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Introduction to Cities: How Place and Space Shape Human Experience

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PART I

THE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Cities as places and spaces
- 2 Social theories of urban space and place:
The early perspectives
- 3 Social theories of urban space and place:
Perspectives in the post-World War II era
- 4 Methods and rules for the study of cities

CHAPTER 1



Cities as places and spaces

KEY TOPICS

- The definitions of place and space as applied to cities.
- The role of place attachment in imbuing places with meanings and significance.
- The importance of place in providing identity, community, and security for human beings.
- The ways that human beings shape cities, and are in turn shaped by them.
- Familiarity with the features of the text, including informative boxes on “Studying the city” and “Making the city better”; boxes that provide opportunities to delve into topics and concepts, called “Exploring further”; definitions of keywords; and critical thinking questions that will help you to continue to consider the issues raised in each chapter.

Contents

Cities as places

Identity, community, and security

Places as the site of our identity

Places as the site of community

Places as sites of security

Human beings make and remake places

Place and space

Cities shape the fates of human beings

Cities and people

This is a book about cities, a topic that seems familiar enough but that most of us have not considered in any great depth. There are plenty of reasons why we should. We can estimate statistically that most of you live or have lived in a city or metropolitan area; more than half of the world's population now lives in cities (see Figure 1.1). Cities are also the centers of the world's economy. They are not only sites of production, where industries cluster, but also the central nodes in service and distribution networks and the command points from which economic decisions are made. Across the globe, wealth is already overwhelmingly generated, and spent, in cities (see Table 1.1). But cities are also the locus of profound environmental challenges (they consume two-thirds of the world's energy, especially through the heating and cooling of buildings, and are home to many toxic industries and waste sites), and social problems ranging from pronounced poverty and uneven access to the most basic of human necessities, to crime, violence, and even warfare. Without a doubt, cities deserve our attention now more than ever.

We would like to draw greater attention, at the very outset, to the much faster pace of urbanization and much larger scale of cities in developing countries, which account for the overwhelming shares of the world's urban growth, energy consumption, and needed social services. While some scholars now prefer to use the Global South instead of developing countries when referring to their cities, we will stick to the more familiar label by devoting a whole chapter to urbanization and cities in developing countries (Chapter 11) that better suit our readers.

While cities, in both developed and developing countries, are important for these reasons, we argue that cities are also particularly important kinds of **places**. So what do we mean by places? Places are specific sites, whether entire cities or smaller locations within cities, that are shaped by human beings and shape the lives of human beings. Places include large metropolitan areas as well as individual homes, workplaces, playgrounds, schools, and street corners. They are all those specific and rich sites to which we feel attached, that become a part of us. As places, cities are distinct and meaningful sites in which people live out their lives. These meanings derive from the histories of places, whether the formal history found in books or the informal history that is created by individuals as they go about their daily routines. In turn, these histories reflect the uses to which places are put: who has lived in a place and how, the businesses and industries that thrived or failed there, and conflicts over just what should occur where. Histories, uses, and experiences imbue places with memories and meanings that distinguish one place from another. Places are thus inherently social creations.

places Specific sites that are shaped by, and shape, the lives of human beings. Sites of human identity, security, and community.

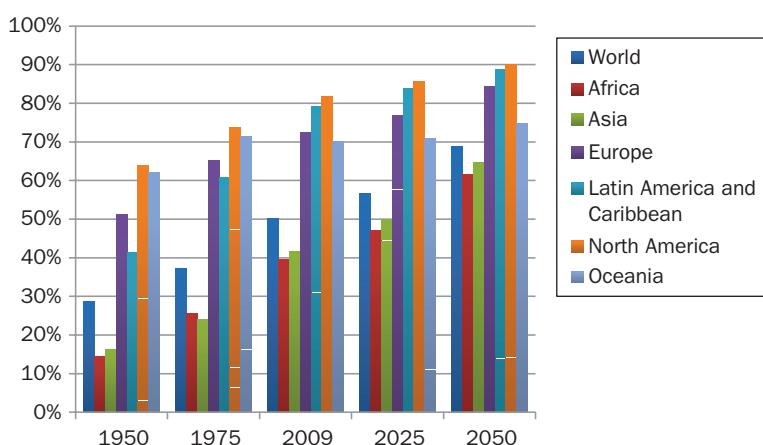


Figure 1.1 Percentage of population in urban areas by world and region, 1950–2050.
Source: Developed by David Boston from data from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Urbanization Prospects 2009.

Table 1.1. Select cities' share of national population and share of national GDP. Cities are increasingly the centers of economic production, with higher per capita contributions to GDP than rural areas or smaller towns. This is particularly pronounced in many developing world cities.

City	Share of national population (Percentage)	Share of national GDP (Percentage)	Ratio of GDP share to population share
Auckland	31.8	47.5	1.49
Buenos Aires	32.5	63.2	1.94
Dhaka	8.7	35.5	4.08
Helsinki	21.1	30.1	1.43
Kabul	10.3	64.3	6.24
Lima	1.9	5.5	2.89
London	20.3	25.4	1.25
Manila	20.0	46.9	2.35
Mumbai	2.0	6.3	3.15
Nairobi	9.0	20.0	2.22
New York City	7.2	9.7	1.35
Paris	16.2	26.5	1.64
Sao Paulo	10.5	19.5	1.86
Shanghai	1.4	2.9	2.07
Tokyo	28.6	34.1	1.19
Toronto	17.2	19.5	1.13

Developed by authors based on data from UN-Habitat 2011.

Attending to the histories of places draws our eyes to the important work that individuals and groups do to make and remake places. That places are the result of human efforts may seem obvious enough, but all too often we take places as givens, assuming that they just are the way they are; that they are somehow immutable and unchanging. This is particularly common when we compare two places – two very different cities or neighborhoods, for example. An impoverished ghetto area is drastically different from a wealthy gated suburb, and these differences may appear almost natural. But, as we explain in this book, places come to be different from one another through human efforts, whether the work of individuals building their own homes on the outskirts of growing cities or the policies of nations that seek to industrialize their lagging regional economies. Culture, power, nature, resources – these and other factors affect the ways that places become what they are, and human beings are always at the helm.

