Since Radburn and the Greenbelt towns of the 1930s, and Columbia and the New Towns of the 1960s, master planned communities have supplied more public space than has suburbia generally—more parks, greenways, community centers, and other active recreation areas. They have also left more land in its natural state. By the 1990s, half or more of the total land area of some master planned communities was devoted to public and open space. That has been one of their main selling points. Residents are willing to pay a premium to live close to these public amenities.

Circa 1990, following in the footsteps of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, William H. Whyte, and other big thinkers, new urbanists began to argue that the quality of public space is more important than quantity.

New urbanist spaces are relatively small and formal, often in the form of village greens, town squares, or urban plazas. They are bordered by buildings (for 24-hour natural surveillance). Local streets converge on these spaces, making them more accessible and more prominent. They are more likely to be used for passive recreation than active, and they are multigenerational rather than being aimed at a particular age group. They are also likely to be linked physically and visually.

Are these good public spaces? Are they better than the spaces in older master planned communities? What, in short, constitutes good public space? And can the qualities that make public space good be measured? (In research parlance, can quality be operationalized?)

The answer is "yes," according to Jeremy Nemeth, a recent Rutgers Ph.D. who will begin teaching planning this fall at the University of Colorado at Denver, and Stephan Schmidt, assistant professor of city and regional planning at Cornell. They are the authors of "Toward a Methodology for Measuring Security in Publicly Accessible Spaces," to be published this summer in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*.

Security of Public Spaces: New Measures Are Reliable, But Are They Valid?

Features encouraging use	Features controlling use
Sign announcing "public space"	Visible sets of rules posted
Public ownership or management	Subjective or judgment rules posted
Restroom available	In a business improvement district (BID)
Diversity of seating types	Security cameras
Various microclimates	Security personnel
Lighting to encourage nighttime use	Secondary security personnel
Small-scale food vendors	Design to imply appropriate use
Art, cutural, or visual enhancement	Presence of sponsor or advertisement
Entrance accessibility	Areas of restricted or conditional use
Orientation accessibility	Constrained hours of operation

Security index for public spaces. Top: Rancho Santa Margarita, California.

Despite some references to 9/11 and terrorist attacks, the authors' approach to security is not political. Their main interest is in developing a useful metric. From user surveys, we know that security is an important dimension of quality for public spaces.

They do an admirable job of surveying the literature on public space management from different vantage points. They group techniques into hard (active) control, and soft (passive) control and further subdivide the relevant literature into four areas: legal and regulatory restrictions, surveillance and policing, physical design for natural surveillance, and access limitations.

They rely on the literature and on-site visits to dozens of public spaces in New York City to create a security index for public spaces. The index is a composite of 20 features, all defined in the article. To compute the overall score for a particular public space, subtract the total score for all features that control users from the total score for all features that encourage freedom of use.

The highest possible score is 20 (least controlled). The lowest is –20 (very controlled). The index has been tested and found reliable, in the sense that different observers arrive at similar scores. My guess is that public spaces in the older master planned communities would score as less controlled than those in new urbanist developments.

What is missing from the article is any validation of the composite index. Reliability and validity are equally essential properties of measurement. In transportation planning, for instance, researchers calibrate travel demand and traffic simulation models with one dataset, and validate the results with another.

The recent marriage of planning and public health has raised the methodological bar for community indicators research like Nemeth and Schmidt's. At least five reliable and valid walking audit instruments are posted on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living Research website. Different instruments have been validated by comparing overall walkability scores to pedestrian traffic volume, expert judgments, or public preference surveys.

In a similar way, the Nemeth-Schmidt index could be validated by comparing overall security scores with incident reports, expert judgments, or user perceptions. These two young academics have gotten a start with the *JAPA* article. Once they validate their security index, it could prove a useful planning and design tool.

Reid Ewing

Ewing is a research professor at the National Center for Smart Growth at the University of Maryland, an associate editor of *JAPA*, and a consultant with Fehr & Peers Associates in Los Angeles. Community audit tools, including validated ones, can be accessed at: www.activelivingresearch.org/index.php/Tools_and_Measures/312.