

#016 The Image of the City - The Image of the Environment

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- **Legibility - can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols**
- **Building the Image**
- **Structure and Identity**
- **Imageability**

- City design - temporal art - seen in all lights and all weathers.
- Moving elements (e.g. the people and their activities) are as important as the stationary physical parts.
- Our perception of the city is partial.
- City is ever changing in detail.

Legibility - can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols

A legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern.

Legibility is crucial in the city setting.

Structuring and identifying the environment is a vital ability among all mobile animals.

Lost - disaster.

In the process of way-finding, the strategic link is the **environmental image**: the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual, the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action.

A clear environmental image:

- has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual.
- is a useful basis for individual growth.
- plays a social role as well.

- gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security.
- heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience.

It must be granted that there is some value in mystification, labyrinth, or surprise in the environment. Only under two conditions:

1. there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out.
2. the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have some form that can be explored and in time be apprehended.

The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image.

Building the Image

Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment:

- The environment suggests distinctions and relations.
- The observer—with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes—selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees.

The image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.

The coherence of the image may arise in several ways:

- There may be little in the real object that is ordered or remarkable, and yet its mental picture has gained identity and organization through long familiarity.
- An object seen for the first time may be identified and related not because it is individually familiar but because it conforms to a stereotype already constructed by the observer.
- A new object may seem to have strong structure or identity because of striking physical features which suggest or impose their own pattern.

the "**public images**": the common mental pictures carried by large numbers of a city's inhabitants: areas of agreement which might be expected to appear in the interaction of a single physical reality, a common culture, and a basic physiological nature.

The systems of orientation which have been used vary widely throughout the world, changing from culture to culture, and from landscape to landscape.

The formal types of image elements:

- path
- landmark
- edge
- node
- district

Structure and Identity

An environmental image may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure, and meaning.

So various are the individual meanings of a city, even while its form may be easily communicable, that it appears possible to separate meaning from form, at least in the early stages of analysis.

If an image is to have value for orientation in the living space, it must have several qualities:

- must be sufficient, true in a pragmatic sense, allowing the individual to operate within his environment to the extent desired.

A map must get one home.

- must be sufficiently clear and well integrated to be economical of mental effort.

A map must be readable.

- should be safe, with a surplus of clues so that alternative actions are possible and the risk of failure is not too high.

If a blinking light is the only sign for a critical turn, a power failure may cause disaster.

- should preferably be open-ended, adaptable to change, allowing the individual to continue to investigate and organize reality.

There should be blank spaces where he can extend the drawing for himself.

- should in some measure be communicable to other individuals.

Imageability

The quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer.

A highly imageable (apparent, legible, or visible) city in this peculiar sense would seem well formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation.

Such a city would be one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly interconnected.

Since image development is a two-way process between observer and observed, it is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by the retraining of the perceiver, or by reshaping one's surroundings.

Symbolic devices: map, machine...

Precarious: *orientation fails if the device is lost, and the device itself must constantly be referred and fitted to reality.*

| by hellinus - 2023.8.15