# PLANNING AND PLACE IN THE CITY
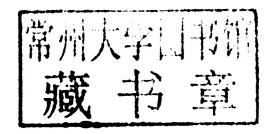## MAPPING PLACE IDENTITY

MARICHELA SEPE

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## Mapping place identity

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# Planning and Place in the City

Under the influence of globalization, the centres of many cities in the industrialized world are losing their place identity – the set of cultural markers that define a city's uniqueness and make it instantly recognizable. A key task for planners and residents, working together, is to preserve that unique sense of place without making the city a parody of itself.

Marichela Sepe explores the preservation, reconstruction and enhancement of cultural heritage and place identity. She outlines the history of the concept of placemaking, and sets out the range of different methods of analysis and assessment that are used to help pin down the nature of place identity. This book also uses the author's own survey-based method called 'PlaceMaker' to detect elements that do not feature in traditional mapping and identifies appropriate planning interventions.

Case studies investigate cities in Europe, North America and Asia, which demonstrate how surveys and interviews can be used to draw up analytical and design maps of place identity. This investigative work is a crucial step in identifying cultural elements that will influence what planning decisions should be taken in the future. The maps aim to establish a dialogue with local residents and support planners and administrators in making sustainable changes. The case studies are amply illustrated with survey data sheets, photos and coloured maps.

Innovative and broad-based, *Planning and Place in the City* lays out an approach to the identification and preservation of place identity and cultural heritage suitable for students, academics and professionals alike.

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**To my parents**
**To my family**

# Acknowledgements

# Foreword

The re-emergence of Urban Design in the early 1960s with the seminal contributions of Lynch and Jacobs has gained a significant momentum over the past two decades. This book is an important contribution to our understanding of place-making by introducing and developing PlaceMaker – a tool for understanding place identity. A questioning and inquisitive approach to Urban Design is now dynamic and evolving, as illustrated by this book.

Over the recent decades, Urban Design has evolved from an initial – predominantly aesthetic – concern with the distribution of building masses and the space between buildings, to become primarily concerned with the quality of the public realm – both social and physical – and the making of places for people to enjoy and respect. Earlier and narrower understanding of Urban Design was predominantly product oriented, tending to concentrate on the visual qualities and experience of urban spaces rather than on the myriad of cultural, social, economic, political and spatial factors and processes that are the ingredients of successful urban places.

Although the aesthetic experience and appreciation of urban design is important – and certainly not to be neglected or diminished – contemporary approaches to Urban Design also recognize the importance of the development and design process. Contemporary Urban Design is therefore simultaneously concerned with the design of space as an aesthetic entity and as a behavioural setting. Accordingly, it places greater emphasis on understanding how spaces function and on what cultural meanings and values are expressed. This book with its clear focus on mapping place identity – which is under threat in our globalising world – is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the city.

As Marichela Sepe notes, urban places change continuously in terms of the rhythms and exploitations of the city, the modalities of living, working and moving around, and the opportunities for enjoying leisure. The emergence of new typologies of place and changes in the patterns of usage for the existing typologies has given rise to whole new cityscapes. In the age of internet shopping, Facebook socialising and Twitter, identity of place may prove to be increasingly more important and placemaking – the art of making places for people – is essential to retaining and enhancing place identity.

The concept of place, in the sense of a space endowed with unique features (which are) fundamental to establishing the identity of the contemporary city, is key to Part I of this book. Part I concludes with an analysis of the main sites that define the contemporary city: new spaces for living, urban containers, networks and infrastructures, new places of perception, and monitored places.

The ongoing changes in places have prompted us to extend and inno-vate the tools of enquiry used for placemaking. Hence the endeavour to develop a 'complex-sensitive' approach retaining both the tangible and intangible aspects of the environment. The PlaceMaker method presented in Section II of Part II is a tool based on dialogue with local people to support professionals in the sustain-able transformation of the city.

The case studies, which are wide ranging, are a major strength of this book. The focus on preserving place identity; reconstructing place identity; and enhancing place identity. The focus of the Trevi–Pantheon case study in Rome is understanding anthropic risk. The South Broadway in Los Angeles case study explores the loss of traditional functions, with an aim of identifying the resources in place for design interventions that can enable the historical tradition to re-emerge and be reinterpreted for current needs. The Kobe and San Francisco case studies assert the value of place identity as a reference point in the reconstruc-tion process, both in terms of the wishes of the stakeholders and in safeguarding the urban image.