Places are not only created through social processes but also fulfill an important array of social needs. Among these needs we single out three for special attention: *identity*, *community*, and *security*. As we explain in this chapter, places provide us with a sense of who we are, and we may attach the meanings associated with a place to ourselves. Telling someone where we are from becomes an important way of announcing who we are – our identity. Places are also the cradles of community. Though some communities exist and even thrive in virtual spaces (groups on Facebook and other internet networks are prime examples), the places where we live, work, and play often link us to groups that care about and share our fates. Significantly, these groups may exclude as well as

include individuals, and constrain as well as support them. Identity and community are actually key constitutive elements of our third dimension of place – security. When we identify with a place and feel connected to groups there, we often feel the most secure. But security extends beyond the psychological and emotional to the material. Some places provide the kinds of environments in which humans thrive – clean air and water, shelter, and freedom from violence, as a minimum – while others deprive residents of these basic elements of a safe and decent life. Moreover, some places are vulnerable to political upheavals and environmental catastrophes that undermine the security of large populations.

Cities are also important **spaces**. In distinguishing the ideas of place and space, we separate the particular from the general. Places are specific sites, whether structures or neighborhoods or entire metropolitan areas, to which people have attached meaning. As such, São Paulo is a place, as is Heliópolis (a slum area in São Paulo), or the block on which you grew up. But these particular places are also different kinds of spaces – geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

spaces Geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

Consider, for instance, a city block. As a space it may be dense or sprawling, accessible or remote, pedestrian-friendly or designed to accommodate automobiles. These qualities of space and others may then predispose the block to becoming a certain kind of place, as human beings live out their lives and write its informal history. As you will learn in this book, the spatial forms of cities have changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century or so (indeed, some would argue that the word “city” is no longer appropriate for describing the sprawling urban regions that now house many millions of persons), and this has in turn affected them as places. While you will have a chance to fathom the gigantic scale of megacities later in the book, you will be guided to appreciate the microscopic meanings they also possess as places.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, places shape our destinies. They are contexts in which lives are created, and as such they furnish many of the resources that we need to develop as human beings and to reach the opportunities to which we aspire. And, while all cities play this role as places, different cities and the neighborhoods within them do so unequally. Places are thus an important element of inequality both globally and locally. As you read through this book, we ask that you keep in mind the very different and unequal types of identity, community, and security provided by urban places, and how these in turn shape the fates of individuals and groups.

In this chapter we develop these central elements of cities as places and spaces. We expand on what it means to understand cities as places, and how this will inform the material covered here. We then take up the points raised in greater detail, elaborating on what it means for places to provide identity, community, and security, and the processes by which places are made and remade. We then turn to the distinction between space and place, and to some central concepts in the scholarship on urban spaces. Finally, we take up the notion of how places shape our fates, previewing the great diversity of urban places that you will come to know through this book.

Cities as places

At first glance, cities seem to be an odd jumble and mixture of things. There are streets and sidewalks, possibly parks, an abundance of housing, factories, offices and government institutions, and perhaps some empty lots and vacant buildings. All kinds of vehicles fill cities – bicycles and buses, trucks and taxis, and more and more

private automobiles. The landscape is largely paved, and what little bits of nature remain are probably heavily manicured or just struggling to survive. These physical features may distinguish cities from rural lands, and they certainly predispose residents to certain kinds of activities and experiences. But what makes cities places is more than the presence of these kinds of surroundings – it is the way that these surroundings become useful and meaningful over time. It is these uses and meanings that connect human beings to cities and that make cities distinct from one another. Strip away the specific everyday uses and meanings, and one city comes to look much like another.

In this book we focus on cities as places, so their uses and meanings are central. But just what do we mean by these terms? Let's first take up *uses*. Cities often develop around very different purposes. Some, like Washington, DC, or Beijing or The Hague are national and even international political capitals, and because of this they contain institutions of government and become magnets for a great deal of traffic in politics, and sometimes traffic in money and finance as well. Beijing also aspires to become an international financial center, for example. Other cities like Miami Beach or Barcelona are sites where people often go as tourists and embrace the warmth and good life they find there. As these cities come to be known as particular kinds of places (tourist destinations or seats of power, in our examples), businesses that will flourish in these places will seek to locate there (a human rights law firm in The Hague, for instance, or a chain restaurant in Miami Beach). Migration, too, perpetuates distinctions between different kinds of cities. Cities might attract migrants with distinct kinds of knowledge and skills, and residents seeking different kinds of pleasures and opportunities. These migrants in turn may work to preserve those aspects of the city that attracted them in the first place, thus ensuring that the distinctive qualities of a place are maintained. Though not all cities are dominated in this way by a particular type of political or economic use, all have distinct mixes of uses that differentiate them from other places and can set similar chains of events in motion.

While entire cities may have different kinds of uses when examined in broad strokes, the uses of different parts of the city matter more for its residents. Over time, cities develop districts that are known for this or that – as industrial or residential or commercial, for instance. They also take on certain qualities within these kinds of distinctions. A residential area may be desolate and depressing, hip and fashionable, or quiet and insular. And the neighborhood that is desolate one day may be hip the next. All of this goes to show that the nature of an area reflects how it is used, and that those uses are subject to change. So, if a residential area is, for instance, a disused site of vacant lots and abandoned buildings, young house hunters seeking a bargain may buy, build, and improve properties there. Their labors, as well as their everyday comings and goings, transform the neighborhood through what is known as gentrification.

The uses of places furnish the primary way in which human beings come to imbue places with *meanings*. These meanings include the memories associated with places, whether first-hand experiences and stories such as those told by a long-time resident or the kinds of public memories derived from books or monuments. Meanings also include associations between a place and certain kinds of social attributes – good or bad – and the senses of what a place should be. These meanings may be quite personal, as in the case of an elderly woman who could no longer afford the property taxes on her home in a small town in upstate New York. She was one of a growing number of people who found her income in her old age did not quite match her needs. At the same time, the community in which she lived needed to raise taxes so it could fund

some important public projects, including local schools. This poor, elderly woman told her story to a *New York Times* reporter and, as she did so, she revealed the ways in which she and her husband, now deceased, had made her house into a home. He had built the cabinetry in the kitchen, for instance, and in doing so left a seemingly indelible imprint on the place. Thus, although to an outside observer the large, rambling, and older structure only seemed to be a building, to this woman it was a distinct place: she and her husband had invested their energies in it, and now the house had become a site of memories and meanings in her life. These kinds of attachments prove fateful in the lives of individuals and in the character of the places they inhabit (see Exploring further 1.1).

