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.

Marichela Sepe is a researcher with the Institute for Service Industry Research (IRAT) of the Italian National Research Council (CNR) in Naples. She joined the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples Federico II in 2003, where she serves as a professor and as a member of the Research Doctorate Committee in Urban Design and Planning. Sepe is on the Steering Committee of the Italian National Institute of Urban Planning (Inu), and is a member of the Urban Design Group (UDG) and European Urban Research Association (EURA).
Planning and Place in the City
Mapping place identity

Marichela Sepe
To my parents
To my family
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Last but not least, I am grateful to the places, which, with their life, people and movements, constantly give me new stimuli and the occasion for urban thinking.
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 innovate 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 sustainable 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 reemerge 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 reconstruction 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 process 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 walkability 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 discussed 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 psychology and perception, to studying how the built environment functions for people.
Foreword

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)

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 predominately 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).

The lengthy periods of time required for the perception of the city that Kevin Lynch 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)
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 interaction 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 reproducibility. 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 reproducible 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 background 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 culturally 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.
Part I
Definition of the field of investigation

Section I
Place and place identity as key concepts
Chapter 1

The concept of Place

The relationships linking the elements that make up the phenomenological world are complex and in many cases contradictory. As Norberg-Schulz has pointed out, phenomena may incorporate others, while some phenomena constitute the environment in which others manifest themselves. One term that can be used to define the environment in which phenomena manifest themselves is ‘place’ – the space in which events occur (or ‘take place’) (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.6).

Place is not evident: it should be sought, identified and gained.

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin: My birthplace, the cradle of my family, the house where I may have been born, the tree I may have seen grow (that my father may have planted the day I was born), the attic of my childhood filled with intact memories … Such places don’t exist, and it’s because they don’t exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It’s never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it.

(Perec, 1997, p.91)

Places are the element of the existential place and constitute the primary unit. Berque (1999) acknowledges the coexistence of two aspects in place, one quantitative and the other qualitative, which complement each other. Every place necessarily possesses a part which is both material – physical and ecological – and measurable, and therefore commensurable with other sites. This quantitative dimension is akin to the Aristotelian topos and Heidegger’s Stelle: as for the container, it is the external limit of a thing in the universal space of an objectified environment. On the other hand, place is related no less necessarily to an immaterial, phenomenal and semantic – non-measurable – dimension, and thus cannot be compared to other places. This qualitative and unique dimension makes it similar to Plato’s Khora and Heidegger’s Ort: it is the condition of existence of the thing within the sensitive world. These two aspects are combined trajectorively in the Ecumene reality: every place is not only a topos, but also a khora, and vice versa.
Specifically regarding the quality aspect, place – as Healey (2010, pp.33–34) asserts – is also related to the meaning that people give to their surroundings and their capacity to influence them. Places are not just a set of objects positioned on a site in order to make up a part of a city or of a territory. They assume a specific meaning in the moment in which we infuse them with a value. Indeed the term place – such as meant by Healey – does not concern the objective reality and their buildings, streets, landscapes and facilities, nor is it considered as necessarily coterminous with administrative jurisdiction. ‘Things may be co-located, and relations may overlay each other in physical spaces when we feel that we have arrived somewhere, when we sense an ambiance, when we feel that we are at some kind of nodal space in the flows of our lives’ (Healey 2010, pp.33–34).

Places and people possess, according to Norberg-Schulz, a genius loci, a sort of guardian spirit which accompanies them to their death and determines their character. The genius corresponds to what a thing is or what it wants to be. ‘Since ancient times the Genius loci, or “spirit of place” has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life … and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell’ (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.5).

Aldo Rossi recognizes in the choice of place a strong value in the classical world both for a single building and a city.

The ‘situation’ – the site – was governed by the genius loci, the local divinity, an intermediary who presided over all that was to unfold in it. … To bring this idea into the domain of urban artifacts, we must return to the value of images, to the physical analysis of artifacts and their surroundings; and perhaps this will lead us to a pure and simple understanding of the value of the locus. For such an idea of place and time is seemingly capable of being expressed rationally, even if it embraces a series of values that are outside and beyond what we experience.

(Rossi, 1984, p.103)

All places have a character which is the world’s main mode of ‘supply’ a priori.

‘Character’ is at the same time a more general and a more concrete concept than ‘space’. On the one hand it denotes a general comprehensive atmosphere, and on the other the concrete form and substance of the space-defining elements. Any presence is intimately linked with a character.