Oxford Street in London and Las Ramblas in Barcelona, where the pro-cess of globalization is underway, and the Esplanade area in Helsinki are case studies located in areas which are dimensionally and geographically different, but that share a central position and proximity to the historical core, and represent symbolic places for citizens as well as visitors to those cities. These case studies were designed to help understand whether the present identity of those places, while they are changing as a result of globalization, is sustainable with their walk-ability and if there are critical points where it might be possible to think in terms of urban redesign enhancing identity, the quality of its image, walkability and urban safety.

Understanding how well the physical milieu supports the multitude of functions and activities that take place in the urban environment/urban places, and how such spaces interact with and shape the lives of the city's inhabitants, is enhanced by the tools developed by Sepe and illustrated by the case studies dis-cussed in this book. Such understanding is fundamental to the activity of Urban Design. When animated by the presence of people – as illustrated in the case studies of Oxford Street and Las Ramblas – spaces become meaningful places with their valued identities. This volume underlines the importance of design for human experience of urban space.

This book continues the tradition, which has developed over the past decades, of applying social sciences research, including environmental psychol-ogy and perception, to studying how the built environment functions for people

of different cultures and subcultures at various stages of their life cycles and through major threats to their environment and well-being, as was the case in Kobe and San Francisco.

Synthesizing and integrating ideas, theories and techniques from a wide range of sources, PlaceMaker is a valuable tool and with this clearly argued and well presented/illustrated book it will gain a greater exposure which is much deserved. Urban Design will be enriched with this contribution, continuing the journey started by Kevin Lynch in 1960 with the publication of *Image of the City*.

Taner Oc, *Professor Emeritus*, University of Nottingham

# Introduction

## Planning the city – mapping place identity

This book talks about the identity of places and the issues connected with its identification, representation and shaping as a key element in planning the city of today.

The studies of Kevin Lynch on the image of the city and Taner Oc on public spaces, together with the approach to delineating the landscape developed by Bernard Lassus, are the chief coordinates for the topics dealt with in this volume, and in particular for the PlaceMaker method. We are operating at the intersection of two important and equally complex concepts: that of identity, full of nuances and interpretations; and that of city, for which a whole range of adjectives – porous, global, diffuse, virtual, hyper – have been employed in the attempt to account for the mutations we are witnessing in today's cities.

Places are termed 'places' and not just 'spaces' when they are endowed with identity (Hague and Jenkins, 2005). Such identity is related to the urban fabric and a series of morphological, natural, historical and cultural invariants. These invariants are closely interrelated to the life of the city and its inhabitants, and also to the perception the latter have of that place. At the same time, colours, materials, smells and sounds become an inseparable part of any one spot in the city, and thus emotional components of the urban image.

The identity of a place expresses a harmonious balance between variant and invariant components, people and urban events, which are intrinsically linked by a reciprocal relationship that makes a specific place unique and recognizable (Lynch, 1960). At the same time, globalization and technological development have contributed to accelerating the rates of change and transforming spaces in the contemporary city. The end result is that cities, places, itineraries, customs and behavioural patterns have all come to resemble one another, contributing to an increasing urban identity crisis (Bentley, 1999; Christensen, 1999; Forrester and Snell, 2007; Massey and Jess, 1995).

Many trends towards homogenisation of, and loss of meaning in, places relate to processes of globalization and the creation of global space, through improved communications (whether physical or electronic). Globalization is a multi-faceted process in which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with centralised decision-making exploiting economies of scale

and standardisation. The changing, and problematising, of relationships between local and global has significant implications for what constitutes the meaning of place. Castells (1989, p.6) described the effects of information technology in the creation of a space of flow which dominates the historically constructed space of places. ... With globalization has come 'mass' culture, emerging from the processes of mass production and consumption, which homogenises and standardises culture and places, transcending, crowding out, even destroying, local cultures. According to Crang (1998, p.115), much of the worry over 'placeness' can be interpreted as fear that local, supposedly 'authentic' forms of culture – made from, and making, local distinctiveness – are being displaced by mass-produced commercial forms imposed on the locality.

