up. The fact that the developers chose a location to the north of the urbanized area indicates that they felt optimistic about the potential for future suburban expansion in other parts of the island (Figure 3).

Centre Laval was constructed as a two-anchor shopping center with a covered mall, in the style of many shopping centers built during that era. It was clearly visible from the highway, though its only access was located on Le Corbusier Boulevard, a street parallel to the highway. A vast parking lot separated the building from the boulevard.

Centre Laval's positioning at the island's main circulation node proved to be a strategic decision for the evolution of the emerging suburb of Laval. Up until that time, commercial development had occurred only along two old boulevards, Laurentides Boulevard and Curé-Labelle Boulevard, which served as shopping and commuting axes for the first neighborhoods on the island. The construction of the shopping center led to the progressive decline of these routes and the eventual displacement of commercial development towards the new pole.

Without a doubt, the presence of the Laurentian Highway influenced the location of the shopping center. The intersection of Saint-

FIGURE 3 SHOPPING CENTER GROWTH AND URBAN DENSIFICATION IN LAVAL



3a URBAN FABRIC IN 1972



3b URBAN FABRIC IN 1979



3c URBAN FABRIC IN 1999
(GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, MINISTÈRE DES RESSOURCES NATURELLES)

Martin Boulevard with the highway was a highly traveled site with great visibility. But it was the construction of the Centre Laval that transformed a visible intersection, a transit pole, into a destination site, an economic pole.

The rapid growth of Laval's population, from 76,688 in 1961 to 118,440 in 1971, and the growing demand for goods and services resulted in Centre Laval's expansion in 1972. A movie theater was added in the west part of the building, near the highway. The introduction of this entertainment activity was an innovation for this suburb, and the cinema became an additional point of attraction alongside the department stores and the rest of the shopping center.

When Centre Laval was constructed, it was isolated from existing residential developments. In general, a great vacuum of agricultural land divided the shopping center from the residential neighborhoods to the south. The center's only real neighbor was a single-family residential development located on the north side of Saint-Martin Boulevard. But multi-family residential buildings appeared on Le Corbusier Boulevard in the 1970s, thus increasing local population density. Located near the new movie theater, these buildings added to the site's importance as a city hub.

At the same time, the first public facilities called for in the 1970 planning scheme were built, further helping to fill the vacuum around the shopping center. The new City Hall, which was meant to symbolize the consolidated city and to give unity to the scattered developments of the first suburbanization, was constructed on nearby Souvenir Boulevard.

These developments confirmed the fact that the Centre Laval shopping center constituted the main focal point for the whole of Laval.

Suburban Development in Sainte-Foy

In the Quebec City region, as in Montreal, suburban development in the 1950s proceeded along the lines set by the inherited territorial structure. For a while, the strong influence of the existing road network contained suburban expansion within a limited territory, for instance along roads such as Chemin Sainte-Foy and Chemin Saint-Louis. The first post-World War II suburban neighborhood appeared along Laurier Boulevard, the route that linked downtown Quebec City to the Quebec Bridge (the only link between the city and the southern shore of the Saint Lawrence River).

In this context, the old village of Sainte-Foy acquired a strategic role in the evolution of urbanization patterns. Its population increased from 5,231 inhabitants in 1951 to 29,716 inhabitants in 1961, giving it one of the highest rates of growth in the entire region.

Yet suburbanization was also due in large part to institutional decentralization. The establishment of the new Laval University campus in Sainte-Foy had important consequences for the further development of this town. A landmark in the Quebec City downtown area since its foundation, this institution moved to Sainte-Foy in the 1950s, on a sprawling campus that opened onto Laurier Boulevard.

Laurier Boulevard also saw the construction of the first suburban shopping centers of Sainte-Foy, Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier. They were built in 1958 and 1961, respectively, after the relocation of Laval University outside the central city. This development helped to confirm Laurier Boulevard as the preferred travel route for the ever-growing number of suburban residents.

In Sainte-Foy, as in Laval and other suburbs, construction of the shopping centers preceded planning endeavors. The 1970 Master Plan for Sainte-Foy called for the definition of a city center around Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier. A specific physical plan for this area anticipated the future growth and expansion of these malls. Located at an important point in the region, in a place that channeled large volumes of automobile traffic, the existing shopping centers constituted the dominant elements of the new core. But the planners conceived of the city center as a collection of commercial and office buildings and neglected the relationship of these structures to the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The construction of the highway network, mostly between 1966 and 1971, further strengthened the position of Sainte-Foy in the Quebec City region. New highways and a second bridge over the Saint-Lawrence River,

close to the first one, added to the residential population and the traffic volumes into which the shopping centers could tap.