Though personal and sentimental meanings such as these are certainly important, individuals and groups attach meanings to places of much larger scales, and with much higher stakes. This can best be illustrated by the large-scale urban redevelopment over the last two decades in Shanghai, where people on entire blocks of old houses, primarily located in the urban core, have had to relocate due to the new construction of more lucrative commercial and residential projects (see Figure 1.2). An estimated one million households and up to three million people have lost their attachments to their old residences and neighborhoods. Without sufficient compensation from the government and developers, many of these displaced residents have experienced both the financial strain of buying the new and more expensive high-rise housing away from the city center and the difficulty of accessing convenient shopping and services. More importantly, however, they have lost the emotional attachments to, and social networks in, the old neighborhoods that once were manifest in convenient daily encounters and casual chats across the alleys and on the street. This loss took a much heavier toll on older people, who were much more strongly and deeply attached to the old houses and neighborhoods as places (see Chapter 12).

Figure 1.2 Redevelopment in the older areas of Shanghai has displaced an estimated one million households. This woman was one of the last remaining residents in her neighborhood, having refused to relocate. Source: © LOOK Die Bildagentur der Fotografen GmbH/Alamy.



EXPLORING FURTHER 1.1



Place attachment

place attachment

The emotional connections that people feel toward specific places such as buildings, neighborhoods, or cities.

One way to better understand how places provide security, community, and identity is to study what scholars refer to as **place attachment**. At its most basic, place attachment describes the emotional connections that people feel toward specific places such as buildings, neighborhoods, or cities. These connections are formed over time, through repeated positive interactions. As we live our lives, places become part of our routines as well as helping us connect to special occasions: we drop in at a neighborhood coffee shop each morning, celebrate our birthday at a local bar, or bring our newborn child home

to a particular apartment. In doing so, those places become imbued with meaning and take on some importance in our lives. Attachments may be intensely personal or shared by larger groups, and may vary from the functional and practical to the social or sentimental. Scholars from fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, geography, and anthropology agree that these attachments are important for individuals and groups.

A useful starting point within the scholarship on place attachment is the research on places that are destroyed or threatened with destruction. Psychologist Marc Fried (2000), one of the first researchers to work on this problem, found that residents forcibly relocated from Boston's West End felt a strong attachment to their old neighborhood. Relocated residents grieved for their homes – structures reasonably characterized as blighted – as they would for lost loved ones. This finding was a surprise at the time of its publication in the early 1960s, as many assumed that housing quality might be the most important predictor of residents' commitment to their neighborhood. Instead, Fried revealed (just as sociologist Herbert Gans also found in *The Urban Villagers* (1982 [1962]), his study of the same area) that the dense social networks of the West End fell apart as residents relocated, and that social dimensions of place had been central to residents' attachment to the area.

More recently, in a study of the Walker neighborhood of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Alice Mah (2006) examined resistance to urban renewal projects designed to encourage economic development. Though their neighborhood scored worst in Newcastle on the year 2000 English Indices of Deprivation (and thirtieth worst for England out of over 8000 wards), the residents were firmly committed to staying in their homes. Here multiple generations of a family could be found on the same street, and residents were loyal to the few shops and pubs that remained as industry and population declined. Given the turbulent economic times in which these residents were living, and the changes to the urban environment around them, their attachment to place may have reflected a desire for stability and continuity. Moreover, uncertainty about the fate of their homes resulted in stress, depression, and anxiety, indicating the strong psychological importance of having a secure home place.

These studies by Fried and Mah, like others working in this tradition, invite an important question about the relationship between social class and place attachment. Are poor or working-class residents, including ethnic minorities and immigrants, more attached to places? Given that poorer residents are more likely to rely upon social networks within their communities (using a neighbor or nearby family member for childcare, or sharing food when times are tight economically) and the myriad dimensions of support that neighborhoods provide to new immigrants (see Chapter 8), this seems like a reasonable question. In an innovative study of communities in three regions of Poland, Maria Lewicka (2005) found that place attachment

was actually no stronger among those with limited personal and economic resources. But, while economic capital did not affect one's attachment to place, *cultural capital* did. In her study, residents with more education (and more educated parents) tended to be less attached to place.

Another important question that drives place attachment research is just what impacts attachments to place might have on the lives of individuals and groups, whether positive or negative. On the positive side, place attachment may be equivalent to what Jane Jacobs calls a sense of proprietorship in one's neighborhood. This sense empowers residents to act on behalf of the neighborhood, enforcing local behavioral norms and watching out for people and property. On the negative side, we might ask to what extent place attachment – which is often measured by the expressed desire to stay in a place, or the degree to which people say they would be sad to leave – leads residents to stay in places that are not good for them. This may include places devoid of economic opportunities, those polluted by hazardous substances, or those where residents are exposed to violence. In addition, we should remember that one group's attachment to place may motivate them to exclude a different group; consider, for example, the violence against immigrants in neighborhoods across the United States and Europe. If we extend this line of thinking to a broader geographic scale, we can see how place attachment might lead to national interethnic violence or ethnic cleansing.

We might also consider the degree to which people remain attached to place in an increasingly globalized world. As we move from place to place more quickly and know of many places that we have never visited in person, how much does our own place matter to us? The demands of the global economy arguably compel us toward a footloose life in which attachment to place is ever more difficult. In addition, some scholars have argued that the increasing standardization of products and places erodes place attachment (consider the identical architecture of chain stores across the United States, or the familiar menu and iconography found at McDonald's restaurants around the globe). We can contrast these pessimistic views with those of scholars who see a continuing relevance of place attachment as places constitute a greater share of our identity. Richard Florida has contended that for individuals in creative fields such as entertainment or software design, where one lives is increasingly more important to identity than where one works. Florida's research suggests that the same global forces that may pry us from the places of our birth may also help us to locate meaningful places of choice.