(Carmona *et al.*, 2010, pp.124–125)

The urban condition we experience today shows many changes in terms of the rhythms and exploitation of the city, the modalities of living, working and moving around, and the opportunities for enjoying leisure. The emergence of new typologies of place and changes in the patterns of usage for the existing typologies have given rise to whole new cityscapes:

In practice the term 'the contemporary city' covers a very broad and diversified series of transformations and situations. It is banal to point out that the urban condition today is very different to what it was in the past, and in any case this must not imply the existence of a homogeneous past. There has been a marked differentiation in the elements that generate urban organization: the ways inhabitants use their city, the mode of living and working, and the forms of production have all undergone radical changes. This has given rise to different cities, not so much in the form (*forma urbis* has always been declined in the singular) but in the modalities of realising and embodying the urban condition.

(Indovina, 2006, p.8)[1]

Striking juxtapositions and fragmentariness seem to predominate in the wholesale dispersion with which subjects, things and habits coexist, characterized by boundaries which are transparent and yet at times unbreachable (Rowe and Koetter, 1978).

Interpreted often as a chaotic dispersion of things and subjects, practices and economies, the contemporary city, on the various scales of physical, social, economic, institutional, political and cultural space, appears to be characterized by the same degree of fragmentariness, the outcome of multiple and legitimate rational approaches but often simply juxtaposed one to another, characterized by boundaries which are as invisible as they can be difficult to cross.

> The various pieces in the mosaic of the contemporary city, their dimensions, reciprocal distance, the period of construction and the inhabitants all show us a city that has been chopped up into pieces. In order to lay claim to being organized, recognizable and intelligible on each of the various scales, it relies on a variegated set of structures referring to different principles and prototypes.
>
> (Secchi, 2000, p.79)[2]

The contemporary city is the locus not only of complexity but also of simultaneity and instability, which give rise to situations of mutation and transitoriness (Harvey, 1985, 1989; Hauptmann, 2001; Landrove, 1997). These are often predominantly motivated by economic gain, to the detriment of place identity which becomes increasingly hybrid, compromised or unrecognizable. Railway stations become shopping malls, libraries turn into shops selling books and gadgets or even restaurants, houses are transformed into workshops, cinemas into supermarkets, residential streets into major highways. The extension of functions and conversions of purpose become intertwined, giving rise to new cultural problems, namely 'the degree of tolerance, compatibility or incompatibility vis à vis others, with their habits and activities, noises, smells, and overlapping and intersecting exploitation of time' (Secchi, 2000, pp.79–80)[3].

The lengthy periods of time required for the perception of the city that Kevin Lynch[4] talks about have been altered by the acceleration of the new urban rhythms. Nonetheless it still seems true that:

> City design is therefore a temporal art, but it can rarely use the controlled and limited sequences of other temporal arts like music. On different occasions and for different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across. It is seen in all lights and all weathers.
>
> At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experience by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.
>
> (Lynch, 1960, p.1)

Undoubtedly the people and their activities are as important as the 'stationary physical parts', and we are part of the scenario together with the other protagonists.

> We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all.
>
> (Lynch, 1960, p.2)

Figure 0.1
**Simultaneity of urban events in a contemporary city**

Placemaking, in the sense of 'the art of making places for people', to quote the definition given in *By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System* (CABE and DETR, 2000), 'includes the way places work and such matters as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities'.

The city thus becomes the outcome of complex intersections created by a number of operators who modify the system for different reasons. It becomes necessary to identify a microsystem within the macrosystem of the city able to make the urban variants intelligible: place is at once porous and resistant, a receptor for complex interactions (Bachelard, 1969; CABE, 2001; Chapman and Larkham, 1994; Dickens, 1990; Gandelsonas, 1991; Hayward and McGlynn, 1993; Hillman, 1990; Moughtin *et al.*, 1995; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Orum and Chen, 2003; Pellegrino, 2000; Project for Public Spaces, 2001; Jacobs, 1993; Jacobs and Appleyard, 1987).

The concept of place, in the sense of a space endowed with unique features which is fundamental for establishing the identity of the contemporary city, is the key to the first of the three Parts which compose this book. I illustrate the environmental, historic, symbolic, urban, perceptive, anthropological, sociological and psychological characteristics, extending as far as virtual place and non-place. Place identity is considered 'not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness' (Lynch, 1960, p.8). The concepts of both place and identity are illustrated with reference to texts produced by architects,

urban planners, sociologists, geographers, environmental psychologists, anthropologists, historians and philosophers (Evans *et al.*, 2011).

Part I is enriched by an analysis of the main sites that go to define the contemporary city. These are both places – spaces for living, places of socialization, virtual and real infrastructures, places of perception and monitored areas – created by the effects of globalization and new habits of people, and existing places modified according to new needs. Some of these are difficult to perceive individually or to explain using the standard terminology, and may even be impossible to represent. Nonetheless, the interrelations between these places and their constituent elements can be deciphered by converting them in terms of place identity and recognizability.

In the last decades, the changes which were identified in contemporary places have been a strong stimuli to innovate the tools of placemaking, so as to contemplate a sustainable form of place able to encompass the transformations in progress. 'Good design can help create lively places with distinctive character; streets and public spaces that are safe, accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale; and places that inspire because of the imagination and sensitivity of their designers' (CABE and DETR, 2000).

There is a need to approach and represent the city using methods of transverse and multi-level analysis and planning of places. By bringing up to date the approaches to the city adopted by Cullen and Lynch, and also borrowing models from other disciplines for envisaging, investigating, explaining and representing the urban, natural, mental and virtual places in which we live, it becomes possible to decode their complexity and make it narratable and representable (Appleyard, 1976; Forrester, 1969; Gandelsonas, 1991; Middleton, 1996; Denis and Daniels, 1988; Miller, 2003; Russ, 2002; Tugnutt and Robertson, 1987; Whitehand and Larkham, 1992).

In Section I of Part II I illustrate the evolution of the concept of placemaking, starting from Lynch and Cullen and the current methodologies of analysis and planning, with the relative tools for representing places, presented according to typology: virtual (Mitchell, 1996); lateral (Boeri, 2003); people-oriented (Gehl, 2010); multi-scale (MVRDV, 2002); and configurational (Hillier, 2007). In evaluating these typologies of methodological approach I found it necessary to develop another type of approach, the 'complex-sensitive' (Sepe, 2006a–b), able to explore urban complexity by retaining both tangible and intangible aspects. The PlaceMaker method presented in Section II is collocated within this typology, and I illustrate the various phases of the method, together with the software and the sustainable place identity index. PlaceMaker is a method of urban analysis and design which both detects elements that do not feature in traditional mapping, constituting the contemporary identity of the places, and identifies appropriate project interventions. The main products are two complex maps; one of analysis and one of planning, which represent the identity of places and planning interventions with the dual aim of setting up a dialogue with local people and supporting planners and administrators in the sustainable construction and transformation of the city (Sepe, 2010b).

PlaceMaker was conceived in 2001 as a method of analysis and has been regularly updated during its pilot experiments which were started in 2002. The case studies, which were carried out in Europe, North America and Japan, led to the upgrade of PlaceMaker as a method of analysis and design and a test of its flexibility.

The PlaceMaker software – which was created during the updating of the method – provides useful support for everything concerning the application and visualization of the multimedia data and their updating, and facilitates inter-action with tablets and smartphones. Furthermore, the software is a support for calculating the index of sustainability for place identity, providing numerical values to be used in evaluating urban sustainability and paying more attention to intangible aspects.

The chief characteristics involve the method's flexibility and repro-duceability. Being flexible, it is possible on one hand to deal with different place typologies in order to achieve a variety of objectives, and on the other to adapt to the ongoing mutations in planning instruments. And the fact that it is reproduce-able means that, thanks to a specific investigative protocol, it can be accessed by a range of user types.

Numerous case studies have been carried out, some of which are presented in Part III of this volume, starting with the objectives and cultural back-ground and giving a broad explanation of the outputs. The phases of analysis and planning are described in detail, showing the different uses and diversity of places and the observations inferred during the experiments. The experiments made it possible to capture the complex identity of places and explore how interventions can be structured to contribute to preserving, reconstructing and enhancing a sustainable identity. The Trevi–Pantheon route in Rome and South Broadway in Los Angeles exemplify the preservation of identity; the Kitano-Cho area of Kobe and Market Street in San Francisco exemplify the reconstruction of identity; and Oxford Street in London, Las Ramblas in Barcelona and the Esplanadi area in Helsinki exemplify the enhancement of identity. These geographically and cul-turally different places were chosen as particularly representative of the cities they belong to. At the same time they can stimulate reflection on questions of a more general nature, not limited to the specific locations where the findings were made. The case studies carried out over the years have made it possible to define a number of principles for enhancing place identity. These are given at the end of this volume as a sort of check list that any urban project has to match in order to enhance the identity of place.

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**Part III Case studies**