(Norberg-Schulz, 1980, pp.13–14)

In place, we can recognize the infinite characters that it consists of (Sepe, 2007). Below, we will treat the environmental, historic, symbolic, urban, perceptive, anthropological, sociological, psychological character, until we reach the virtual and that of non-place, which is useful to provide a framework for the topics in this book.
The concept of Place

Environmental character, as Norberg-Schulz (1980) affirms, is the essence of the place. It consists in shape, in concrete things, the atmosphere in which these live. The first operation ‘to give life to a place’ is to give it a name in order to make it recognizable to the rest of the world around it, or construct it, according to our own way of thinking and vision of the world.

According to an environmental-psychological approach, individual places should be treated by positioning them in a wider system of places in which they belong. As Bonnes and Secchiaroli (1995, pp.192–194) assert, the consideration with which to start is the existence of organizational modalities with which the individual experiences the place. Places are perceived as being interconnected at the individual or collective level.

Place is historical ‘from the moment when – combining identity with relations – it is defined by a minimal stability. This is the case even though those who live in it may recognize landmarks there which do not have to be objects of knowledge’ (Augé, 1995, p.44).

Rossi (1984, p.106) refers to the study of Gallia by Eydoux on:

places that have always been considered unique, and he suggested further analysis of such places, which seem to have been predestined by history. These places are real signs of space; and as such they have a relationship both to chance and to tradition. I often think of the piazzas depicted by the Renaissance painters, where the place of architecture, the human construction, takes on a general value of place and of memory because it is so strongly fixed in a single moment.

Rossi theorizes on the historical method for the study of the city which can be analysed from two different perspectives:

In the first, the city was seen as a material artifact, a man-made object built over time and retaining the traces of time, even if in a discontinuous way. Studied from this point of view – archaeology, the history of architecture, and the histories of individual cities – the city yields very important information and documentation. Cities become historical texts; in fact, to study urban phenomena without the use of history is unimaginable, and perhaps this is the only practical method available for understanding specific urban artifacts whose historical aspect is predominant. ... The second point of view sees history as the study of the actual formation and structure of urban artifacts. It is complementary to the first and directly concerns not only the real structure of the city but also the idea that the city is a synthesis of a series of values. Thus it concerns the collective imagination. Clearly the first and second approaches are intimately linked, so much so that the facts they uncover may at times be confounded with each other.

(Rossi, 1984, pp.127–128)
Historical places can also become symbolic. Urban environments contain not just meanings and values but also symbols which are the fields of investigation of semiotics.

As Eco (1968, pp.56–57) explains, semiotics studies ‘all cultural phenomena as if they were systems of signs’. The world is replete with ‘signs’, interpreted and understood as a function of society, culture and ideology. Following Ferdinand de Saussure, the process of creating meaning is called ‘signification’: ‘signifields’ are what are referred to, signifiers are things that refer to them, and signs establish the association between them.8


Place is a cultural entity speaking to its contemporaries in the long process of anthropization of the landscape, creating identity, memory, language, material culture, and symbolic and affective messages. As long as we treat places – in the wake of mass industrial culture – as beast of burden (without loading them to death, making them carry a sustainable weight), we will still have no idea of their deep riches and we will hardly be able to reverse permanently the planetary catastrophe caused through our lack of knowledge about local places and the environment.

Through the analysis of places, a more detailed and qualitative interpretation of the city is carried out. This is not circumscribed to its aesthetic essence, nor even to its physical geometry. The functional and symbolic interpretations of the elements of a place are the fundamental factors for understanding its meaning (Migliorini and Venini, 2001, p.129). ‘And as society changes, so does signification. Meanings attached to the built environment become modified as social values evolve in response to changing patterns of socio-economic organization and lifestyles’ (Knox, 1984).

Mumford (1961, pp.9–10) states that the first urban nucleus was constituted when Palaeolithic hunters began to settle in some fixed gathering places which, as they became meeting places between groups that were no longer occasional, contributed to the formation of social groupings, the basis for proto-urban settlements in the Neolithic period.

Thus even before the city is a place of fixed residence, it begins as a meeting place to which people periodically return: the magnet comes before the container, and this ability to attract non-residents to it for intercourse and spiritual stimulus no less than trade remains one of the essential criteria of the city, a witness to its inherent dynamism, as opposed to the more fixed and indrawn form of the village, hostile to the outsider. The first germ of the city, then, is in the ceremonial
The concept of Place

meeting place that serves as the goal for pilgrimage: a site to which family or clan groups are drawn back, at seasonable intervals, because it concentrates, in addition to any natural advantages it may have, certain ‘spiritual’ or supernatural powers, powers of higher potency and greater duration, of wider cosmic significance, than the ordinary processes of life .... Some of the functions and purposes of the city, accordingly, existed in such simple structures long before the complex association of the city had come into existence and re-fashioned the whole environment to give them sustenance and support.