Let's return for a moment to where this section began, with a rough inventory of the kinds of physical things that one finds in a city – the streets and sidewalks, parks and factories, and so on. While this physical landscape certainly has a hand in shaping the ways that human beings make their lives in cities, it becomes much more consequential once humans establish patterns dictating what the physical spaces mean and how they will be used. For example, who will dictate the uses of public parks? Will it be children? Or gangs? Or police? Or people who are homeless? Does the statue in a public square provide a rallying point for protestors or merely a roost for pigeons? Does the struggling industrial center erode, and thereby lose population, or do its leaders anticipate change and invest in new kinds of production? Actions and decisions, large and small, make cities the distinctive kinds of places that they are, as we will learn throughout the rest of this book, allowing them, in turn, to shape the fates of the individuals who live there.

In emphasizing the importance of place, we do not intend to overshadow the roles of other social forces in the lives of city dwellers, or to imply that all residents have the same experiences of places. Take, for example, the contrast drawn here between cities

that serve primarily as tourist destinations and as seats of government. These central uses of any given city are not immediately relevant in the day-to-day lives of every resident. For instance, the lives of a low-wage service worker in Washington, DC, and one in Miami Beach might actually be quite similar. Each would likely struggle to find adequate housing and transportation, and would have little time or income to enjoy the museums and restaurants, or beaches and clubs, for which these places are internationally famous. This illustrates an important caveat when studying cities as places: it is important to keep in mind the differences between places, but larger social structures still shape the lives of residents. The types of racial/ethnic, gender, and income inequalities present in a society will extend to all places there, though the specifics of how inequalities operate will vary from one place to another.

Similarly, different people will come to associate different meanings with places, in part because they use them in very different ways. Tourists, for instance, have very different experiences of cities than locals, often because they are insulated from areas of danger or decline (see Studying the city 1.1). As a result, tourists may associate a given city with leisure, culture, or romance while locals have far more complex associations that are less universally positive. One illustration of this can be found in how differently the dwellers of Mumbai's slums and the foreign tourists who visit those slums view and feel about these places. While the residents see and experience the wretched conditions as living quarters and as work environments for those with home businesses, the tourists walk through them and gaze at the people, thereby satisfying their own fleeting curiosity.

Race, class, and gender matter too in shaping the meanings that people make of places – as do immigrant status, religion, physical ability, age, sexuality, and any other dimension of inequality. Women and men, for instance, often experience the same place very differently. As we discuss in Chapter 8, men have long enjoyed the ability to move freely about cities, while women's movements have been more confined. They could suffer injury to their reputation, or their person, if seen in the wrong place. While

these constraints on women's movement have lessened in many parts of the world, women continue to experience **street harassment** and other informal means of controlling their movement and expression. As a result, the memories and associations that women have with places – public places, in particular – may be those of unwanted attention, whether verbal or physical. Racial and ethnic minorities often develop similar associations with places where they have been regarded as “suspicious” outsiders, profiled by police, or explicitly told that they are not welcome. We can

continue the line of thinking to acknowledge the distinct experiences and meanings that members of different groups have in urban places. And when considering the meanings associated with places, we must be mindful of exactly *whose* meanings those are.

street harassment

Unwanted verbal interactions in urban public places, usually (but not exclusively) perpetrated by men against women.

Identity, community, and security

Places as the site of our identity

In recalling his childhood in Southie – a poor, predominantly Irish-American neighborhood in Boston – the author Michael Patrick MacDonald conveys the powerful and multi-layered ways in which young people constructed place-based identities. For them, being from Southie meant being Irish (or Irish-American), and even youth who were several generations removed from their Irish ancestors relished

cultural displays such as caps and jackets bearing the University of Notre Dame's Fighting Irish name and logo. Symbols like these helped to connect the young people not only to their ancestors' home but also to the ethnic enclave from which they hailed. Southie youth also announced a specific neighborhood identity with a small tattoo on the wrist known as the "Southie dot." This indelible mark conveyed to all who understood it just where a young person was from – for better or worse. As MacDonald recounts, the dot could make one a target for gangs from outside neighborhoods or other ethnic groups. "But everyone went ahead and did the Southie dot anyway," he writes, "to prove their loyalty to the neighborhood, regardless of the consequences in the outside world" (MacDonald 2000: p. 63). Solidarity and toughness were central to what it meant to be a young person from Southie.

Although most of us do not announce our place-based identities with a tattoo, the places we are from still constitute an important part of who we are. This is in part because the meanings attached to places also attach to people. When a stranger asks you about yourself, one of the first things that you tell them is likely to be where you are from. We know that others are familiar with a variety of places, and we allow those familiarities to say something about us as individuals. What do we say about ourselves when we tell people where we're from? To start, our home places convey something about our cultural roots. For instance, one religion may predominate in a particular city, or the city may be known for a distinct set of values. Our hometown may have a well-known art or music scene of which we are a part, or it may be recognized as a place that is rabid for its sports teams. Places also announce social differences, whether high or low. Noting the city where we come from – and particularly the neighborhood – can thus serve as shorthand for our social class (this is particularly useful in countries like the United States, where people are uncomfortable talking about class status). It is important to keep in mind, however, that individuals do not identify wholesale with the cultures of their places, and that places and their residents can be stereotyped in just the same way that ethnic or racial groups are.

The sense of identity derived from places allows us to understand ourselves as well. We are socialized in specific places, and learn how to be of a place at the same time that we learn how to be members of society more generally. To return to the Southie example above, MacDonald and his friends learned a certain set of local traits and behaviors, from how to speak, stand, and dress to just whom one should trust. Our families and peers typically share the norms of our place, and in this way much of our culture is derived from, or mediated through, the places we inhabit.