Early Evolution of Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier

The first phase of the Place Sainte-Foy shopping center was constructed along Laurier Boulevard in 1958. It was a neighborhood shopping center with a simple row of shops separated from the boulevard by a large parking lot, following prevailing standards of the time. An element of planning was evident: the developers had acquired a large lot but used only part of it, keeping the remainder in reserve for the future growth of the shopping center (Figure 4).

The rapid growth of Sainte-Foy's population fostered the arrival of other commercial buildings along Laurier Boulevard. In 1960, the Place Laurier shopping center was built in a lot adjacent to Place Sainte-Foy. The design of Place Laurier, as a unitary covered mall, was influenced by that of earlier projects such as Minneapolis's Southdale, a Victor Gruen project of 1955 that boasted the first covered mall. The controlled internal environment, the first of its type in the region, proved to be a very attractive feature, which is not surprising in a climate where winters are extremely cold and summers are hot.

The structure contained not only department stores and shops, but also one of the first office buildings in Sainte-Foy. The Tour Frontenac, a seven-story building, was erected in the north part of the shopping center and was serviced by its own independent entrance. This new function was added to the traditional commercial functions in an attempt to diversify land uses and benefit from various sources of income.

Although it, too, was separated from the street by a vast parking lot, the new Place Laurier strengthened the role of Laurier Boulevard in the regional structure and gave a renewed breath of life to commercial activities in the immediate area. It serviced the population of Sainte-Foy itself, but it also rapidly became the main shopping place for a great part of the population of the Quebec City region as a whole.

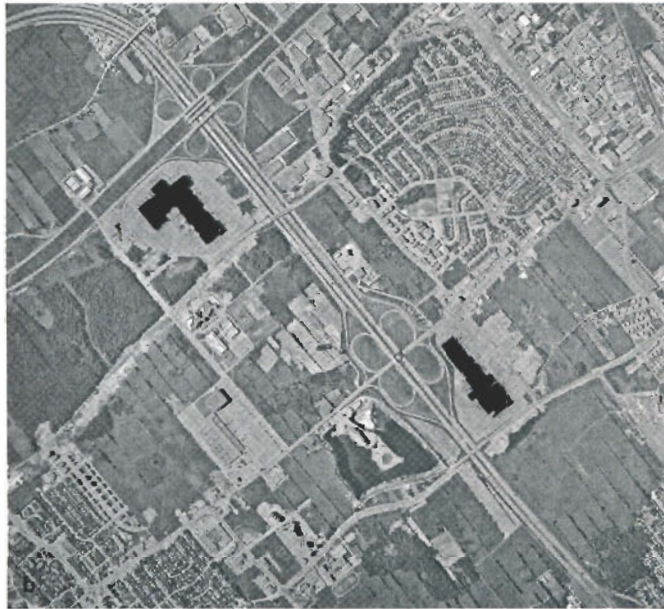
The competition from Place Laurier, with its covered mall, prompted a wave of transformations to its neighbor. Between 1963 and 1965, only five years after its construction, Place Sainte-Foy underwent major changes. First, the addition of a row of shops and a department store created an open mall. Then, in 1965, a roof was built to cover the existing mall, giving it a controlled environment as well.

The rapid growth and transformation of Place Sainte-Foy provoked a competing series of improvements at Place Laurier. The newer shopping