(Mumford, 1961, pp.9–10)

The urban character of a place changes in part with the change of time: the seasons, the passing of the day and the weather conditions, resulting in different light, contribute to changing its character. This character is also:

determined by the material and formal constitution of the place. We must therefore ask: how is the ground on which we talk, how is the sky above our heads, or in general; how are the boundaries which define the place. How a boundary is depends upon its formal articulation, which is again related to the way it is ‘built’. Looking at a building from this point of view, we have to consider how it rests on the ground and how it rises towards the sky. Particular attention has to be given to its lateral boundaries, or walls, which also contribute decisively to determine the character of the urban environment.

(Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.14)

Halbwachs in his studies on collective memory theorizes on the interrelationship that exists between a group and the space which it occupies:

The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built. The group’s image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution. ...

Thus we understand why spatial images play so important a role in the collective memory. The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. .... But place and group have each received the imprint of the other. Therefore every phase of the group can be translated into spatial terms, and its residence is but the juncture of all these terms. Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it.

(Halbwachs, 1992, p.54)
Place and place identity as key concepts

Expanding Halbwachs’s thesis, Rossi (1984) states that the city itself is the collective memory of peoples, and that memory is linked with events and places. The city is therefore the ‘locus’ of collective memory. The value of history as collective memory, intended as society’s relationship with place and the idea of it, helps us to understand the significance of the urban structure and the architecture of the city which is the shape of this individuality. The union between the past and the future is in the idea of the city that runs through it, and to become concrete it must take shape in reality, which remains in its unique events, in the idea that we have of them.10

The sensory quality of a place consists of all the elements that can be perceived by the senses: smell and noise, but also sensations of touch, sight and taste. All of these, both individually and in their overall perception, can influence our feelings, actions, general well-being and appraisal of what surrounds us. The perception of the city can be separate or partial and combined with other feelings: the overall image is the union of all stimuli.

According to Lynch (1960, p.3):

Structuring and identifying the environment is a vital ability among all mobile animals. Many kinds of cues are used: the visual sensations of colour, shape, motion, or polarization of light, as well as other senses such as smell, sound, touch, kinaesthesia, sense of gravity, and perhaps of electric or magnetic fields.

Indeed, as Relph (1976, p.10) asserts:

Perceptive space is a space of action centred on immediate needs and practices, and as such it has a clearly developed structure. … This structure can clearly be in no way understood as objective or measurable – rather distances and directions are experienced as qualities of near or far, this way or that, and even when these are made explicit as paths or trails they are known with their special meaning. … Perceptive space is also the realm of direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, and sky or with built and created spaces.

Migliorini and Venini (2001, p.129) observe that

the factors which determine the description of a place are the visual, tactile, smell, sound perceptions which are felt. Place, unlike space, is described by objects which transmit specific cultural, historical or socially meaningful values which are different for each individual. As mentioned above, the dimension of a place is related to the way in which people live it. And the dimension can change following the measure that derives from the description of the events that can be played out.
The anthropological place defined by Augé (1995, p.42) has a variable scale and at the same time ‘is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it’. Anthropological places are identitary, relational and historical.

Michel de Certeau perceives the place, of whatever sort, as containing the order ‘in whose terms elements are distributed in relations of coexistence’, and, although he rules out the possibility of two things occupying the same ‘spot’, he admits that every element of the place adjoins others, in a specific ‘location’, he defines the ‘place’ as an ‘instantaneous configuration of positions’, which boils down to saying that the elements coexisting in the same place may be distinct and singular, but that does not prevent us from thinking either about their interrelations, or about the shared identity conferred on them by their common occupancy of the place.

(Augé, 1995, p.44)

The anthropological place is also geometric:

It can be mapped in terms of three simple forms, which apply to different institutional arrangements and in a sense are the elementary forms of social space. In the geometric terms these are the line, the intersection of lines, and the point of intersection. Concretely, in the everyday geography more familiar to us, they correspond to routes, axes or path that lead from one place to another and have been traced by people; to crossroads and open spaces where people pass, meet and gather, and which sometimes (in the case of marketplace, for example) are made very large to satisfy the needs of economic exchange; and lastly, to centres of more or less monumental type, religious or political constructed by certain men and therefore defining as others, in relation with other centres and other spaces.

(Augé, 1995, p.46)

Place also has sociological value:

It is difficult to conceive of ‘space’ without social content and equally, to conceive of society without a spatial component. ... The relationship is best conceived as a continuous two-way process in which people (and societies) create and modify spaces while at the same time being influenced by them in various ways. Dear and Wolch (1989) argue that social relations can be: constituted through space (e.g. where site characteristics influence settlement form); constrained by space (e.g. where the physical environment facilitates or obstructs human activity); and mediated by space (e.g. where the ‘friction of distance’ facilitates or inhibits the development of various social practices). Hence, by shaping that built environment, urban designers influence patterns of human activity and social life.

(Carmona et al., 2010, p.133)
As identified by Maslow (1968), it is possible to distinguish a five-stage hierarchy of human needs:

- Physiological needs: for warmth and comfort; safety and security needs – to feel safe from harm; affiliation needs: to belong – to a community, for example; esteem needs: to feel valued by others; self-actualisation needs: for artistic expression and fulfilment.

The needs – despite the existence of a hierarchy – are related in a complex series of inter-relationships (Carmona et al., 2010, p.134). Specifically on the relationship between public and private places and their interchangeability, Goffman (1959, pp.22) notes that ‘a place can be defined as an area bounded by barriers to perception’ and that not all areas have the same types of obstacles (referring to the case of societies who live mainly in indoor environments). Furthermore, Goffman observes that performances take place in a well-defined territory in space and time, as if they were built inside a theatre. Representation of an individual on the front stage can be considered as a way to show that his/her actions in that area follow certain rules, which in turn are grouped into two categories: the way in which the actor treats the public while engaged with them in a conversation or an exchange of gestures, a substitute for the word; and the way in which the actor behaves when he/she can be seen or heard by the public, but is not necessarily committed to talking to them. Both contexts have temporal or historical qualities, of an everyday or exceptional nature.

Place in the psychological sense sees an active and central subject to its environment. The relationships established between the observer and place are reciprocal: a place can affect the person and his/her values and actions, in the same way that the intentions of the person and his/her actions can attribute meaning to a place.

As asserted by Healey (2010 p.34), ‘A sense of place and of place quality can be understood as some kind of coming together of physical experiences (using, bumping into, looking at, hearing, breathing) and imaginative constructions (giving meanings and values) produced through individual activity and socially formed appreciations’.

Furthermore, Canter (1986) proposes a definition of place based on its components:

(a) the activities which are understood to occur at a location and the reasons for them. Here we would add the consideration of the individuals – actors of these activities – as parts of the same component of activities; (b) the evaluative conceptualizations, or, better the representations which are held of the occurrence of those activities, and (c) the physical properties of the place, as they are evaluated – or better represents – in relation to the activities.
In this regard, Canter (1986 p.8) affirms that places can be readily distinguished from behaviour settings and situations. Unlike behaviour settings a) they are not created by the investigator on the basis of observing behaviour and b) they have distinct evaluative and physical components. Unlike situations, they have a distinct enduring existence as well as being inevitably intertwined with the physical properties of their location.\footnote{11}

Place also concerns an unconscious sense of place which is related to the association of it to somewhere:

Place can be considered in terms of ‘rootedness’ and a conscious sense of association or identity with a particular place. Rootedness refers to a generally unconscious sense of place. … For Relph (1976, p.38) it meant having ‘a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular’.

(Carmona, 2010, p.120)

Extending the concept of place to a broader context, Castells (1989) refers to the place of flows as a real or virtual entity, which also includes electronic inter-connections, where many temporalities, as well as many simultaneities – which become atemporal – are allowed. With new technologies, space is downsized to zero and, recreated in a virtual dimension, no longer constitutes an obstacle. These relationships are defined by Castells with the term cyberspace or virtual space, and are described by means of spatial language such as ‘information highways’, ‘sites’ and ‘squares’.

In the informational economy for example – as Castells (1989, pp.169–170) asserts – the space of organizations is increasingly considered a space of flows:

However, this does not imply that organizations are placeless. On the contrary, we have seen that decision-making continues to be dependent upon the milieu on which metropolitan dominance is based. … Thus, each component of the information-processing structure is place-oriented. Nevertheless, the organizational logic of corporations and their satellite activities is fundamentally dependent upon the network of interaction among the different components of the system. … While organizations are located in places, and their components are place-dependent, the organizational logic is placeless, being fundamentally dependent on the space of flows that characterizes information networks. But such flows are structured, not undetermined. They
possess directionality, conferred both by the hierarchical logic of the organization as reflected in instructions given, and by the material characteristics of the information system infrastructure. Organizations establish flows according to their hierarchy within the limits set by the telecommunications and computer infrastructure existing at a particular time in a particular place. The space of flows remains the fundamental spatial dimension of large-scale information-processing complexes.

In this regard, Soja (1996, p.278) notes the social meaning of these new kinds of places:

A new mode of regulation seems to be emerging spontaneously from this diffusion of hyperreality, plugging us into the new economic machinery of virtual reality and cyberspace, protected by elaborately carceral system of social control and leading us to the promised lands of postmodern re-enchantment, where tax cuts for the rich magically benefit the poor and social spending for the poor is seen as hurting those that receive it.

The increasing loss of meaning of place as a recipient of social customs, historical memories and symbolic contents has led to the emergence of places with provisional uses, linked to a contemporaneity which cares more about satisfying immediate consumption than sedimenting traces of culture (Arefi, 1999). As Augé (1995, p.63) states, ‘If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place’. The word non-place identifies two different aspects of the reality: spaces created in relation to sites used for transport, transit, commerce or leisure, and the relation between people and those spaces.

Non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totalling all the air, rail and motorways routes, the mobile cabins called ‘means of transport’ (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and airway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extra-terrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself.

(Augé, 1995, p.64)

Places and non-places often overlap and intertwine. In any place there is also the possibility of becoming a non-place and vice versa:
Places and non-places are opposed (or attracted) like the words and notions that enable us to describe them. But the fashionable words are associated with non-places. Thus we can contrast the realities of transit (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of residence or dwelling; the interchange (where nobody crosses anyone else’s path) with the crossroads (where people meet); the passenger (defined by his destination) with the traveller (who strolls along his route), the housing estate (‘group of new dwellings’, Laurosse says), where people do not live together and which is never situated in the centre of anything (big estates characterize the so-called peripheral zones or outskirts), with the monument where people share and commemorate; communication (with its codes, images and strategies) with language (which is spoken).

(Augè, 1995, p.86)

These characters were presented in order to understand the complexity of the concept of place. The place, although complex, is nonetheless a total phenomenon, a set of all the individual characteristics that make it up. Man receives the environment and focuses on buildings and things, things reveal the environment, and show their character, becoming in turn meaning (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The role of place, then, is to embody the world of life and its value lies in representing the general local essence, a space with unique characteristics. Recognizing the value of place as the key component of a city’s identity becomes a basis of reference both for its design and the wishes of the community.

Placemaking efforts need sensitivity towards ‘who lives where, what they do, what they know, how they get on, how they relate to each other, what they care about and feel that they “need”’. This requires design at different dimensions both of relations and scale in order to imagine the future of a place. Such a sensibility will be achieved by taking into account a wider range of dynamics not necessarily contained within a determined territory boundary and able to grasp the contemporary urban complexity.

(Healey 2010, p.35)
Chapter 2

Place identity

Places are termed places and not just spaces because they are endowed with identity. The identity of a person consists, for example, in a set of elements and patterns which determines the world he/she belongs to. On this point, Norberg-Schulz (1980, p.21) states that:

This fact is confirmed by common linguistic usage. When a person wants to tell who he is, it is in fact usual to say: ‘I am a New Yorker’, or ‘I am a Roman’. This means something much more concrete than to say: ‘I am an architect’, or perhaps: ‘I am an optimist’. We understand that human identity is to a high extent a function of places and things. … It is therefore not only important that our environment has a spatial structure which facilitates orientation, but that it consists of concrete objects of identification. Human identity presupposes the identity of place.

Definition

The notion of identity is a fundamental phenomenon which is difficult to define, although it is possible to recognize many of its characteristics. In order to frame this notion within the aims of this volume, we will report the definitions that are used in different ways in the placemaking practice and the relative components which contribute to their characterization.

The starting definition is that asserted by Relph who identifies the difference between ‘identity of’ and ‘identity with’, which is useful to gain a clearer idea of this concept:

The identity of something refers to a persistent sameness and unity which allows that thing to be differentiated from others. Such inherent identity is inseparable from identity with other things; Erik Erikson (1959, p.1029), in a discussion of ego identity, writes: ‘The term identity … connotes both a persistent sameness with oneself … and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others’. Thus identity is founded both in the individual person or object and in the culture to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable, but varies as circumstances and attitudes change; and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms.

(Relph, 1976, p.45)
This is confirmed by Paul Gilroy, who claims: ‘the sheer variety of ideas condensed into the concept of identity, and the wide range of issues to which it can be made to refer, foster creative links between themes and perspectives that are not conventionally associated’. Indeed, Watson and Bentley (2007, p.6) observe that place identity matters to a wide range of people. This is easy to understand if we focus on the relationships between the identities related to humans and a different set of meanings which affect the cultural landscape: ‘for us, place identity is the set of meanings associated with any particular cultural landscape which any particular person or group of people draws on in the construction of their own personal or social identities’.

Place identity is often viewed in relation to the definition of space. As Bauman notes (2004, p.13–14):

There is always something to explain, to apologize for, to hide or on the contrary to boldly display, to negotiate, to bid for and to bargain for; there are differences to be smoothed or glossed over, or to be on the contrary made more salient and legible. ‘Identities’ float in the air, some of one’s own choice but others inflated and launched by those around, and one needs to be constantly on the alert to defend the first against the second; there is a heightened likelihood of misunderstanding, and the outcome of the negotiation forever hangs in the balance. The more one practises and masters the difficult skills needed to get by in such an admittedly ambivalent condition, the less sharp and hurting the rough edges feel, the less overwhelming the challenges and the less irksome the effects. One can even begin to feel everywhere chez soi, ‘at home’ – but the price to be paid is to accept that nowhere will one be fully and truly at home.

Hague and Jenkins (2005, p.20) highlight the existence of both individual and collective definitions of place identity related to different ideas of the area within which one lives:

in an increasingly complex society, overlapping definitions of place identity exist – again both individual and collective. The manifestation of these forms of social identity is what has been termed ‘mind-maps’ whereby we register physical space mentally. Thus if asked to describe, for instance, the area which they live within, members of the same household will define this area differently based on their perception and activities within it, and will use different physical attributes to describe this. More than this, an individual household member is quite likely to use different mind-map references when describing the same area to different people, and would probably describe the same place in different ways with the passage of time.
This is demonstrated by the fact that the experience of place assumes relational meanings rather than being merely subjective.

This means that our capacity to identify a place as a place is shaped by what others tell us about the place, and filtered by our socialization, as shaped by class, age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, professional education, etc. As Rose (1995, p.88) commented: ‘although sense of a place may be very personal, they are not entirely the result of one individual’s feelings and meanings. It is this process of receiving, selectively reconstructing, and then re-communicating a narrative that constitutes identity and transforms a space into a place’.

(Hague and Jenkins, 2005, p.5)

Furthermore, Proshansky et al. (1983) links the various kinds of relationships between people and their experiences: ‘Thus, place identity is the result of a constant, and often subconscious negotiation between individuals and the potpourri of experiences, objects, and even idealized places they encounter during their lives’.2

Southworth and Ruggeri (2010) point out that Stokols and Schumaker (1981) coined the term ‘social imageability’, which derives from the shared meanings generated by the involvement of individuals with a place. This terms leads to the concept of place attachment.

Researching the effects on identity of displacement and detachment from familiar places, sociologist Melinda Milligan has identified what she calls ‘locational socialization,’ through which one’s active involvement with a place generates shared meanings (1998; 2003, p.383). These meanings are layered onto a place, and it is in the very act of embedding these meanings that place identity and place attachment emerge and are shared with others.

(Southworth and Ruggeri, 2010)

Place identity can also be related to the concept of authenticity which Southworth and Ruggeri define as

the quality of a place being unique, distinctive, and rooted in the local. Geographer Edward Relph describes authentic places as being generated unselfconsciously and without theoretical pretense by individuals working alone or in small community groups over long spans of time. ‘The end result is places which fit their context and are in accord with the intentions of those who created them, yet have a distinct and profound identity that results from the total involvement of a unique group of place-makers with a particular setting’ (Relph 1976, p.68). Ancient Italian hill towns and preindustrial English villages epitomize these qualities.

(Southworth and Ruggeri, 2010)
The close link that interrelates place identity with the history of a place is identified by Lo Piccolo. Accordingly, the first definition which we can attribute to urban identity is that related to physical aspects of the city, making urban identity coincide with historical identity which is elaborated through continuous stratifications.

Whilst acknowledging the prevalence of the physical and material dimension, similar importance is given to morphology of places, which contributes in no small way to the configuration of specific local characteristics, hence also to identity, in terms which must not be understood in the sense of rigid environmental determinism, since it is easy to observe that very different choices or interpretations can correspond to similar morphologies. … Therefore identity does not only refer to urban fabrics but to the whole area, whose morphological, natural and cultural invariants – in the most detailed analyses and the most sensitive up-to-date approaches – take on the role of ‘strong’, structuring, recognizable elements.

(Lo Piccolo, 1995, p.15)

On the other hand, as Magnaghi (2005, p. 46) pointed out, it is important not to confuse history with its evolutionary interpretation:

The identifying structure of place also grows because of the breaks between different civilization cycles. In conclusion, recognizing permanence, structural invariance and landscape features defining the identity of places must not lead to interpreting place as the outcome of an unequivocal deterministic relationship between the settled society and environmental structures: each territorialization cycle is a cultural event affecting the same inherited environment, realizing, reifying and structuring in the territory specific differentiated forms of settlements in the complex universe of potential and random outcomes, but always shaping the process as the result of a symbiosis between human and natural elements.

Place identity is therefore the product of a continuous evolutionary process.

It is not a static image of its state, but is rather the result of concrete development over time. This is due to the fact that identity is the outcome of the relationships established between people and their environments. By making their mark on a region’s cultural heritage, they have made every regional context unique and different. The uniqueness of places, area identity and the stratifications of history cannot be represented without running the risk of abstraction and crystallization, of the extraneousness of the product with the space-time context. Area identity can only be shown and communicated through the history which has shaped it, requiring continuous interpretative mediation.

(Carta, 1999, p.151)
In continuity with this assertion, place identity also assumes significance in relation to its public meaning, which in turn influences and stimulates citizen participation. In this connection, Southworth and Ruggeri (2010) observe that:

Place significance may also result from historic or political events. But places with strong public identity need not have strong visual identity. … While strong visual form is not essential for identity, it can provide a framework for attaching meanings. Place identity has greatest power when visual form, individual and social meaning come together. According to Lynch (1960), ‘(S)ense of place in itself enhances every human activity that occurs there, and encourages the deposit of a memory trace’.

Castells (1997, p.60) proposes that urban movements are based on three factors combined in different ways:

urban demands on living conditions and collective consumption; the affirmation of local cultural identity; and the conquest of local political autonomy and citizen participation. Different movements combined these three sets of goals in various proportions, and the outcomes of their efforts were equally diversified. Yet, in many instances, regardless of the explicit achievements of the movement’s participants, but for the community at large. And not only during the lifespan of the movement (usually brief), but in the collective memory of the locality. Indeed, … this production of meaning is an essential component of cities, throughout history, as the built environment, and its meaning, is constructed through a conflictive process between the interests and values of opposing social actors.

Components

The different definitions related to the concept of place identity reflect the many components which go into it and the innumerable possibilities of combining them. Relph (1976, p.61) identifies three interrelated components which can be expressed in any identifiable place, creating its specific identity: ‘physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meanings or symbols’. He observes:

In terms of our experiences this sharing does display certain consistencies that make it possible to distinguish a number of types of identities of places.

1. From the individual perspective or sociality in communion of existential insideness places are lived and dynamic, full with meanings for us that are known and experienced without reflection.
2. For empathetic insiders, knowing places through sociality in community, places are records and expressions of the cultural values and experiences of those who create and live in them.

3. From the standpoint of behavioural insideness place is ambient environment, possessing qualities of landscape or townscape that constitute a primary basis for public or consensus knowledge of that place.

4. In terms of incidental outsideness it is usually selected functions of a place that are important and the identity of that place is little more than that of a background for these functions.

5. The attitude of the objective outsider effectively reduce places either to the single dimension of location or to a space of located objects and activities.

6. The mass identity of place is a consensus identity that is remote from direct experience for it is provided more or less ready-made by the mass media. It is a superficial identity, for it can be changed and manipulated like some trivial disguise so long as it maintains some minimum level of credibility. It is also pervasive, for it enters into and undermines individual experiences and the symbolic properties of the identities of places.

7. For existential outsiders the identity of places represents a lost and now unattainable involvement. Places are all and always incidental, for existence itself is incidental.

… The identity of place is not a simple tag that can be summarised and presented in a brief factual description. Nor can it be argued that there is a real or true identity of a place that relates to existential insideness.

As was pointed out by Montgomery (1998, p.100), it is possible to distinguish between 'identity', what a place is actually like, and 'image', a combination of the identity with perception of the place by the individual with their own set of feelings about, and impressions of, it. Furthermore, Pocock and Hudson (1978, p.33) suggest that the overall mental image of an urban environment will be: Partial: not covering the whole city; Simplified: omitting a great deal of information; Idiosyncratic: every individual’s urban image being unique: Distorted: based on subjective, rather than real, distance and direction.

(Carmona et al., 2003, p.88)

The components used for analysing the environmental image are for Lynch (1960, p.8) identity, structure and meaning: they always appear contemporaneously and are studied separately only for the purposes of analysis.
It is useful to abstract these for analysis, if it is remembered that in reality they always appear together. A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness. Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation.

The structure of a place is also mentioned by Norberg-Schulz (1980). This, in the opinion of the author, even while changing, maintains its identity for a certain period of time.

*Stabilitas loci* is a necessary condition for human life. How then is the stability compatible with the dynamics of change? First of all we may point out that any place ought to have the ‘capacity’ of receiving different ‘contents’, naturally within certain limits. A place which is only fitted for one particular purpose would soon become useless. Secondly it is evident that a place may be ‘interpreted’ in different ways. To protect and conserve the genius loci in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts.

(Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.18)

According to lo Piccolo (1995, p.15), identity can be interpreted in its relationship between civitas and urbs, through which the social nature of the architecture and public spaces, concrete and symbolic expressions of the city, may be recognized.

In other words, it is the way in which the city, as a set of citizens, is able to express its own character through its physical forms, in the present historical moment, showing the relationship of mutual belonging between inhabitants and places within the respective cultural context, both present and past. … And it is precisely in this evolving relationship of attribution of value to extremely different permanent elements, in this continuous ‘tension between the long times of the stones and the so much briefer pace of social life’, which the wider but maybe at the same time more precise notion of urban identity has to be identified.5

The territorialist approach defines the territorial heritage as the result of the historical process of territorialization, whose identity is determined by how its components are integrated. This approach is configured as a deposit of long duration which specifies its own identity and character in the way in which environmental components (neo-ecosystems produced by successive civilizations) are integrated with built
components (monuments, historical cities and structural invariants of long duration: in particular, infrastructures, agriculture traces, building, urban and landscape types, and constructive and transformation rules) and with anthropic ones (socio-cultural and identity patterns, artistic, productive and political cultures). As a matter of fact, the process of territorialization, adding layers of territorializing acts determined by different patterns of civilization, increases during the time the complexity and richness of sedimented, stratified and interagent elements in the long term (territorial mass, material and cognitive sediments and identity of places). The territorial and landscape typology which characterizes identity of a place – as well as the existence of a milieu – is the result of that long process of co-evolution between settlement and environment. (Magnaghi, 2005, pp.41–46)

In this respect, Carta (1999) asserts that communities change and transform, preserving certain invariants which are fundamental for recognizing place identity.

We need to find these invariants and adapt them to contemporary situations and conditions, and it is on this heritage of specificity and intrinsic values (history, culture, nature) that one can establish an effective, sustainable local innovation process, which can become a source of collective identity, a tool of communication between generations and a means of maximizing opportunities. (Carta, 1999, p.112)

Further components are identified by Amundsen. These, variously combined with each other, are present in the identity of a place:

spatial qualities that distinguish the place from others – e.g. location, but also infrastructure, communication and architecture; characteristics or qualities of the inhabitants that distinguish them from inhabitants of other places – e.g. values, customs, physical appearance; social conditions and social relations between inhabitants; culture and/or history, seen as a unifying element that again connects the inhabitants to tradition and distinguishes them from ‘the other’.7

On the other hand, Barbara and Perliss (2006) argue that issues related to the concept of identity cannot nowadays only rely on local characteristics. The issue of identity may refer to the local scale for elements which are an expression of the materials, the feelings that make one city different from another or bring them together.8 ‘In fact, the identity of a work may play on the “iconic language” that no longer concerns the form, plants, gables, columns and decorations, but the colours, materials, smells and sounds which are recognized and shared emotional heritage’ (Barbara and Perliss, 2006).
Place and place identity as key concepts

The various components which contribute to the definition of place identity suggest, as was observed by Southworth and Ruggeri (2010), that this concept ‘should be thought of as a gradient that includes several dimensions and should be as complex as the processes at play in every neighbourhood. It should account for aesthetic appeal and imageability, but be expanded to include social considerations, the discourses and meanings that are shared by community members’. This means that other more nuanced definitions of place identity may be identified.

It can be found by looking at a range of places, from the historic downtowns of our cities to the everyday landscapes of suburbia, using a variety of methods, including physical form analysis, observations, interviews and other sociological methods. This new definition should consider the need for memorable and imageable environments, expressions of shared social values, new forms of non-place communities, and the multiple mechanisms by which meanings are embedded and communicated in the landscape.

(Southworth and Ruggeri, 2010)

Indeed, in order for identity to be captured it needs to establish a deep engagement with place and local life in order to affect its natural evolution.

As a result, design integrity is seen as a sign of a healthy identity, while changes and adaptations are interpreted as signs of an unhealthy, degraded place identity. Maintaining a gradient of identity is a much more complex endeavour, as it cannot rely purely on the maintenance of an original form. It must include considerations of the social, economic and cultural processes needed to successfully manage the evolution of the cities and neighbourhoods we design, allowing them to change and adapt to future conditions, while maintaining their essence. Only this can insure that the place identity resulting from our designs will be stronger, more imageable, and ultimately more sustainable.

(Southworth and Ruggeri, 2010)

Finally, based on these interpretations the role of identity should be understood within the project of transforming the city, assessing the potential of design and planning tools as regards urban identity, and integrating them (Neil, 2004).
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