Places as the site of community

Places furnish us not only with a sense of identity but also a strong sense of community – of our social connections to other people. Neighborhoods do this for people, and people become attached to those neighborhoods. The daily routine of our movements through the neighborhood, the people that we see, gives us a strong sense of a community that surrounds us. A famous student of cities and neighborhoods, Jane Jacobs, wrote at length about her neighborhood in the Greenwich Village area of New York City (see Figure 1.3). Jacobs pointed out that the various people who lived in the neighborhood provided the kind of community in which residents could feel a sense of belonging, and, especially, a sense of trust. People got to know one another in the neighborhood, and, if there was a problem or someone was in danger, neighborhood residents and business owners would help one another out. Jacobs wrote of the local delicatessen owner, Joe Cornacchia, for example, who served as the eyes of the neighborhood. Because his shop opened early, Joe kept a watchful eye over the street at hours when others were attending to matters inside

Figure 1.3 Jane Jacobs at the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village in 1961. For Jacobs, the neighborhood tavern was an important place for locals and visitors alike to renew connections. Source: Photo: Cervin Robinson/Courtesy of the Architects' Journal.



their homes. Moreover, because everyone visited the delicatessen regularly, Joe acted as an important source of information in the community. He even held the keys to various buildings and residences in the neighborhood – a strong indication of the level of trust there.

Ideally, places furnish these kinds of communities with a high degree of social capital – and that is the second key element of place. Sometimes these places can be very small – for example, playgrounds where parents will gather with their children in the afternoon. They meet with other parents and their children play with one another, creating strong bonds of friendship for both generations. Alternatively, sometimes such places can simply be street corners or shopping malls where teenagers gather after school and on the weekends. Businesses are well aware of these features of places. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1997) refers to places where people can gather and establish connections to one another as “third places,” following home and work in their importance. He offers that pubs, taverns, and other sites outside people’s homes where friends can gather on a regular basis help to create this strong sense of community. Indeed, Oldenburg was a consultant for the coffee company Starbucks, and he urged them to create not merely a site where people could get a good cup of coffee but one where they could sit around and chat with one another.

It is easy to idealize places as sites of strong and supportive communities. But, in many places, the trust and mutual support that communities provide is largely absent. This may be because populations are highly transient (although most of the residents in Jane Jacobs’ neighborhood rented, they stayed in the area for many years) or because neighborhoods lack the kinds of spaces and institutions that would facilitate positive interaction among residents (no parks, no pubs, and so on). In other places, communities may have strong ties, but these ties may not extend to all members. Ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual minorities have often been excluded from place-based

communities, and as a result, have made their own where possible (see Chapter 9). In other places, any newcomer or new way of thinking is suspect, and as a result change occurs only very slowly. It is important to remember that, while places *can* facilitate community, we should not assume that they actually do, or that community is universally positive.

Places as sites of security

The last element so important to places is that they can furnish us with a sense of security. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, security often follows from identity and community. When we feel connected to a place and the other people therein, we often feel secure. We know our figurative “place” in the world, and know that we are surrounded by individuals we can trust to support us. The positive implications of this type of security cannot be underestimated – it allows us to truly be ourselves.

But security has a more practical side as well. We need to feel that our person and our family, as well as our property, are safe. This too is fundamental to our wellbeing. Knowing that our home will be there as we left it when we return from work, or that we are safe walking to a friend’s house, or that our children are able to play outside, allows us to then turn our minds to the myriad other interests and responsibilities that life presents.

The lack of such security is a major concern for city dwellers today – particularly for parents, who may feel this most acutely. Especially in large and dynamic cities, the safety and security of neighborhoods varies widely. When people choose to move to a particular place, they often do so because they have heard that that neighborhood is safe and secure, for them and their children. Anthropologist Setha Low has found that this desire to *feel* secure, even when real threats to that security are largely imagined, is a major factor behind the spread of **gated communities** in the United States and around the world (see Studying the city 1.1). Likewise, when people choose to leave neighborhoods, it often is for the very same reason – that those neighborhoods did not feel safe or secure to them. In poor neighborhoods, in particular, this sense of security is a major issue. In a study done of local residents in Milwaukee years ago, for example, the researchers found that the key reason people wanted to leave their neighborhood was that they did *not* feel safe and secure there.¹ They reported that they were worried, in particular, about the amount of crime and violence in their neighborhood.

gated community A residential community surrounded by walls, fences, gates, water, and/or natural barriers that admits only residents and their guests.

Just as different types of people associate places with different meanings, they also experience different levels of security. Well-publicized events such as the 2012 gang rape of a 23-year-old female medical intern on a Delhi bus (the victim died from injuries associated with her attack), or the assaults on women in Cairo’s Tahrir Square as they celebrated the change of government in 2014 (see Figure 1.4), remind us that women experience distinct dangers in urban places. The police shootings of unarmed black men in US cities and suburbs provide another important example of the differing levels of security experienced by members of different groups. In this case, it is the very people tasked with ensuring cities’ security who are also understood as a threat to the security of minority communities.

Larger-scale forces also threaten places. Political conflicts have the potential to undermine the security of neighborhoods and even entire cities. As regimes change, large populations are displaced or killed – often to make places more homogeneous or to provide greater access to a privileged group. The so-called “ethnic cleansing” that

Figure 1.4 Cairo's Tahrir Square – during the Egyptian uprising of 2011, when as many as one million protestors would gather there. This public space became a crucial site for organizing and communicating, and it became a symbol for the movement itself. In other countries experiencing the Arab Spring uprisings, public spaces also played key roles, such as the make-do use of a traffic circle in Bahrain. Source: © Jonathan Rashad/Getty Images



occurred in the former Yugoslavia are a prime example, as are the sectarian struggles in Iraq. The war in Syria has displaced some 10 million people – 6.5 million who remain within the country but have lost their homes, and over four million who have fled to other countries (UNHCR 2015). Environmental forces also threaten the security of places, whether the potential flooding of coastal areas due to climate change or more routine disasters such as earthquakes, wildfires, and seasonal flooding (see Chapter 13). Whatever the threat to security, it is important to keep in mind that when people lose the places to which they are attached they lose much more than their physical environment: they also lose the potential of that environment to generate a positive identity or community. For that reason, displacement is among the most disruptive events that an individual can experience.

STUDYING THE CITY 1.1



The globalization of gated communities

Why are we seeing more and more communities surround themselves with walls, gates, and guard towers? Increasingly we see urban and suburban communities, whether groups of single-family homes or multi-story apartment complexes, fortified against would-be intruders. Anthropologist Setha Low (2005) studies gated communities in the United States, Latin America, and China to try and make sense of this global trend toward the increasing privatization of residential space.