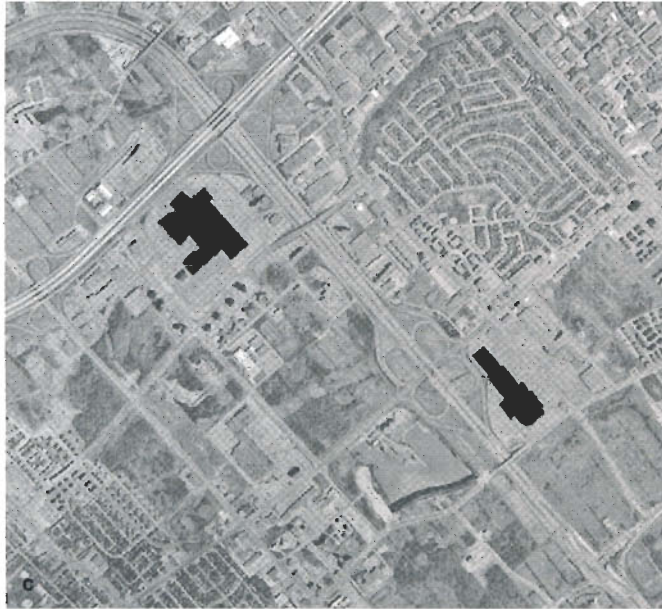
FIGURE 4 SHOPPING CENTER GROWTH AND URBAN DENSIFICATION IN SAINTE-FOY



4a URBAN FABRIC IN 1965



4b URBAN FABRIC IN 1987



4c URBAN FABRIC IN 1998
(GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, MINISTÈRE DES RESSOURCES NATURELLES)

center was enlarged for the first time in 1965. The addition of a department store in the west part of the building increased the attractiveness of this establishment to the regional population.

This first phase of the building of the Sainte-Foy shopping centers reveals an interesting relationship between the two neighboring centers. In a context of rapid suburban development, the strategic location of Place Sainte-Foy influenced the construction of Place Laurier. In turn, the competitive environment generated by this juxtaposition created a real dynamic of growth that led to the enlargement and the restructuring of the existing buildings.

The development of the two Sainte-Foy shopping centers in this dynamic environment also had important side effects on the surrounding urban fabric. Nearby urban plots were the first to be filled by other retail activities. The construction of the Pollak department store, in the plot that separated the two regional shopping centers, is of particular relevance. This independent retail establishment was built in the mid-1960s. Its relocation from Quebec City's downtown core to Sainte-Foy confirmed the strategic importance of the site on the regional retail scene.

While the construction of the shopping centers affected the nature of Sainte-Foy, which had grown first and foremost as a residential suburb, the arrival of the Laval University campus and a major university hospital also contributed to the diversification of this suburban environment. In

the 1960s, the erection of several new buildings on campus considerably increased the number of students in the area. The construction of student residences near Laurier Boulevard also contributed to the diversification of the suburban population, which was principally composed of young families. During the same years, several hotels were built along Laurier Boulevard, in proximity to the crossroads that linked the boulevard to the Quebec Bridge (Figure 5). This location enabled them to attract drivers on their way to Quebec City.

Sainte-Foy was starting to acquire a somewhat schizophrenic character. On the one hand, residential development took place along the dominant model of subdivision design. Thus the neighborhoods surrounding the shopping centers were homogeneous expanses of single-family housing. On the other hand, the urban fabric immediately adjacent to the suburban core was extremely fragmented. Vast undeveloped tracts of land and enormous parking lots separated commercial buildings and public facilities from the surrounding residential areas. The shopping centers and the university were isolated from each other and were arranged without much regard to their local context. Regional accessibility seemed to have been the only criterion that mattered in their planning. Still, during these formative years for the town of Sainte-Foy, shopping centers provided the only real meeting place for residents, students, workers and hospital visitors. All could access the shopping center while the other buildings and spaces were more limited in their usage (Figure 6).

FIGURE 5 SAINTE-FOY SHOPPING CENTERS IN 1964



(ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDS W.B. EDWARDS)

FIGURE 6 LAURIER BOULEVARD IN 1965

(ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDS W.B. EDWARDS)

■ The Densification of Shopping Centers and the Consolidation of New City Centers, 1970–2000

From the 1970s on, a new wave of highway construction and suburban development fostered the expansion of commercial facilities in Laval and Sainte-Foy. New shopping centers appeared, while existing ones were expanded; all saw their uses become more varied over time. The diversification and densification of land-use occurred in the surrounding areas as well, lending a more urban character to the greenfield development of the previous decades.

Still, these changes did not fundamentally affect the fabric of the areas in question. At the regional scale, the completing of the highway network confirmed the strategic location of the commercial sites and fueled their growth. At the local scale, the shopping centers established their value as community centers within emerging city centers. Yet, despite some improvements in design, their relationship to their immediate environment did not change much. A logic of regional accessibility continued to prevail over a logic of urban design.

Densification in Laval

The new growth of the Laval shopping centers was principally influenced by the construction of Laval Highway at the beginning of the 1970s. The introduction of this new axis transformed the territorial geography of the island of Laval. With it, Saint-Martin Boulevard lost its role as the dominant east-west artery, and a new intersection, that of Laval Highway and the Laurentian Highway, gained prominence as a site for new commercial development.

Developers were quick to realize that potential. By 1974, the Carrefour Laval shopping center had appeared on the map. It was organized with three anchors connected by two covered malls in a typical "L" pattern. Its location at the crossroads of the two highways gave it excellent visibility at the regional scale. It rapidly became the most attractive destination in Laval, resulting in Centre Laval losing its dominance among retail facilities. Following the city's Master Plan, a new City Hall was erected in the area as well.

In the 1980s, with continued suburbanization to the north, both on and off Jesus Island, the customer base of Laval's shopping centers greatly expanded. Spurred by this rapid growth, Carrefour Laval was enlarged. In 1983, a department store was added to the western part of the building. It was connected to the existing structure by two new malls bordered by numerous shops. This enlargement prompted more than the growth of commercial activities: the western part of the structure also saw the addition of an office building, thereby giving the development a new mix of activities.

This diversification was accompanied by the densification of the eastern part of the site. There, the construction of a detached building containing a hotel and a conference center contributed to an increased mix of functions inside the actual plot of the shopping center. This prestigious complex did more than diversify the commercial activities of the shopping center; it also provided an element of urbanity and centrality to the city as a whole.

In spite of the presence of these new functions on the site, Carrefour Laval remained an isolated structure in its larger context. Large parking lots separated the hotel and the conference center from the shopping mall (Figure 7). Neither transition spaces nor landscaping were planned to improve the walk between these facilities and the mall. The outer parts of the site were also used exclusively for parking purposes, and only a minimal sidewalk led from the mall to Carrefour Boulevard, its link to the highway.

The densification of Laval's city center was not only the result of commercial expansion. In the 1980s and 1990s, the territory adjacent to

FIGURE 7 RELATIONSHIP (OR LACK THEREOF) BETWEEN CONFERENCE CENTER AND SHOPPING CENTER IN LAVAL



(PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPIERO MORETTI)

Centre Laval and Carrefour Laval was slowly changed into a specialized urban fabric that now houses many central activities. In addition to other commercial facilities, office buildings, public institutions and mid-to-high-density residences were built.

The surroundings of the Carrefour Laval shopping center have witnessed remarkable development due to the building of many office towers along Daniel-Johnson Boulevard and Carrefour Boulevard. These towers form a kind of street frontage around the shopping center site and supply local merchants with an expanded customer base. However, the pedestrian links between these buildings and the mall are interrupted by parking lots that were designed only in relationship to car traffic. These transition spaces could still be seen as potential sites to develop a positive relationship between the shopping center and its environment.

On the south side of the shopping center, along Carrefour Boulevard, the recent construction of the Laval bus terminal confirms the importance of this area in the development of the island as a whole. It reinforces the nodal character of the site, while also increasing access to it by alternative means of transportation.

Moreover, the addition of cultural facilities and amusement destinations has further diversified local land-uses and has further increased the weight of the area as city center (Figure 8). Located on the south side of Carrefour Boulevard, the Cosmodome, a public aerospace museum, has become a regional attraction. It is highly visible from the Laurentian

FIGURE 8 URBAN DIVERSIFICATION IN THE LAVAL CITY CORE**MAIN LAND USES**

- Commercial buildings
- Office buildings, hotels and institutions
- High and mid-density housing

Highway and can only be reached by automobile. Nearby, between the Carrefour Laval shopping center and Saint-Martin Boulevard, a new megaplex with 18 movie theaters has just been built. It should become an anchor for a theme park and retail center. An open promenade between the different buildings is planned, but the megaplex is presently an insulated entity, cut off from the rest of the Laval city center.

Public buildings have also multiplied near the shopping centers. After a new City Hall and a public school, a municipal library, a court house and other government facilities have come to confirm the central vocation of this area.

Finally, the surroundings of the shopping centers have become more dense through the addition of medium- to high-density residential buildings (Figure 9). Close to Carrefour Laval and Centre Laval, there now exist residential developments that directly benefit from the existence of nearby commercial services. In spite of their proximity, however, these buildings do not enjoy comfortable pedestrian links to the shopping malls.

FIGURE 9 RESIDENTIAL DENSIFICATION IN THE SURROUNDING FABRIC OF THE CARREFOUR LAVAL SHOPPING CENTER



(PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPIERO MORETTI)

Densification in Sainte-Foy

In Sainte-Foy, too, the 1970s marked a new phase in the development of local shopping centers. The construction of the highway system emphasized the location of a regional node in this part of the Quebec City metropolitan territory. The existing shopping malls aggressively expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, while the 1990s were marked by a progressive integration of these commercial structures with each other (Figure 10).

In 1973, Place Laurier was enlarged in its northern section with the addition of a department store and of two new malls bordered by many shops, an expansion that changed the original pattern of the building. Land-use density on the site was further increased by the construction of multi-level parking garages, one along Laurier Boulevard, to the south, the other along Hochelaga Boulevard, to the north.

In 1977, Place Sainte-Foy, too, received a multi-level parking structure located along Hochelaga Boulevard. The garage created a real barrier between the mall and the surrounding urban fabric. Enlargement continued in the 1980s with the construction of new department stores in the southern section of the two shopping centers.

While the growth of Place Laurier and Place Sainte-Foy played an important role in the densification of the central area of Sainte-Foy, changes on the plot in between the two shopping centers was a deter-

FIGURE 10 URBAN DENSIFICATION ALONG CARREFOUR LAVAL SHOPPING CENTER



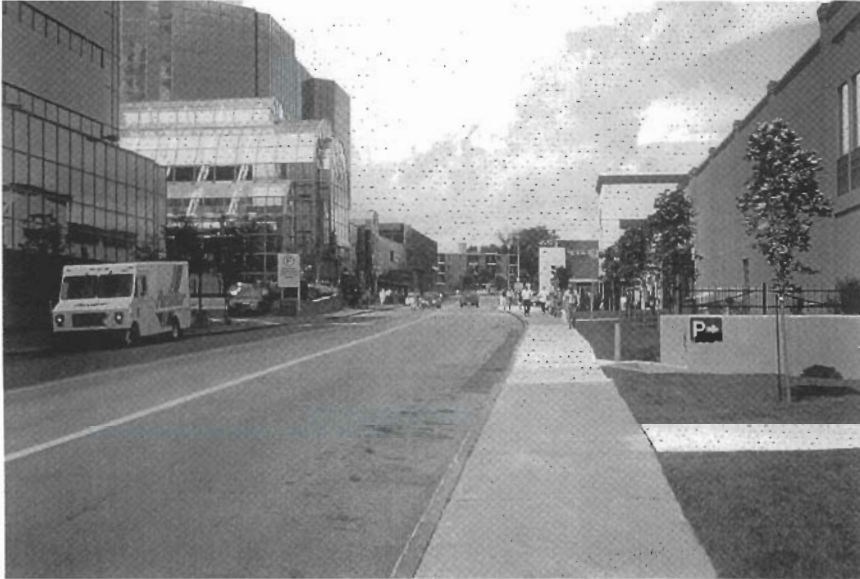
(PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPIERO MORETTI)

mining factor in the evolution of the whole sector, allowing as it did the progressive integration of the existing structures. In 1981, the transformation of the Pollack department store into a covered shopping center and the addition of an office building called Place de la Cité at once helped to diversify and to integrate the commercial complex (Figure 11). Further integration occurred in 1987, when Place de la Cité fully integrated the existing buildings in the northern section of the block.

The most recent transformations of Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier, realized in 1997, improved the continuity between the three different structures. A continuous mall linking all three entities is now interrupted only by the two north-south streets that link the boulevards. In fact, the appeal of Sainte-Foy's retail activities today follows in part from the close relationship that has been established between the various shopping centers.

In addition, interior changes have increased the diversity of uses. As in numerous shopping centers on the continent, cafés, relaxation areas and food courts have given the malls a more vibrant atmosphere and an added value. These spaces are used by many people, in particular by people who work in the immediate area. They constitute real meeting places for diverse groups, including the elderly and the young.

The latest changes also affected the relationship of the buildings with the public realm. At first, Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier were developed in the form of autonomous entities, separated from the boulevard by large parking lots. Now the three buildings are more clearly oriented toward the street and their entrances have become more interactive with this public space. Several new stores, including clothing outlets and book-

FIGURE 11 NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLACE SAINTE-FOY AND PLACE DE LA CITÉ

(PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPIERO MORETTI)

stores, have large windows looking out to the boulevard (Figure 12). Although these open façades create a more attractive interface with the street than did the blank walls of traditional shopping centers, they have not had much of an impact on the actual use of the site. In fact, the continued lack of pedestrian traffic has rendered the new design somewhat awkward.

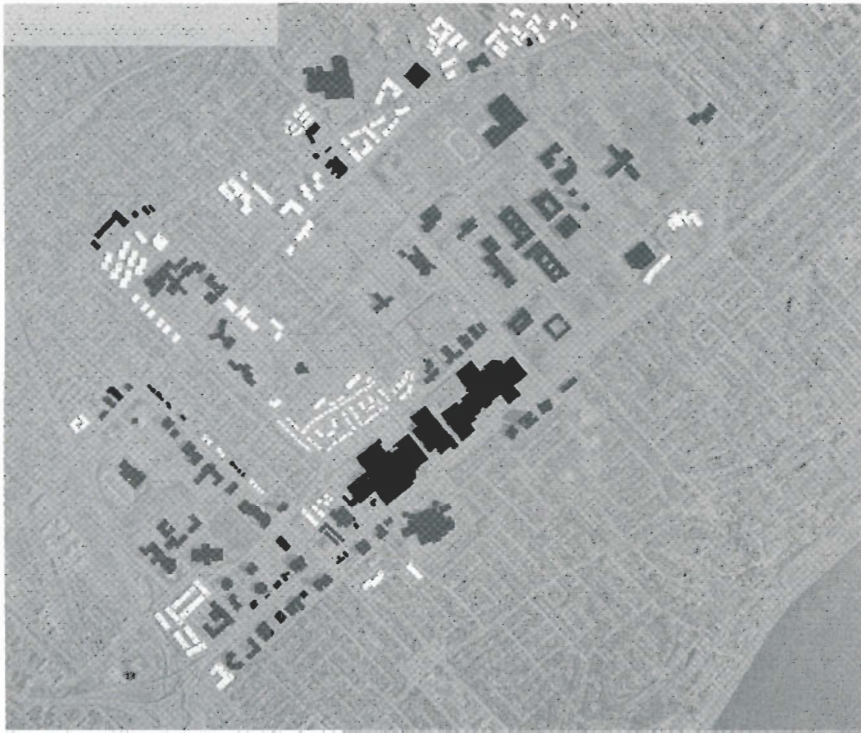
The development of the Sainte-Foy shopping centers was not an isolated phenomenon. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the surrounding urban fabric also became denser and more varied in its functions (Figure 13). As it did so, however, the center of gravity of the Sainte-Foy city center moved slightly away from the shopping centers and toward a concentration of non-commercial facilities.

Densification and diversification were particularly visible along Laurier Boulevard. New retail structures, office buildings and hotels were added, and an important research center was built next to the university hospital. Other research facilities were built on the Laval University campus, and the university attracted private research development in the area as well. Government buildings and the new Sainte-Foy City Hall, located along Route de l'Église close to Laurier Boulevard, confirmed the importance of these two axes and their intersection in the making of the city center.

**FIGURE 12 NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SAINTE-FOY SHOPPING CENTERS
AND LAURIER BOULEVARD**



(PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPIERO. MORETTI)

FIGURE 13 URBAN DENSIFICATION IN THE SAINTE-FOY CITY CORE.**MAIN LAND USES**

- Shopping centers
- Office buildings, hotels and institutions
- High- and mid-density housing

The economic dynamism of Sainte-Foy, in particular its concentration of a skilled labor force on and off campus, fostered the construction of medium- to high-density housing in an area that had been characterized by low-density, single-family housing. A large part of this new housing stock serves the local student population, a population that adds to the urban character of the area.

Despite all these positive trends, most buildings in the Sainte-Foy city center have maintained an introverted character. In the case of shopping centers, large parking areas or parking garages between the street and the mall continue to define the urban fabric. The principal entrance of Place Laurier on Laurier Boulevard effectively illustrates this situation (Figure 14). Pedestrians crossing over from the hospital across the street or coming from the bus stop have to pass through a gloomy parking garage to gain entry to the mall. Thus, despite the presence of a varied set

FIGURE 14 THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF PLACE LAURIER ON LAURIER BOULEVARD.



a

14a VIEW FROM THE BOULEVARD



b

14b VIEW FROM THE MULTI-LEVEL PARKING-LOT
(PHOTOGRAPHS BY GIANPIERO MORETTI)

of public and private facilities in a fairly limited perimeter and despite their own internal diversity, the Sainte-Foy shopping centers have not yet been properly integrated in the surrounding urban fabric and have not yet generated the sense of place that local planners hoped to create.

■ Comparing the Two Cases

Studying the growth and transformation of the Laval and Sainte-Foy shopping centers and their respective environments (see Tables 1 and 2) reveals the process by which two suburbs increased in density over the past five decades. Both in Laval and in Sainte-Foy, shopping centers were important elements in the evolution of the surrounding area, though in different ways. The difference between both cases lies primarily in the relationship between the new highway systems of the 1960s and 1970s and the existing commercial infrastructure.

In Sainte-Foy, the highway network of the 1970s reinforced the central position of existing shopping centers. Hence commercial development continued to occur on the same sites. In Laval, on the other hand, new highway construction generated a displacement of the dominant commercial node on the island. Centre Laval lost its commanding position to Carrefour Laval, a new shopping center built strategically at the crossroads of the Laurentian Highway and Laval Highway.

In both cases, the complementary nature of public and private action must be noted. In Laval, private developers seized on the opportunities created by road construction and turned a highway intersection into a major destination in its own right. Although accessibility is a necessary condition for shopping-center development, it is not a sufficient one; retail agglomeration itself seems to be a more important factor (Eppli and Shilling, 1996). In Sainte-Foy, highway planners contributed to the con-

TABLE 1. MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAVAL AND SAINTE-FOY

LAVAL (Montreal)	SAINTE-FOY (Quebec City)
1950s: Laurentian Highway	1950s: Laval University campus, hospital
1967: Centre Laval shopping center	1958: Place Sainte-Foy shopping center
1970: Urban Master Plan	1960: Place Laurier shopping center
1970s: Laval Highway, City Hall	1966–71: Highway system
1974: Carrefour Laval shopping center	1970: Urban Master Plan
1980s: Office buildings	1970s: Hotels, office buildings
1990s: Cosmodome, megaplex	1981: Place de la Cité shopping center
	1993: City Hall

TABLE 2. MILESTONES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE FIVE SHOPPING CENTERS

CENTRE	CARREFOUR	PLACE	PLACE	PLACE
LAVAL	LAVAL	ST-FOY	LAURIER	DE LA CITE
1967: construction	1973: construction	1958: construction	1960: construction	1981: construction
1972: movie theater	1983: department store	1963: row of shops	1965: dept. store	(from existing bldgs)
		1965: roof	1973: dept. store, malls,	1987: mall, office bldg
		1977: dept. store, parking garage	parking garage	
		1997: dept. store, mall, underground parking	1997: dept. store, mall	

tinued dominance of Place Sainte-Foy and Place Laurier (and, later, of Place de la Cité) in the regional retail economy.

Our research also shows that in both cases, the presence of the shopping centers preceded suburban densification. In Laval, prior to the construction of Centre Laval along the Laurentian Highway, commercial space was scattered along several routes linking Laval to Montreal Island. After this shopping center was built, commercial development took on a much more concentrated form. This tendency was reinforced with the construction of Carrefour Laval.

Although the primacy of the shopping center in establishing a suburban core is clear in the case of Laval, it is less so in the case of Sainte-Foy. When the shopping centers arrived, the Laval University campus and the university hospital were already present. The road network and the presence of these facilities, rather than the old village nucleus, influenced patterns of development. In fact, the heart of Sainte-Foy was progressively displaced towards the new agglomeration of public and private services. The erection of the new City Hall on Route de l'Église, in the early 1990s, confirmed this slight displacement.

Despite these differences, in both cases the centralization effects of regional shopping centers can be clearly seen in the evolution of the urban fabric. The first effect was one of commercial polarization, as other retail activities clustered around the shopping centers in order to benefit from their drawing power. In Laval, a new theme park is currently under development near the Carrefour Laval shopping center. In Sainte-Foy, very early on, the Pollack department store was built between two existing shopping centers.

The progressive diversification of shopping center functions, especially with the introduction of office spaces in Carrefour Laval, Place Laurier and Place de la Cité, contributed significantly to their consolidation as central destinations in the contemporary cityscape. The presence of these workplaces gave the shopping centers new dynamism and a regular patronage. Near these first office buildings, which were directly connected to the shopping centers, others were added in the adjacent urban fabric.

Aside from office space and additional commercial facilities, public buildings related to various levels of government were located in the vicinity of the shopping centers, helping to institutionalize the new suburban cores even further. In Laval, the new court house and other public institutions helped to mark the identity of the area as the city center. In Sainte-Foy, numerous governmental buildings, in addition to the existing Laval University campus, confirmed the importance and multi-functional character of the area. In both cases, the location of a new City Hall added to the functional and symbolic importance of the sites under study.

Municipal governments also participated in the process of densifi-

cation and diversification through their land-use plans and zoning regulations. In both cases, planners saw the shopping centers as anchor points for the future “downtowns” of their respective suburban municipalities. Hence their plans called for the concentration of specialized and higher-density development in their vicinity. As has been noted, municipal plans and regulations were adopted after the erection of the shopping centers, not the other way around. To a certain extent, public planners were only acting on the same impetus as their private counterparts in the commercial real-estate sector, namely the existence of a road structure with specific nodes. Yet they were also responding to the fact that shopping center developers had turned some of these nodes into well-known destinations in the region.

Despite their location in dynamic environments where private and public interest collaborate, the shopping centers of Laval and Sainte-Foy cannot take their continued success for granted. New regional malls and power centers, both on greenfield sites in the outer suburbs and on brownfield sites closer to downtown, directly challenge the older shopping centers as commercial magnets in the region.

■ Conclusion: Linking the Local and the Regional

Even though this study focused on two specific cases in the province of Quebec, it offers a basis for some general conclusions that are valid for the North American continent as a whole. In the contemporary city, planned largely on the basis of the spatial separation of different land-uses, the presence of mid-to-high-density residential buildings near commercial facilities constitutes an important fact. Contrary to the general preconception that North American suburbs are principally made up of single-family homes, this paper confirms the observation of Vernez Moudon and Hess (2000) relative to the mix of land uses in the suburbs of Seattle. Shopping centers attract not only shoppers but also residents.

In Laval and Sainte-Foy, as in Seattle, higher-density residential development has aggregated in the surroundings of regional shopping centers, thereby greatly adding to the number of residents who live within walking distance of the malls. This reality, which is in constant evolution, opens up interesting paths for the creation of centrality and the assertion of local character in suburban environments.

Whether or not this potential is being used depends on the willingness of both private and public parties to consider the urban-design qualities of commercial areas. When designing, expanding and rehabili-

tating shopping centers, the local as well as the regional scale should be considered. While location and accessibility are key factors in their development, shopping centers must also enjoy well-planned surroundings. And for such centers to participate in the creation of suburban “downtowns,” as is increasingly the ambition of local officials and residents, the design of the local environment must be accorded particular care. Certainly, shopping centers attract a large proportion of their visitors from afar, but they also have patrons who live or work nearby. Local residents, workers and users of public facilities (in Sainte-Foy, university students in particular) all contribute significantly to the vitality of the shopping centers.

In the cases we examined, external spaces exist to ensure regional visibility and accessibility by car. Although some efforts have been made recently to connect the shopping center to the street (in Place Sainte-Foy), the link between both has not been treated as a matter of urban design. Large parts of the site are considered as mere technical spaces and are dedicated exclusively to parking. Yet exterior spaces are indeed used by local residents and by patrons of the shopping center, even if the use is not of the highest order. For that reason only, these spaces should be more carefully designed.

In addition, the poor design of the environment surrounding shopping centers contributes to their negative perception and to the negative perception of suburbia as a whole. Multi-level parking garages often constitute real barriers to pedestrian access; pedestrian routes are generally cumbersome, dangerous, or simply nonexistent. The lack of attention to built form and site design may in fact deprive stores of the patronage of residents and workers from the area. This is especially critical as shopping centers are becoming more diversified facilities, relying on continuous animation for their success.

Concern with the interface between the shopping center and its environment is visible in recent retail developments such as Valencia Town Center, in the region of Los Angeles. The careful integration of various commercial and non-commercial functions in a coherent urban design ensures that the shopping center is accessible on foot and acts as the public facility that it aims to be. There is no reason why the lessons learned in integrated developments, namely that context and community matter, could not be applied to the improvement of existing suburban cores (Altoon, 1997).

Much like the shopping center played a critical role in the regional polarization of the first post-WWII suburbs, today it can serve to ensure greater cohesion and smarter growth in the polynucleated metropolis. This issue must be addressed together by the private and by the public sector. The future viability of existing shopping centers in the face of

growing competition from newer malls will depend on their ability to grow and to reinvent themselves. At the same time, the ability of suburbs to remain attractive will demand proactive planning to generate a distinct identity and offer a quality environment for all. Both tasks will require, among other actions, the redesign of the immediate surroundings of shopping centers, at the level of the site and at the level of the adjacent urban fabric. In the same manner that highway planning, shopping-center construction, municipal zoning and mixed-use development all contributed to creating suburban cores, joint action by private owners and public authorities is needed to turn these cores into true suburban downtowns with a sense of place.

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