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Though it can be argued that green spaces, urban projects, pedestrian friendliness, and diversity are the most important factors that contribute to making a healthy city, it is actually “sense of place” engendered by these elements that is integral to a city’s own health. Much as all the components of a city function synergistically to create what Jacobs described as an “urban ecosystem” (Jane Jacobs), the aforementioned elements coalesce to create a “sense of place” and ultimately a vibrant, living city.

One of the main factors responsible for engendering a “sense of place” and a healthy city is the presence of green spaces in urban areas. Green spaces are not only aesthetically pleasing and serve as visual respites from the concrete and cement that dominate much of urban landscape, but also serve as what urban ecologist Jane Jacobs referred to as a mixed-use” space. One fine example of such a mixed-use space in



Rittenhouse Park, a mixed-use space that draws a diverse crowd at all times of day (Krist).

Philadelphia Rittenhouse Square, which is bounded on two sides by high-rise apartments and on the other two sides by a mixture of bistros, restaurants, art galleries, retail shops, and schools.

Jane Jacobs argued that ““this mixture of uses of buildings directly produces for the park a mixture of users who enter and leave the park at different times...because their daily schedules

differ’” (Bartlett 255). This flux of people through the square creates a safe, vigorous, and healthy space that serves as a place of relaxation, introspection, and mixing of people through social interaction. In addition, the sun shines brightly in Rittenhouse Square and is not obscured, as in other places, by gargantuan high rises. The sun’s uplifting, golden rays can turn even the most miserable winter days into more enjoyable ones and give the park’s users a much-needed boost in morale. In turn, Rittenhouse Square is responsible for creating a “sense of place” for its denizens. The safe atmosphere that it provides allows the families and people of all types—White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and otherwise—to interact in a wholesome environment. In the park, one could see children playing in the emptied fountains, an artist painting cityscapes, and others simply sitting quietly on park benches, reading or reflecting. These various activities are illustrative of the different perspectives of “place” for these different people, yet they all work cooperatively to give the park and the city a vibrant feeling. Rittenhouse Square not only contributes to ethnic diversity by drawing people of all types, but also to the diversity of buildings, businesses, and restaurants.

Other major constituents in creating a “sense of place” and a healthy city are urban projects, including art and gardens. These two urban projects have a way of being self-



Murals such as “The Peace Wall” promote unity and understanding, a key component to healthy cities (Ramsdale).

reinforcing; that is, urban dwellers who take pride in their city often create urban art and gardens, which in turn give them and others reasons to take pride in their neighborhood and city. In Philadelphia, urban art seems to be the more prevalent of these two projects, with some 2,800 (Hurdle) murals covering the city’s

buildings. On a short walk through some of the neighborhoods of Philadelphia, one may see upwards of ten murals: whimsical undersea scenes made of pieces of colorful glass, a portrait of some Black jazz greats painted on the three-story canvas of a row-house, a Black man singing to a small child in his arms, a picture of the French countryside, and several others. The power of murals, however, goes far beyond their aesthetic appeal; their transformative power is noted by one Philadelphia resident, who says that years ago one could not stand in the flower-covered lot hemmed in on both sides by the mural “Holding Grandmother’s Quilt”, lest one be mugged (Listen Up). Now, though, the garbage-strewn lot in a once decrepit neighborhood has metamorphosed into a beautiful garden and a safe haven for its residents. The mural is a source of pride and a distinct “sense of place” for its residents, providing them with a space that is their very own, which they have built and taken care of with their very own hands. In addition, it confers on the neighborhood psychological benefits, according to one resident: “It’s clear we feel more relaxed” (Hurdle). Elsewhere in Philadelphia, the healing powers of urban art have even helped repair strained relations between different ethnicities. Black and White residents of the racially divided Grays Ferry neighborhood came together with surprising enthusiasm, first to lay plans for the mural and then later for trash collection and street repair (Hurdle). The simple act of painting a mural served as the impetus for these residents to overcome their prejudices to take ownership of their neighborhood and develop their own “sense of place”. The addition of urban art created a safe, healthy environment for these neighborhoods’ people, where people from a diversity of backgrounds could interact. A similarly galvanizing effect was observed by a judge of a flower competition in New York City, who noted that far more remarkable than the flower gardens were what these joint efforts had yielded for communities and individuals alike: “Attempts to protect the gardens from vandalism led to an assortment of creative solution that

brought neighbors together, even permitting a meaningful role for those who might have otherwise been the offenders...The gardens led to fixing up the surroundings, to creating attractive settings that symbolized better things to come” (Bartlett 288). Much like a garden growing, a few small seeds of unity blossomed into the beautiful flowers of stewardship that took root—found their “sense of place”—in an urban community.

Jane Jacobs once said, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” (Jane Jacobs), and it is no wonder, then, that she was a champion of diversity in all its shapes and forms. One can easily see in the example of the creation of “The Peace Wall” why diversity is vital to a city: the exchange of ideas between people of all different ethnic and even socioeconomic backgrounds ultimately leads to something that is greater than the sum of its parts. However, when Jacobs refers to

“diversity”, she does not simply diversity of people, but also diversity buildings, businesses, residences, and even amounts of people in different areas at different times. Having a diversity of businesses and dwellings in a particular area draws people of all types, and as



“People on display” at a sidewalk café on Main Street in Ann Arbor draw others to the location (Ann Arbor).

was frequently cited by many people in the video *Insights Into a Lively Downtown*, the

variety of stores was what drew them to the downtown area of Ann Arbor. Additionally, the video, echoing Jane Jacobs’ sentiments, noted the phenomenon of “people on display”; that is, the sight of people, whether through well-placed coffee shop windows or dining at sidewalk cafés, acts as a visually-stimulating magnet that draws even a greater crowd to the area. The

diversity of businesses—ranging from bistros to law offices and art galleries—and the diversity of buildings—ranging from beautiful brick colonials to two-family houses and high-rise apartments—surrounding Rittenhouse Square are responsible for making the park such a healthy, animated space. By making all city residents welcome, places such as Main Street in Ann Arbor and Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia give their inhabitants a “sense of place” that they can claim as the “Heart of Downtown” or their place to relax and reflect on their day.

The final contributor to “sense of place” and health of a city is pedestrian friendliness, which, if lacking, can alienate its residents and make them feel as if their city instead belongs to the transients—the commuters—that often drive the city’s streets. In Philadelphia, one finds the



Quince Street, like Delancey Street in Philadelphia, is the exemplar pedestrian friendliness with a narrow road, large sidewalks, and plenty of vegetation (Haith).

pedestrian situation to be much more amenable than that of Easton. One street in particular stands out as the quintessential pedestrian street: Delancey Street, lined with old brick colonials

fronted by marble porches, is split down the middle by a narrow road with trees on either side. One cannot help but notice

that there is almost more sidewalk space than there is road space, and one could almost leap over the street in a single bound. The trees afford the street a quiet feel, while the cobblestone crosswalks and patches of bricks in the sidewalk lend it a quaint feel. Another thing one notices not just on Delancey Street but elsewhere in Philadelphia is the large presence of joggers and walkers, of which there is a great dearth in Easton. These exercisers and surely other city residents had found their “sense of place” in the hustle and bustle of the big city by simply being

able to do their favorite physical activity. One group of Jane's walkers noted that murals, adorned gates, decorated homes, and even balls of lights in trees made their walk on the whole more pedestrian friendly. Meanwhile, another group explained that the colorful potted plants and vibrant window boxes mitigated the effects of the drabness of winter and the bareness of the trees, making the walk more enjoyable. By giving people something to look at, the urban residents are giving the city vitality by making people want to come explore and linger on the city's sights. These adornments and decorations are indicative of the city dwellers' "sense of place" and the concomitant pride they take in beautifying their space.

One trend that seems to emerge as one walks around a city is that those people of lower socioeconomic status are generally confined to the "less healthy" areas of the cities, where green



The Spring Gardens in Center City, Philadelphia grown in a space that once was a garbage-strewn lot, are illustrative of the transformative power of urban projects (Franzia).

spaces are sparser and the spaces are less pedestrian friendly. On streets near Rittenhouse Square, such as Delancey Street, Sotheby's auction house signs announce tacitly that these homes are reserved for the wealthy citizens of Philadelphia. However, less than ten blocks south of the fairly pristine Rittenhouse Square sit 11th and 12th streets, which are littered with refuse and occupied by small, drab houses and apartments whose tenants are among the city's less wealthy citizens. Despite the seemingly critical condition of the neighborhood, the vital sign of murals is present throughout. The advancement

of urban projects such as the murals one can see along these streets and gardens that are

elsewhere in Philadelphia are some simple ways in which low-income residents can partake in a healthy city. For example, the Mill Creek Farm in West Philadelphia is an urban farm that sits atop a lot that was once vacant and strewn with rubble and garbage (Mill Creek Farm). The addition of an urban garden can have a salutary effect on a low-income neighborhood or serve as a focal point for further education and improvement, as in the case of Proyecto Jardín in the Boyle Heights Neighborhood of Los Angeles. The garden, which is maintained by the group Girls Today Women Tomorrow, is located in a violent, poor neighborhood dominated by some forty gangs, which recruit members of the Hispanic community and lead to a sixty-one percent attrition rate of Latino high school graduates. It serves as the basis for the development of responsibility, good eating habits, positive role models, and positive outlooks that lead to healthy citizens and ultimately a healthy city (Baroff). One can only imagine that the empty dirt lot with garbage scattered throughout on Catherine and 12th streets in Philadelphia can be likewise transformed into a cynosure of hope and health for its surrounding community. The homeless can also partake of a healthy city by being given meaningful niches in a community. In exchange for food and shelter, for example, they might help to rid streets of trash, which not only creates a healthier city for the residents by increasing pedestrian friendliness but also provides the homeless with a “sense of place”.

While green spaces, urban art and gardens, diversity, and pedestrian friendliness are the most all very important elements of a healthy city, it is the “sense of place” created by connecting—with nature by digging one’s hands in a communal garden or simply enjoying a bike ride through the park, with others by making joint plans for a mural, and with the living, breathing creature that is a healthy city by walking its sundry paths and discovering what it has to offer.

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