The places that Low studies have very different cultural backgrounds as well as different social meanings attached to gated communities within them, so identifying what these places have in common and how this trend of residential privatization emerged almost simultaneously in each place is a daunting task. Two important perspectives that have tried to explain this global trend are the supply-side theory put forward by Chris Webster (2001) and the demand-side perspective advocated by Low.

According to Chris Webster, these communities have been springing up globally because goods and services can be supplied most efficiently and effectively through smaller-scale local organizations, such as gated communities, and this leaves less for government to supply in the public realm. Conversely, Setha Low argues that globalization is leading to increasing heterogeneity and uneven development in cities, which in turn leads to increased perceptions of crime. When the perceived level of crime rises, people begin to feel more insecure, and the option to live somewhere safe and predictable, such as a gated community, becomes very appealing.

Whatever the reason, the increase in such communities across the world means that more types of public space are being privatized every day. And, as many people begin to have all of their services and amenities provided through private gated communities, those people may be less likely to want their tax money spent on providing the same types of services and amenities publicly. What then might happen to those living outside the walls?

Human beings make and remake places

Places, whether they are cities or their constitutive parts, are human creations. Though the age and scale of places such as London or New York City may obscure the efforts of the people who envisioned and built them, we must always remember that these cities reflect the work of human hands, and that these hands are never idle. One generation designs one kind of city – for example, the generation of people who developed cities during the Industrial Revolution – and another generation then seeks to change and modify that city. Cities and other places must therefore be seen as fundamentally human and social constructions that change and evolve over time. As we explain later in this book, industrial cities such as Detroit are increasingly finding that their infrastructure outstrips their current population and economic output, resulting in efforts to “downsize” the city and return urban landscapes to nature. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Chinese agricultural lands are now sprouting factories and worker housing as cities large and small grow outward and eat up farmland. It is estimated that between 1987 and 1992 China lost close to 100 million acres of farmland each year to urbanization and the expansion of roads and industries. Between 1990 and 2000, in a stretch of accelerated urbanization, 74 percent of the new urban land use in the Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei (Province) region was converted from arable land (Tan et al. 2005). This pace of extensive land use has since decelerated as a result of pushing a new phase of urbanization based on more compact land development.

These kinds of urban changes mark important shifts in the world economy, but changes in social arrangements at the local and national levels are also visible in the forms that cities take. Consider, for instance, the patterns of segregation seen in US cities. For many years, black and white residents lived near one another, albeit often in unequal circumstances. Following the **Great Migration** of the early twentieth

Great Migration The movement of a large number of African Americans from the US South, especially during the interwar period.

century, a period in which millions of African Americans moved from the rural south to industrial cities of the north, segregation became much more pronounced and was enforced by violent means. This coincided with an initial boom in suburban construction that facilitated the movement of affluent whites to the urban outskirts, where racial and ethnic minorities were denied residence by legally enforceable covenants (this process is detailed further in Chapters 6 and 8). As a result, US cities took on a form that George Clinton of the funk band Parliament characterized as “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs.”

Patterns of segregation by class, race, and ethnicity are common in cities across the globe as groups map their social positions onto the urban landscape. In South Africa, the patterns of segregation under the system of apartheid essentially separated people by race so that black South Africans were compelled to live entirely in areas separated from the white population of Afrikaners and British. The apartheid system was overturned partially because black South Africans began challenging these racial boundaries by moving into areas designated as white-only neighborhoods. With the end of apartheid, legal racial segregation was eliminated. Yet today these formal barriers have been replaced, in part, by the emergence of new barriers of separation that are both race- and class-based. Thus, in metropolitan Johannesburg, one today finds enormous slums on the outskirts of the city populated by poor black South Africans but also by a flood of recent refugees from nearby Zimbabwe and migrants from countries such as Nigeria and Mozambique who have come in search of work. At the same time, wealthy white residents have deserted the central city and, along with the new black elite, have consolidated their financial and political power in nearby Sandton, a former all-white suburb that has become the new social and economic capital of metropolitan Johannesburg (Murray 2008).

Difference not only results in negative and exclusionary forms of place-making but can also foster positive outcomes. As immigrants flood into cities across the world,

urban enclaves

Settlements and communities created by new immigrants to a country.

they create and recreate neighborhoods in ways that make them comfortable. They create, in effect, **urban enclaves** – social settlements that provide immigrants with a way to remain attached to others from their homelands and to mark and identify their place as a distinct ethnic space in their new country. Since the mid-1980s in Chicago, for example, various enclaves have grown up in and around the city, enclaves that consist primarily of recent Mexican immigrants but also those from Korea

and Ukraine. These immigrants open shops and restaurants, places where recent immigrants can come to buy the groceries and the clothing from their homelands. One particularly well-known Chicago neighborhood is Pilsen (see Figure 1.5), home to many thousands of recent immigrants from Mexico. Its residents have attempted to recreate elements of their homeland for themselves and marked the area with various public artworks and murals – a twentieth-century Mexican tradition they have reinvented in Chicago. Spanish is spoken as often as English, if not more often, in the enclave, and the whole range of institutions – from churches to schools – reflects the Mexican influence. As more and more Mexican immigrants have entered the city, in fact, they have settled in the outskirts of the metropolis, creating new and even more diverse enclaves for themselves. As you will see in Chapter 8, cities and their ethnic enclaves have long served as important points of transition for new immigrants, and these immigrants have in turn remade their cities in vital ways.

We should look at cities not merely as bricks and mortar, buildings and streets – as the work of architects and urban planners, engineers and laborers – but also as cultural and social creations providing insight into the ways and customs of the people who live in them. Cities reveal to us how people live, their power arrangements, their values and

Figure 1.5 Murals in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood announce – and enhance – the area's Mexican heritage. Source: Photo © Ralf-Finn Hestoft/Corbis.



priorities, how they care for their children, and other important matters. In 2010, a conflict over the construction of an Islamic center and mosque near the site of the former World Trade Center provides a useful illustration here. Had the area never been the target of terrorist attacks, the proposed mosque might have proceeded with little notice. But, because the area now possesses a near-sacred status, and because that status is bound up with the identity of the terrorists, in the minds of some New Yorkers the construction of a mosque nearby constituted another assault. Those supporting and opposing the mosque struggle to attach their preferred meaning to Lower Manhattan as a place: some supporters have argued that a mosque nearby would serve as a testament to US tolerance and diversity, while those opposing the development contend that it would mock the memories of those who perished nearby. Although this is a dramatic example, the meanings of all places are subject to change, whether by deliberate action or by accident. Changes in meaning are then literally cast in concrete when one type of structure or another is deemed appropriate and constructed.

Place and space

In revealing the ways that meanings are contested and attached to sites, the struggle over what kinds of uses should or should not occur near Ground Zero also illustrates ways in which space becomes place. The concepts of space and place are often used together, as each turns our attention toward the importance of land and structures, and people's connections with these. For many years, social and behavioral sciences – with the exception of geography – paid limited attention to the roles of place and space. In looking for the general patterns in human behavior, they often looked to variables that transcended locations. They knew that people might behave differently in one city or country than they did in another, but believed that this was only because other important variables – income, religion, level of education, and so on – differed in those

Table 1.2 Place versus space.

Place	Space
A specific site, whether an entire city or a smaller location therein, that is shaped by human beings and shapes the lives of human beings.	Geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

locations. But in recent years social scientists have recognized that places and spaces differ in important ways – ways that are more than the sum of a handful of demographic or geographic variables – and that these differences have important consequences for people's lives. This has led to more cross-disciplinary discussions of the roles that place and space play in people's lives – conversations that will continue through this book.

We've said quite a bit about place but so far have not said much about space. Just how do the two differ, and how do they work together? The distinction is partly one of the general versus the particular: space is different from place in that *places represent specific locations in space* (see Table 1.2). As spaces are used and made meaningful by human beings, they become places. To illustrate this distinction, Studying the city 1.2 describes the spaces and places dedicated to tourism, a growing share of urban areas. The same location is therefore simultaneously a certain kind of space and a particular place. Thus, a plaza is a certain kind of *space*, and Mexico City's Plaza de la Constitución is a *place*.

Beneath the meanings and uses that distinguish spaces as places, spaces differ from one another in important ways. Some spaces are constructed for certain kinds of uses – ball fields, for instance, or streets – though this does not always mean that they are used for their intended purposes (indeed, a street may come to serve as a soccer pitch or baseball diamond when no proper field is available). Scale also matters, as small spaces suggest intimacy and privacy while large spaces seem to foster anonymity. Many more qualities of spaces matter as well, as these allow spaces to facilitate some activities rather than others. And, as you will learn later in this book, even the same kinds of spaces can have qualities that make them inviting or repellent, well-loved or reviled. Jane Jacobs called attention to the ways that parks – an important type of urban space – differ from one another. Park spaces that offer a sense of enclosure, for instance, will actually be more inviting. Examining similar properties of urban space, William H. Whyte, whose work we discuss in Chapter 4, found that something as simple as the presence of movable seating will make one park or plaza more popular than another.

STUDYING THE CITY 1.2



Tourist spaces

As cities increasingly attempt to market themselves as tourist destinations, scholars have used the concepts of place and space to better understand this process. Tourism certainly capitalizes on cities as places: the distinct qualities of Vienna, or Bangkok, or Las Vegas motivate visitors to come and experience them. But space is also important in tourism, as tourist *places* also construct tourist *spaces* – areas designed for the comfort and pleasure of visitors (see Figure 1.6).



Figure 1.6 A horse and buggy ride in front of Hofburg Palace, Vienna. Tourist spaces often include elements that connect places to moments in the past. Source: Photo: Hiroshi Higuchi/Getty Images.

What is a **tourist space**? Within cities, we find highly controlled areas that cater specifically to the experiential, consumption, service, and aesthetic demands of tourists. They allow visitors to engage with a place's positive associations in a highly controlled environment. Informed by tourist literature and local iconography, tourism promoters essentially “script” the impression a tourist is to take away from a place. Thus, in Rome or Paris the tourist revels in culture and art, while in Jamaica or Cancun the script emphasizes tropical relaxation. Care is taken to ensure the harmony of the message, typically by removing any contradictory elements. Thus, a resort district may wall off views of nearby slums, and street vendors might be carefully controlled around museums and monuments. However, slum tourism in India’s megacities (mentioned earlier in this chapter) appears to fit both in an ironic way.

Political scientist Dennis Judd (1999) observes the emergence of what he calls “tourist bubbles,” a type of tourist space unique to decaying cities. Here the traveler “moves inside secured, protected, and normalized environments.” Judd cites Baltimore’s Harborplace development as a typical example. Harborplace’s “festival marketplace” (a hybrid of shopping mall and performance space popularized in the 1980s) provides opportunities to shop, dine, and take in local sites of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor in an atmosphere free of crime, decline, or interactions with urban “others” such as the homeless.

But, while Harborplace is a specific *place*, we can identify a category of locations like it – which are increasingly common across the globe – as *tourist spaces*. These would include entertainment districts, where one finds a high density of performance venues, restaurants, and pubs, as well as many historic districts, resorts, casinos, parks, and monuments. As you travel through or explore your own city, keep an eye out for spaces that cater to tourists and ask yourself how these kinds of spaces represent a particular *place*. What meanings are conveyed? Whose version of the place is presented?

tourist spaces Highly controlled areas that cater specifically to the experiential, consumption, service, and aesthetic demands of tourists.

While some urban spaces are as small as plazas and parks, space can scale up to entire cities and metropolitan regions, whose spatial attributes are more complex and variegated. Think about the difficulty of orienting yourself spatially in downtown Shanghai, which has almost 20 million people, with its crowded high-rises, compared

to a small, empty suburban park in the United States. Then imagine the likely scenario of Shanghai and a dozen other nearby million-plus cities growing into one another in the Yangtze River Delta and forming a megacity region of 80 million people. These gigantic spatial units make it difficult to visualize myriad concrete places such as streets and parks embedded within and across many scalar units and boundaries (see Chapter 12 for an extended discussion of this topic). From their scaled-up vantage point, cities and metropolitan regions amplify the more abstract quality of space relative to place.

private spaces Spaces to which access is restricted by those who own the property.

public spaces Spaces that are open and accessible to every person in a society, in particular its citizens.

One of the most important qualities of spaces is the degree to which they are freely accessible. Scholars are increasingly turning their attention to the distribution of **private spaces** and **public spaces** within urban areas. Cities have always contained private spaces, which provide a degree of protection from the outside world, and where the owner of the property may dictate just who is allowed to enter and what they may do on the premises. Homes are the major private spaces that we human beings occupy, as are those sites where we work, particularly private businesses and firms. Both family spaces and work spaces are protected by certain laws in democratic societies: they are private and thus cannot be subject to unlawful entry by public authorities such as the police.

These laws, among other things, help to establish the boundaries and contents of security, and thus they provide an added layer of protection, above and beyond our own families and friends, to our sense of security in places.

But it is public spaces that in many ways represent the heart of societies – democratic societies in particular. Public spaces are, by definition, open and accessible to every person in a society, in particular to the inhabitants of that society. Such spaces include streets, parks, and plazas, and other areas that we regard as sites of gatherings. In democratic societies such public spaces enable people who are different from one another to gather and participate with others in activities that they enjoy. It is this gathering and the participation, in public, so the argument claims, that help to establish the character and quality of democratic societies. And, where such public spaces are not used, or are not available to everyone, then the very nature of democracies and the very quality of communities is substantially diminished, even threatened.

Both private and public spaces serve important purposes: free speech and assembly are cornerstones of democratic societies, but most of us would like to have some say regarding the uses of some spaces, particularly our homes. Of increasing concern to scholars is the degree to which the kinds of spaces that were once unambiguously

public are increasingly becoming private. They refer to this process as the **privatization of space**: efforts to make space less accessible and to curtail the freedoms of those who use it. Take the shopping mall, for instance. While it may appear to serve many of the same functions as a town square or an open-air market, malls are privately owned and the rights of those who use them are specified by owners and management. Neighborhoods, too, particularly gated communities and common-interest developments, are extending private control of space beyond individual residences to the formerly public areas of streets, sidewalks, and parks (recall Studying the city 1.1 on the global spread of gated communities; also see our extensive discussion of such communities in Chapter 6). Anthropologist

privatization (of space) The shift in ownership of spaces from public to private, whether corporations, management companies, or homeowners' associations.

Teresa Caldeira (2001) has chronicled the increasing use of walls, gates, and guards to seal off residential compounds in São Paulo, Brazil. There, what are called closed condominiums include not only residential spaces but also parks as well as sports and entertainment facilities. Even the utilities are provided independently of the surrounding city.

One of the major issues of the twenty-first century will be how the public spaces of cities, such as parks and plazas, even sidewalks and corners, are treated and preserved so that they can truly represent sites and sources of cultural diversity and democracy in the modern world. Those of a more cynical turn of mind believe that the privatization of public space will be one of the great tendencies of modern life, whereas those who seek to protect the democratic elements of modern societies believe that movements of resistance must be made in order to establish the rights of all citizens to be able to enjoy the public spaces of cities. Don Mitchell (2003), a geographer, has promoted the point of view, which originated with French urban scholar Henri Lefebvre, that every person has the right to use the public spaces of cities – that's what cities are all about, he argues. Mitchell identifies ways in which local authorities across the United States, for example, have limited, indeed infringed upon, these rights of people. And, having identified this fundamental problem, he has promoted the idea that groups of people, homeless people in particular, must resist the efforts of local authorities and demand their own rights to the use of public spaces.

MAKING THE CITY BETTER 1.1

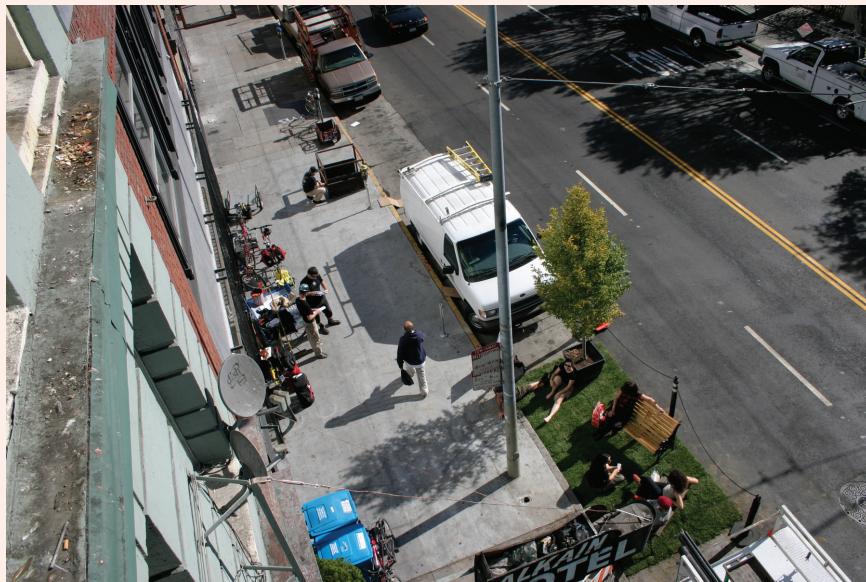


Remaking space through “DIY urbanism”

As people live and work in cities, they often recognize ways in which, with slight or simple improvements, these places could better suit their needs. For instance, a bus stop may lack trash cans or benches. Sometimes city governments respond to these kinds of requests, but formal responses can be slow and expensive. In a number of cities, residents are taking things into their own hands, engaging in “DIY urban design” or “DIY urbanism”—direct actions to improve the urban environment. This might include installing a bench or chairs on a street that lacks them, planting flowers, or even painting a bicycle lane on a public street. Sociologist Gordon C. C. Douglas (2014) has studied these activities and activists in several North American cities. He finds that most are seeking to improve the spaces where they live, responding to governments’ disinvestment in these neighborhoods and the lack of public amenities and space in particular.

Another example is PARK(ing) Day, which began as a way to expand the amount of public space available in urban environments. In downtown San Francisco, where the majority of outdoor space downtown is dedicated to private vehicles, an organization called Rebar first took action in 2005, paying for a parking space and converting it into a real park that passing pedestrians could use to relax. They laid down sod, put in some benches and trees, and watched as people came by to use the park or stare in wonder. And no one stopped them. