“Place Basics: Concepts, Research, Literature”

Our daily lives are not played out in an intellectual realm or virtual world, but rather in very real and tangible places-environments, neighborhoods, cities. We arise each day to sights, sounds, textures, and encounters with climate and flora and fauna, often very specific to the places we live. This chapter identifies and isolates some of those important aspects of place that shape us and that we in turn shape, and it summarizes the main thinking and literature about place and good place building.

There is a long history of scholarship, research, and writing about place.

And although what follows is by no means a comprehensive summary or survey, it is an attempt to acknowledge this extensive and rich body of thinking. The fresh ideas and thinking in this book are built on the solid foundations laid by many others.

To begin, there is a common distinction in the literature between "spaces" and "places." Spaces are generic and nonspecific; places are "immediate, known and lived in. We move through spaces, we stop in and are directly involved with places" (Yencken, 1995, p. II). Places have significance and meaning to us; our memories are wrapped up with them. Places are those spaces and environments (built or natural) imbued with personal and cultural meanings. Environmental psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman (1992) define place in this way:

> Place ... refers to space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes .... [p]laces may vary in several ways-scale or size and scope, tangible versus symbolic, known and experienced versus unknown or not experienced. (p. 5)
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> Thus, familiarity and knowledge of space and environment transform it into place. As the philosopher Yi Fu Tuan (1977) says, "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (p. 6). "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (p. 73).

Much of the place literature supports the notion that creation of place is a dynamic or an ongoing process. It is not something that starts or ends at a specific point. Even places we think we know quite well may feel different with the passage of time and with the development pressures and demographic changes that accompany it.

Many things influence what a place feels like, its place qualities. The unique qualities of places are the cumulative result of the many sensory impressions we experience when being there. We often tend to emphasize the visual experiences, of course. We see the buildings and human-built environment, the natural landscapes, and the ways in which humans (and nonhumans) interact with these environments. But, of course, our other senses are also very much involved. Sounds are crucial-one thinks of the sounds of the street vendors when walking along the Rambla, the main pedestrian street in Barcelona, Spain, or the unique sounds of Venice, Italy, a result of the absence of cars, and the noise of pushcarts being pulled up and down bridge-steps in that city. We hear places as much as see them.

Smells often provide the most vivid memories and recollections of place.

The distinctive smells of place are many, and one recognizes them though we may not always be able to isolate or disentangle the (usually) delightful sensory mix. Smell is highly underrated as a sense and an important way we experience places. It is commonly said that humans are actually capable of distinguishing 10,000 different smells, though our language and ability to describe and articulate them is woefully underdeveloped. The fish market vendors at the market in Leiden, the fragrant smells of vegetables and herbs-melons, tomatoes, basil, zucchini—are some of the most enjoyable aspects of shopping at community farmers markets, to be sure (a pleasant contrast to the antiseptic, smell-free atmospheres of most large grocery stores). There are many seasonal smells that characterize our place memories—the smells of falling leaves in autumn along the Eastern U.S., the smell of snow, the smells (and other sensations) of summer thunderstorms. There are many food smells that we experience in cities-the aroma of Cajun food in New Orleans, bakeries in Paris, the numerous food smells of Chinatown in San Francisco. City smells, though not always entirely pleasant (car exhausts, garbage waiting to be collected) are also place-defining. Burning charcoal in Caribbean cities like Kingston, Jamaica or Port-au-Prince, Haiti, are defining smells in these places.

These spaces with imbued personal and social meaning can take many physical forms. They can be largely natural environments-national parks and scenic landscapes-or built environments such as cities, towns, or rural agricultural landscapes. They can be large (New York City or the Florida Everglades) or rather small and confined (Natural Bridge in Virginia, or an urban courtyard or urban space, such as the Plaza in Santa Fe).

Figure 2.11 Venetian *campi,* or small squares, each have their own special quality and flavor, and serve important civic and social functions for the surrounding neighborhood. Campo San Luca, shown here, is one of the most delightful.

An interesting or unique neighborhood has its own quality of place, a function of its buildings, people, and environment, but it is also shaped by, and in turn helps to shape, the broader town and region in which it lies. The Plaza in Santa Fe is itself a significant and important place, yet together with other buildings, neighborhoods, and city features make up the place of Santa Fe, which itself is embedded in a rich landscape mosaic comprising a distinctive New Mexican place. The delightful small plaza spaces of Venice, Italy—the *campi,* as they are called—each have their own unique and special qualities. They are places, at a certain neighborhood scale, that build together with special qualities of water, wind, bridges, and architecture to create the special feeling and experience of Venice the city.

Increasingly, it seems, and perhaps paralleling the immense mobility and travel now enjoyed by those living in industrialized northern nations, the places that are significant to us and that have meaning are many and diverse. We may enjoy an attachment to our place of birth or homeland, to where we presently live (or have lived), or to many other places imbued with some degree of specialness or sacredness to us. This modern phenomenon of multiple place experiences is both a vice 'and a virtue. On the negative side, our tendency to be "place grazers" may serve to diffuse or dilute the commitments we feel to anyone specific place. This is one primary problem associated with the high degree to which Americans tend to move around. We know many places casually but few in much depth or particularity.

On the other hand, a variety of place commitments are helpful and healthy, even to those places we visit infrequently. Two examples are Yosemite and New York City, a natural environment and a built environment. Both places instill tremendous pride, affection, and loyalty to many people, and both might be aptly characterized as sacred places. Both places hold important place affections for me, even though I do not live in or near them—they are place affections borne of periodic visits and the memories of the experiences there.

Many types of place bonds develop over one's life, some from religious or cultural importance, others from important personal events or tragedies.

> University of Utah environmental psychologist Setha Low (1992) speaks of the importance, for example, of "pilgrimage" in creating place bonds: "Pilgrimage to a place, the desire to visit a place, and participation in a celebratory event such as a parade or festival is a special kind of place attachment, in that the experience of the place, although intense, is usually transient, but the idea of the place and its religious, spiritual, or sociopolitical importance lingers on for years" (p. 173).

There is a considerable literature on the notion of sacred places and the importance of such places in our spiritual and cultural lives. Native Americans and other native peoples have attached special values to unique or distinctive natural places—a mountaintop, a sequoia grove, a coastline. Tragic events forge special bonds with the places affected—for example, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers site. Ground Zero has become a sacred site, creating special duties to design and build in ways that are respectful of this

importance.

The Language of Place

There is indeed a language of place—different terms and terminology, some popular, others more professional or specialized—by which we talk about places. The significance of places to us can be and is spoken of in many different ways. *Sense of place* is one common way, a term I have already employed.

As David Hummon, a sociologist at Holy Cross College (1992), observes, sense of place involves a personal *orientation* toward place, in which one's understandings of place and one's feeling about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning. (p. 262)

One's sense of place involves both a subjective and an objective perspective.

Objectively, there are many place qualities, such as landscapes, buildings, and community features; subjectively, we judge and assess the meaning and personal value of these objective qualities. The literature offers a number of ideas and cases demonstrating actions that can be taken to make or strengthen a sense of place. These include public art projects, distinctive pedestrian environments, landscapes using native species, parks and gardens, and gateway projects that strengthen a sense of entering a new and different place, among many others (Winikoff, 1995). Much of this book discusses these different ideas.

Place *attachment,* or emotional commitments to place, is another way we relate. Places that have significance or special meaning to us also engender special considerations in our actions and behaviors. Place attachment can be described as a "positive emotional bond" and "the emotional linkage of an individual to a particular environment" (Mesch and Manor, 1998, pp. 504-505).

Community *rootedness* is another way of talking about place attachments. To what degree do residents actually feel a part of a place or community? Are they in a familiar place, one that feels comfortable and nurturing, one where they feel like "insiders"? Place attachment and commitment and place rootedness are important in part because they can serve to shape personal choices and behavior. It is hoped that residents with greater levels of attachments and rootedness are more willing to take the many actions essential to conserving and improving places. Few individuals will care about sustaining places if they have no attachment or rootedness.

Home is an important word in our place language. For most Americans, home connotes a structure or building, usually a single-family house, but of course the word has a broader, more expansive meaning. It is a place that we like very much or love, that makes us feel secure and cozy, where we enjoy being, that replenishes, refreshes, reinvigorates us, to which we have significant attachments. *Coming home* is a good thing—these are places that reassure us, provide shelter and safety, where there is rest and nourishment. These are places that are familiar to us. Our larger home, beyond the narrow notion of our house, including our streets, our neighborhoods, our communities, similarly provides us with comfort,

sustenance, and reassurance and equally warrants our care and commitment.

Some authors argue passionately for the need to define our home in an even broader, more biophysically appropriate or logical way. Our home is the *watershed* we live in or the *bioregion* we occupy, however that might be defined. Bioregionalism has been brilliantly defended and argued for by individuals like the writer Kirkpatrick Sale and the naturalist Gary Snyder (Sale, 1985; Snyder, 1982). Landscape architect Rob Thayer (2003) defines a bioregion, what he calls a "LifePlace," in the following way:

> ... a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting human and non-human living communities. Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems, and related, identifiable landforms (e.g., particular mountain ranges, prairies, or coastal zones) and by unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region. (p. 3)

Supporters of bioregionalism argue that efforts to reorganize our thinking and lives around discernible bioregions will itself facilitate place commitments. If we begin to see ourselves as embedded in the Cuyahoga bioregion or the Mt. Shasta bioregion, we may further develop a strong sense of regional and place dimension to our language, thinking, and lives, and this will make it easier to live more sustainable, place-based lives.

In this book I often use "home" in this more expansive way, in a broader ecological and geographic sense consistent with the lifeplace and bioregion/ definitions tendered by Sale, Thayer, and others. Our "home" is our lifeterritory—the communities, landscapes, and bioregions that we occupy and depend upon for our emotional and physical existence.

In planning for sustainable communities, much importance is placed on how to encourage or facilitate or strengthen these commitments to place. Research helps us understand the many sources from which we derive our emotional commitments to place, including genealogical and family ties to place, religious or cosmological attachments, pilgrimages to places of personal importance, and narratives or the telling of stories that connect people and communities to the land (Low, 1992). Age (the older the person, the greater the attachment), homeownership, and length of residence are all positively related to place attachments. Longevity of residence in a community, which results in greater social ties and more extensive personal memories of place, has been found to correlate highly with place attachments (Hummon, 1992).

In a study of Calvert County, Maryland, by University of Maryland researchers Sagoff and Wasserman, through a series of focus group sessions, found distinct differences between older residents and more recent residents. Older residents were seen to have a "richly nuanced sense of place," born of personal histories and hardship, whereas newer residents were found to have "a thin, relatively under-developed sense of Calvert County as a place, they saw the county as a place of pleasant scenery and relaxation from the rigors of work and the commute, but also as a place of isolation and sometimes burden" (Sagoff and Wasserman, undated). Perceptions of place will also vary by race, and in the study the researchers found

that for African Americans the county's place history was "polluted by segregation and racism." Consequently, this group appeared less interested in preservation and more supportive of future development.

Desirable natural and physical qualities of community are also important in strengthening place attachments. The distinctive natural qualities of South Carolina's Low Country, for example—its bays, marshes, palmettos, and tremendous natural beauty—has much to do with place affections. Views of the Rockies in Denver, spectacular visual connections to the bay in San Francisco or to Diamond Head in Honolulu, are extremely important natural and physical elements of these places—they make them different and special to us and uplift us emotionally and spiritually.

It is, of course, much more than just the physical environment, the buildings and landscapes, that are important to us; it is the social qualities and characteristics of the places, as well. Considerable research explores the impact of social networks and personal relationships on commitments to place. Perhaps not surprisingly, the more extensive the neighborhood social and familial ties, the greater are the expressed commitments to place. A place survey by sociologists Gustavo Mesch and Orit Manor (1998) came to this conclusion: "The larger the number of friends living in the neighborhoods and the closer the relationship with neighbors, the greater the pride residents took in their neighborhood. The more satisfied individuals were with the neighborhood physical and social characteristics, the more likely was attachment to place" (p. 51 5).

Places are important to us because we have family or close friends living there, and because we value the closeness, familiarity, comfort, and support that are derived from these social and familial connections. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle our affection for a city or region from the social and personal connections we have there. A street recalls friends we knew there, a hospital recalls illness or tragedy (or perhaps the elation and beauty of the birth of a child), specific cities are home to grandparents, adult siblings, close friends. The geographical and social are intimately bound together.

Places where we have spent time, where we have grown up, where we formed opinions of the world, where relationships have developed, are all important because of these patterns. Landscapes and places are embedded with memories, and the nature of these memories affect how we value and treat places. History, personal and collective, is an important dimension then in place building and in forging place commitments. Battlefields involve a solemnity that makes them important collectively and, sometimes, individually. The house and neighborhood where one grew up often imbues them with special, valuable memories. They can consequently be the basis for place attachments.

We live on a coinhabited planet, and the communities and landscape where we dwell are home to other forms of life. Our source of place and our commitments to these places are formed in part through these relationships to others. Personal stories and recollections are common of time spent watching wildlife, climbing trees, experiencing in some direct way the biodiversity of place. The interaction of the human and natural environments is a special and important relationship. There is growing recognition that nonhuman species influence

our perceptions of place and, indeed, are shaping these human places in important ways.

Native peoples often conceptualize lands and landscapes in terms of their "sacredness," that is, the extent to which they are especially important for religious or historic reasons. Native Americans have identified a number of environmental features as sacred. Increasingly, the notion of sacred places has taken on a more secular meaning—places that are of special value, emotionally or spiritually. Battlefields may take on this label for some; special geological features or spectacular elements of natural beauty such as coastlines may be viewed as sacred to others.

Another contemporary reality is that a place, or places, can no longer be viewed as a discrete or separate thing. Our modern notion of place must acknowledge the *connectedness* between places. This connectedness is physical, social, and temporal. Physically, places are connected in many ways. Communities lie in complexly intersecting physical and ecological spaces-watersheds, aquifers, airsheds, viewsheds. What happens in one community may affect other communities hundreds or thousands of miles away.

The notion of an ecological footprint, popularized by William Rees, a planning professor at the University of British Columbia, is one tool for understanding and appreciating these place interconnections. It is a quantitative expression of the land base needed to support a human population and its consumption habits and a powerful measure of place sustainability (Wackernagel and Rees, 1994). About 25 acres of land is required to provide the average North American with food, energy, and other needs. When the aggregate footprint of a city or town is calculated, the land impact can be immense. A recent ecological footprint study done for London shows that the city's population, for instance, requires a land area nearly 300 times the actual size of the city (Best Food Forward, 2002). London depends on the resources and life support provided by many other places, some quite far away.

The rise in bioregional literature and thinking further reflects the importance of connecting place with the ways in which we live our lives (e.g., Thayer, 2003). Bioregionalism believes in the primary importance of reestablishing deep place connections and awareness. Described simply by some as "living a rooted life," it "means you are aware of the ecology, economy, and culture of the place where you live, and are committed to making choices that enhance them" (Great River Earth Institute, undated).

Few, if any, places can be accurately characterized as the proverbial island (even, and especially, islands!). These place relationships are often described in urban-rural terms. Cities and rural areas do themselves each represent places worthy of appreciation and protection, perhaps based on quite different physical, architectural, or landscape qualities, but they also seem to be connected. Water, food, and resources may derive from the surrounding countryside as many as hundreds of miles away in an increasingly globalized world, and employment and recreational community patterns may represent similar connections. Modern concepts of place must, as a result, acknowledge these interconnections.

The connections are social and cultural, as well. Immigrants to a new country typically

maintain family and personal connections to their country of birth. Indeed, partly because of technologies of air travel and communications, international families maintaining strong connections and bonds to places outside their immediate residence are increasingly common.

There has been considerable attention in the professional planning literature to strategies and ideas for strengthening sense of place, and for creating or building new places. Protecting sense of place is often about protecting the special or unique historic qualities of the community, as well as preserving the natural landscapes and characteristics of such communities. Urban design guidelines, historic preservation initiatives, Main Street programs, and land conservation initiatives are frequently supported on the basis of strengthening a sense of place. Sameness and a homogenization of the landscape is the often criticized outcome of sprawl (e.g., Moe and Wilkie, 1997)

Place knowledge is yet another way we commonly talk about this issue.

The extent (or lack) of knowledge about a place is often viewed as a proxy for the extent of commitments and the placeless existence many of us lead today. Our paucity of specific place-based knowledge is especially accentuated when considering the natural environment. Many surveys of geographical knowledge suggest that our specific understanding of the places in which we live-their natural and biophysical conditions and characteristics, and their history and built heritage-is limited to nil (e.g., National Geographic Society, undated; Jones, 2001). Learning about place seems a low priority in our consumption-oriented society; where we're working harder and longer, commuting farther, all to buy the things that we are interested in learning about—the play station, the Navigator, the latest bargains in cellular phones. Residents commonly have scant knowledge of the ecosystems and landscapes in which they live. Most would have difficulty naming a species of butterfly or native wildflower or snake, and would not recognize such if (when) they present themselves in the flesh. Even recognition of common species of songbirds or native trees is limited. And, no wonder. Little emphasis or value is placed on knowing such things, either within the community or through conventional educational institutions. The irony is that children are able to recognize a Burger King logo at a distance of half a mile but would have trouble identifying even a common species of dragonfly or damselfly. It seems knowledge of our broader ecological community, as Aldo Leopold conceived of it, is quite limited indeed.

Figure 2.21 The main street of Franklin, Virginia. Despite devastating flooding from Hurricane Floyd in 1999, the city has worked hard to strengthen and enhance its charming downtown. Recent efforts have focused on encouraging new housing above shops.

Diminished engagement or involvement in politics (especially local politics) influences place as well. And many writers and commentators have made the connection between a declining civic realm and a diminished and deteriorating place. William Shutkin (2000) of MIT observes that much developed or built landscape reflects an "atrophied civic life," as does the way in which we treat the natural environments to which we have been entrusted:

> Civic expression goes beyond architecture to land use and environment itself ... Contaminated urban land, suburban sprawl, polluted rivers, drained wet-lands, regional smog, acid rain, clear cutting and endangered species: these are some of the adverse and interrelated physical effects of development that ultimately are a reflection of the civic health and consciousness of communities.

In Shutkin's view, such outcomes and physical conditions reflect an "impersonal, indifferent, and rootless society" (p. 76). "Similarly, place can nurture public memory, the sense of civic identity, which empowers citizens and inspires them to contribute to civic life" (p. 49). There is power in place, to be sure, in its promise for binding us together politically and interpersonally.

Place Qualities: What Do We Like About Places?

The physical and natural context of places, as determinants or influences on sense of place and place quality, are undeniable. J. H. Crawford, in his book *Carfree Cities* (2002), talks of the importance of making *magical* places. To Crawford, such places are marked by "human scale, rich detail, beautiful setting, harmonious sounds and evocative scents. They require an appreciative public to come alive: people involve themselves in the magic helping to sustain

it" (p. 288). Creating magical places, soulful places, distinctive and genuine and inspiring places, is the charge and challenge, and it is a difficult one today.

Distinctiveness is one feature of place consistently valued in literature and in planning practice. No place can be considered special or unique if it looks, feels, and functions the same as every other place in the world. Other words and sentiments are often used to express feelings of placelessness. Gertrude Stein is famously quoted as saying about Oakland, California, that there is no there *there.* Joel Garreau (1992) and others have talked of "soulless" cities and communities. Urban designer Kevin Lynch (1972) has argued convincingly in support of the values of *place diversity* and *identity:* "Places should have a clear perceptual identity: recognizable, memorable, vivid, engaging of attention, differentiated from other locations" (p. 225).

Lynch's classic study *The Image of the City* (1960) identified in systematic fashion the key building blocks of a distinct place. The visual qualities or "imageability" of a place, to Lynch, derives from the arrangement of five main building blocks: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Paths are the movement corridors, the ways that we pass through places, and how we experience them, whereas edges create boundaries and breaks that help distinguish, differentiate, and organize space. Districts, perhaps a commercial area or ethnic neighborhood, share common qualities, and nodes are important junctions or foci. Landmarks, of course, are of various sorts and critical to creating recognizable, unique place. A large church, a civic structure such as city hall or a courthouse, a prominent theater, and other "point-references" help to build familiarity, orient residents and visitors, and build strong physical (and social) identity. Lynch (1960) cites the Duomo, in Florence, Italy, as an example of a distinct landmark, at once orienting and symbolic. Together, these essential elements "must be patterned together to provide a satisfying form" (p. 83).

Another useful way of thinking about the determinant of unique and special places is to identify the place "assets" that exist and upon which a strengthening of a sense of place can take place. Place assets are of many kinds. Some are, of course, essentially beyond control, such as the topography of a place, its climate and natural beauty, although of course there are many actions that can be taken to protect, nurture, and promote greater appreciation of and connection to these environmental assets. Historic buildings, charming streetscapes, and the cultural flavor and ethnic mix of a place are other kinds of important place assets, as are all manner of amenities, from restaurants to art galleries to outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities. These are assets that, as Richard Florida (2002) demonstrates in his research, can serve to attract the so-called creative class and can be so important in driving local economy.

Residential or community satisfaction, although separate and distinct from commitment to place, does appear to be related. Access to basic human needs in a community, such as abundant natural lighting, fresh air, and stimulating parks, and outdoor environments, for instance, is essential to creating good places (e.g., see Hiss's discussion of this in *The Experience of Place*, 1990). Inspiring and beautiful architecture is important to many. A diversity or distinctiveness to the buildings and architecture of a place is a common plea in good place building.

Creating "legible" places is an often-expressed goal. Legibility can be understood as the ability to understand the pattern of a place, to know and find one's way around. Urban designer and planner Kevin Lynch (1971) talks of both spatial and temporal legibility—the former, understanding the physical cues and spatial elements that guide and orient one; the latter, involving the elements of place that "orient its inhabitants to the past, to the present with its cyclical rhythms, and even to the future, with its hopes and dangers." Places must be meaningful, as well; they must have both practical utility and emotional and aspirational importance.

Figure 2.31 Distinctive and beautiful architecture is an essential element of place. Ghent, Belgium, seen here, exemplifies the importance of inspiring architecture and urban design, in this case evolving over several hundred years.

There is considerable academic and policy research and writing about the design and planning qualities of a good place. These qualities include mixed uses and walkability, communities and cities with clear boundaries, extensive open space, parks and nature. The New Urbanism movement in the United States, especially in the last two decades, has been a vocal proponent of more compact, walkable neighborhoods and urban design, based on the traditional design qualities of small American cities and towns, circa 1900 or 1920 (e.g., see Katz; Congress for the New Urbanism, 1998). Gridded street patterns, narrower streets with sidewalks and trees, on-street parking and alleys behind homes, and porches and picket fences are common signature elements of New Urbanist communities (e.g., for review of New Urbanist principles, see Congress for the New Urbanism, 2000, or www.cnu.org).

Sociologist William Whyte's seminal observational work *The Social Life of Small Urban*

Spaces (1980) provides significant insights into public and 'Community spaces that people like and are attracted to and that, on many levels, can be said to *work.* Through his Street Life Project and the extensive use of time-lapse photography, he extracted many key design and planning insights. Whyte's analysis highlighted the importance of such essential features as adequate sitting space (including ledges, benches, and movable chairs, ideally), sun, trees, and water (people like them, and are attracted by them), and wind (people seek spaces that shield them from cold winds).

Sun access should be protected, Whyte believed, and where urban spaces did not get sufficient sun, it might be possible to bounce the sun into these spaces off of the surfaces of surrounding buildings. Whyte's discussion of water conveys the desirability of this element in cities—not just to see, but to learn, feel, and even experience by immersing one's feet and hands in it. "It is not right," Whyte notes, "to put water before people and then keep them away from it. But this is what is happening across the country" (p. 48).

Perhaps Whyte's most important insight about places may be the most obvious—that we seek out and want to be in places where there are other people. We cluster together, and seek out sitting spots and spaces where others are not far away. Fundamentally, Whyte and other proponents of public spaces regale them as serving important community building and social enhancing goals. These are the places where we come together as a community, where we hold rallies and parades, and where we celebrate both the festive and the somber. They have much to do with creating a distinctive sense of place and affectionate attachment to place.

Few individuals have had as much influence on the architecture and planning academics about place and what makes a good place as urban critic Jane Jacobs. With no formal planning or design training, she expounded classic and enduring principles of good urbanism, most clearly and importantly articulated in her *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). In many ways she caused a reconceptualizing of cities—the seemingly messy and chaotic nature of life in places like New York were not bad or negative qualities but quite positive indeed. These are the qualities essential to vital urban life and a creative market economy. Jacobs believed in the importance of urban densities, the mixing of primary uses (and was very critical of efforts by planners to "sort" uses), a diversity of housing types, and the need to protect and preserve historic buildings and neighborhoods. Her vision of active, vibrant streets and street life is perhaps her greatest legacy. Streets were the real public spaces in the city, the essential social glue binding a city and its residents, places for socializing and for raising children, and places where people and activity provide a natural kind of collective security (her famous adage "eyes on the street"). Her contributions to our understanding of real places have been immense.

British urban designer John Montgomery argues, along with Jane Jacobs, that economic activities and "transactions" are the real life of cities, and the heart of what makes a "successful" place (Montgomery, 1995). And, what is needed to allow and encourage these interactions is a highly mixed and diverse set of land uses and activities. Many observers of places and place making have of course bemoaned the tendency of contemporary planning, especially in the United States to separate and isolate different uses and activities. Having a "variety of building types" is also equally important: "a mixture of uses, blocks, building sizes, ages and conditions,

types and adaptability" (Montgomery, 1995, p. 147).

Walkable or pedestrian-friendly communities are highly valued in the place literature. A walkable community requires a form and street pattern, as Montgomery notes, that is highly "permeable":

> People need to be able to move around places with relative ease, crossing roads, seeing around corners, being tempted down the "side streets of disorder" as well as sticking to the "avenues of order." Permeability is the capacity to move into and through an area. (Montgomery, 1995, pp. 147-148)

Urban environments and communities that provide rich and stimulating experiences are important. Enjoyable, desirable places are places that stimulate our senses, that promote what Tony Hiss (1990) calls "simultaneous perception," and that allow us to, at once, appreciate and draw in many different sensations and stimuli. For Hiss, this kind of perception "seems calmer, more like a clear, deep, reflective lake" (p. 3). And the places that encourage simultaneous perception, like Grand Central Station in New York City, can "amplify our perceptive real, allowing us to notice aspects of our mental activity that are normally veiled," and can as a result "give us a mental lift" (p. 27).

Figure 2.41 The Grand Canal, Venice, Italy. Few places evoke the majesty and visual beauty of this special interplay of buildings, water, boats, and the movement of people and goods.

Perhaps more than any other designer, Christopher Alexander has shaped our understanding of what makes good places, and the elements of communities that respond to timeless human needs. His classic *A Pattern Language* (I977) remains a fount of insights into good place building. Along with several colleagues, Alexander provides a comprehensive set of guidelines or "patterns" from the scale of regions and towns down to buildings and construction, that reflect

established principles of good place building. Alexander identifies each pattern he believes "describes a deep and inescapable property of a well-formed environment"

Urban planner Sidney Brower (1990) reviewed and summarized the findings of some thirty-six studies about the qualities associated with neighborhood satisfaction. Although the findings depend on the preferred living environment (city, suburb, size of community), and some qualities are often at odds with each other, some consistent qualities do seem to emerge. Neighborhood maintenance and appearance, safety and tranquility, friendliness, and community amenities (recreation, restaurants, shopping, etc.) are most important to people.

Surveys of the public about what makes up a good place may, of course, differ from what planners, community leaders, and community institutions hold to be important values. This is a major tension today in community planning and place building. Brower's survey of the literature about neighborhood qualities suggests that many respondents in these kinds of studies value "ethnic, religious and income homogeneity," although urban respondents all appear to value diversity more. Yet, the goal of diverse neighborhoods and communities is established and widely accepted in planning and design. Planners and architects believe in the critical importance, and fairness, of diversity and social opportunity in any concept of a good place.

Disagreement exists today about how best to grow cities, and there is concern that large-scale building and development, often focused on converting large, previously undeveloped areas to new urban and suburban uses, will do little to create unique special places. Many believe (as do I) that cities, towns, and villages that grow slowly over a relatively long period of time (or even grow quickly through hundreds or thousands of small building and renewal projects) have an historical texture and rich design complexity that places built largely at once do not have. Older centers of European cities like Leiden or Copenhagen, for instance, have a charm and flavor and level of historical detail typically lacking in new towns or in major new growth districts in these cities. But the approaches are not mutually exclusive, of course, and efforts can be made in the design and planning to stimulate diversity, to make historical connections, and to incorporate livability and sustainability features (e.g., good cycling facilities) that may compensate for the feelings of newness and sameness that many of these places may exude.

The Importance of Nature in Place Making

Arguably, good places, places we love, respond to and acknowledge our basic human needs. Although no consensus exists about the full panoply of physical and biophysical human needs, some fairly clear indications are provided by the literature and research. In only very recent human history have we, as a species, begun to spend the majority of our days indoors, toiling and living in the midst of artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation.

There appears, as well, a hardwired need for direct contact with nature and other forms of life. E. O. Wilson speaks of this in terms of *biophilia,* or our innate need to connect with other living organisms. What strikes some as an academic notion is demonstrated daily around the United States and the world, as humans show their fascination with and concern

about other forms of life. The demonstrated therapeutic value of contact with animals, even domestic pets, shows our biophilic physiological and emotional needs (Frumkin, 2001). With the reintroduction of peregrine falcons in the early 1980s, crowds in New York City huddled around street-level TV screens that projected pictures of nesting falcons on their ledged perches. There are now sixteen pairs of nesting peregrine falcons in the city, providing tremendous enjoyment and satisfaction to residents lucky enough to see them.

We biologically need full-spectrum natural sunlight, the ability to see sky and stars, and access to the natural elements. Other elements of landscape that humans appear innately to prefer include vistas, open space, "legible" landscapes (landscapes that are readable and make finding one's way possible), and landscapes with winding paths that hold mystery for us (see Hiss, 1990).

There is no question that urban residents prefer living in neighborhoods that are "greener." And, to a considerable degree, the marketplace recognizes the value of these green features in the form of higher rents and property values. Studies show that home lots containing trees have a higher market value than lots without them (Benotto, 2002). Visual preference surveys, which have been used extensively around the United States, especially by architect/planner Anton Nelessen, equally demonstrate the value, at least in the visual realm, of trees and tree-lined streets. Rated consistently high in visual preference surveys are streets with generous sidewalks, on-street parking, and a row of mature trees. A recent study of the economic' value of greenspace in London further demonstrates the strong impact such factors have on market values (Greater London Authority, 2003).

Figure 2.51 Urban forests contribute much to communities: beauty, connections to landscapes and nature, essential natural services. This is the large Eilenriede forest in the center of Hannover, Germany.

Trees and greenspace in the urban environment have been found to produce soothing and therapeutic benefits' (see Frumkin, 2001, for a good overview of the research). These effects may even translate into significant medically and physiologically restorative qualities. Roger Ulrich, a researcher at Texas A&M, has done some of the most important work documenting these therapeutic qualities. In perhaps his most famous study, Ulrich (1983) sought to test

the impact that views of trees from hospital rooms have on the recovery of surgical patients. Comparing recovery time for patients with rooms with tree views against those with windows looking out on a brick wall, he found that patients in the rooms with views of trees recovered from surgery faster, needed fewer drugs, and had fewer postsurgical complications.

Ulrich's theoretical approach is typically characterized as one founded on notions of stress reduction-that natural environments reduce stress, with accompanying psychological and physical benefits. Others have emphasized the concept of "directed attention" and the role nature plays in recovery from fatigue and the ability to focus attention. Undoubtedly, both dynamics are present and both sets of benefits occur (Kaplan, 1995). Rachel Kaplan in early research (1973) has demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of urban gardening as one example. Sometimes described in terms of restorative benefits, the main idea is the ability of these natural qualities and activities to elicit feelings of fascination and to replenish our natural energies.[3]

Studies suggest that homes with views of trees and natural environments will have a positive psychological effect on children. Nancy Wells, a professor at Cornell's College of Human Ecology, conducted a study of the cognitive functioning of children aged 7-12 years in low-income families. In this longitudinal study, children were evaluated when living in poor housing conditions with little access to nature, and then later when their housing circumstance had improved to include views of trees and natural settings. Exposure to nature in these different home environments was evaluated through the use of a ten-point naturalness scale, evaluating the extent to which views of nature are present from different areas of the house. Parents were given a standardized set of questions aimed at judging the cognitive attention-focusing ability of their children. The results show a strong correlation between naturalness of the home and cognitive functioning. Professor Wells (2000) concludes that these effects are "profound": "Children who experienced the most improvement (increase) in the natural elements or restorative characteristics of their home tended to have the greatest ability to direct their attention several months after moving to the new home" (p. 790).

Phil Leather and his colleagues at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom (1998) found that sunlight penetration and window views of nature in the workplace were positively associated with job satisfaction and well-being, and negatively associated with intention to quit. Based on a sample of 100 workers at a wine operation in southern Europe, the study demonstrates what seems intuitive: that workers with windows and workspaces providing more natural sunlight and views of trees and the natural environment will be happier, and happier in their jobs.

Applied psychologists Hartig, Mang, and Evans (1991) have shown through several experimental and quasi-experimental studies the restorative value of natural environments and the ability of exposure to nature, even urban parks, to reduce mental fatigue. In this study, participants who recreated in nature (backpackers) performed better on a proofreading test than those who did not have a similar nature vacation. Follow-up with participants over time suggests that nature experiences may have longer-term restorative value, or "proactive effects, preparing people to better cope with the stress and strain of daily life" (p. 15).

While backpacking in a remote wilderness is one way to achieve these elements, University of Michigan psychologist Stephen Kaplan (1995) and others acknowledge that many of these qualities can be present in urban environments and through experiences much closer to where most people live: "The sense of being away does not require that the setting be distant. Natural environments that are easily accessible thus offer an important resource for resting one's directed attention" (p. 174). Those restorative qualities can be achieved through careful design of small urban spaces, through connected trails and pathways that maximize these experiences in urban setting, for example.

The enjoyment many people get from bird watching, often in urban environments, is indicative of the recreational and therapeutic benefits and personal enjoyment of wildlife viewing. We tend to think that true wildlife experiences can only happen in remote national parks, yet cities represent important habitats for a rich array of wildlife and biodiversity. Enhancing this urban biodiversity, restoring it where possible, and expanding opportunities for urbanites to gain direct exposure becomes an important strategy for strengthening place, and for reducing urban stress.

A recent study comparing play patterns in public housing projects that have trees and vegetation, to play patterns in projects without these features, provides compelling support for the socializing and developmental benefits provided by nature and natural features. Children's play in green housing projects was substantially higher, and presence of and exposure to adults also significantly greater (Taylor et al., 1998). The authors, a group of environmental psychologists at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Professors Andres Faber Taylor, Angela Wiley, Frances E. Kuo, and William Sullivan conclude with an admonition to the design disciplines about the importance of incorporating natural features, especially trees: "We hope these findings, along with future research, will encourage city planners and designers to include more trees and grass in public housing developments. Doing so is likely to have a number of positive consequences that benefit children, their families, and their communities" (p. 23).

Nature and Its Capacity to Strengthen Place and Build Community

Nature and the natural features of cities help to actively strengthen community in several ways. First, greening urban environments can create important preconditions for socializing behavior. Presence of trees and vegetation create more appealing places in which to meet, socialize, and interact with other community residents. As community gardens in New York City and elsewhere demonstrate, these natural areas are extremely attractive and vitally important places in which to hold community events, meetings, and celebrations. These forms of urban nature not only provide the physical spaces in which these community-strengthening activities can occur but, as cited earlier, likely serve to enhance the attractiveness of participating. Where a political rally or food drive or civic event can occur in park and forest settings, as opposed to say an auditorium, greater attendance and participation are likely.

The various programs and initiatives designed to enhance, restore, and expand green qualities in communities can themselves be important processes for building and strengthening community. Andrew Light (2000), a philosophy professor at New York University, has argued that ecological restoration has "inherent democratic potential" in its

possibility of involving large numbers of citizens and volunteers working in a largely equal way to pursue collective goals. Restorative work is not by definition participative or democratic (e.g., consider the scale and tasks associated with the new Everglades restoration project), but it can be. And, natural restoration in an urban setting tends to be small-scale and decentralized, the result of many good people acting together to make a difference and to improve their community.

There is much anecdotal evidence, moreover, that such forms of direct personal action and participating directly in the improvement of one's community has a commitment-strengthening function. Tree planting parties, urban stream cleanup and restoration functions, and other similar initiatives typically amount to a kind of "ecological barn raising" and can make a large difference in the public life of a community.

Considerable and convincing research suggests, then, that access to trees and nature has profound therapeutic, life-enhancing, and community-building qualities. Although access to nature is perhaps easier in rural and natural settings, there is an increasing importance, as discussed further in Chapter 5, to design and manage cities in ways that maximize opportunities for interaction with nature. Cities can and must become more natural and ecological, and doing so will respond to basic human needs.

Place Ethics

An important body of thinking and writing focuses on the value and normative dimensions of place, a recognition that there are fundamental ethical dimensions to the ways in which we treat places—how we use and affect natural and cultural space, and the human and nonhuman lives that occupy and depend on these spaces. We might refer to this broad but important component of the literature and theory as *place ethics.*

What is the extent of our place obligations? What do we owe places? How ought we treat places and the people and things that occupy them? Elsewhere I have argued for the importance of the concept of the *moral community* (Beatley 1994), and in particular the question of three ethical dimensions temporal, spatial, and biological. Do we have obligations to future generations (temporal), duties beyond our immediate community or jurisdictional borders (spatial), and duties to forms of life other than our own (biological)? There is now a growing body of literature largely in environmental ethics that seeks to address these questions (e.g., see Nash, 1989).

The normative impact of public design and planning, and the powerful effects of the designed qualities of our cities and communities, is a point often made in the literature. Sidney Brower (1990), a professor of planning at the University of Maryland, for instance, talks of the important civilizing function of communal spaces in a neighborhood: "The neighborhood center represents, however, not only a spatial but also a social focus; it is the symbolic center of the neighborhoods. The design of the center celebrates community; it is pleasurable and spiritually uplifting. This is desirable because good design has both educational and social value; it teaches taste and refinement, and it has a civilizing influence, reducing the likelihood of conflict" (p. 75).

Bioregionalism is often argued for on ethical or moral grounds. Among the personal actions that a bioregional or place-based ethic suggests are, where at all possible, consuming locally, supporting locally owned businesses, buying products that minimize environmental impacts (locally and globally), supporting green companies and businesses, investing and banking locally, and being actively engaged in local politics and in the social life of one's community. So much of the essence of bioregionalism is about developing and nurturing a far greater consciousness of the local and regional ecology and working on its behalf. And, very important, making an effort to understand the connections between one's life choices and lifestyle, and the condition and quality and health of that ecology—that is, where does the electricity come from to power your home, and what are the environmental impacts created through producing and delivering this power, where does the water come from, where does the household waste end up, what happens to the stormwater running off your yard (and what happens to the fertilizer or herbicides applied to it?)? Understanding these connections is a key premise of bioregional living, and then taking tangible actions to sustain and nurture and commit to place is the next step.

Place-based living, it can be argued, is in direct contrast to our typical modern globalized lives. Place-based living or bioregional perspective suggests that it is indeed extremely important to know where our food is grown, for instance, and the impacts on the environment involved in growing it. Place-based living holds that individual consumers ought to take responsibility for the consequences of these consumption choices.

Globalized lives allow us to be anonymous—our consumption and its impacts are anonymous, hard to know or understand, and consequently absent of any corresponding duties or responsibilities. Our high petroleum consumption results in great ecological damage, yet we feel little direct responsibility because we typically lack specific information about these impacts and are not able to discern or understand a direct cause and effect.

An ethic of place demands of us, then, not only actions locally and bioregionally to protect and restore and nurture, but to be accountable for the destruction and impacts outside of where we live. We are concerned about and responsible for our place effects, wherever they might manifest.

There is considerable diversity of opinion about the need to disconnect completely from the global economy in order to achieve a truly bioregional society and a truly harmonious relationship between land and community. Bioregionalists like Kirkpatrick Sale argue essentially for economic self-sufficiency for bioregions. Many others argue for movement in direction of local self-sufficiency, reducing the amount and flow of goods and materials coming in from far distant lands, and favoring locally produced food and other products where possible, but accepting the inevitability of the global economy. At the heart of this philosophy is the sense that by bringing production and consumption closer together there will be greater awareness (and, it is hoped, efforts and ability to minimize) of the ecological and social impacts of such consumption.

A new kind of political ethic is also suggested. A call for *civic environmentalism* has been made by a number of recent authors. Civic environmentalism suggests the need to move beyond top-

down laws arid programs, on the one hand, and the NIMBY-ism (Not in My Backyard) that typically characterizes much contemporary local politics. The virtue of broad-based community organizations and coalitions that look across issues and focus on the "whole" and the long term is emphasized (John, 1994).

The discussions that follow in this book also emphasize the important—indeed, fused—relationships between sustainability and place. Creating sustainable communities and cities, advocated by many (e.g., Newman and Kenworthy, 1999) must necessarily happen in a place and in a locality; it is by definition place-based.

Conclusions

Place is an essential element in all human existence and living; all lives are lived in relation to actual, physical places, and thinking about what constitutes a good and healthy place is an important undertaking, to be sure.

There is a rich and abundant literature on place and place making, and on the qualities and conditions that make up a good place. Much can be learned from this extensive past research, scholarship, and writing. We know that there are many ways of defining and thinking about place, but at the core they represent the spaces, landscapes, and environments to which we attach meaning. Meaningful places are essential for meaningful lives. The meanings we attach to places are influenced by many factors, and any effort at creating sustainable places must acknowledge these influences and, where possible, bring them to the surface. Among the place qualities that emerge as important are exposure to nature and the natural environment (e.g., trees, water, wildlife).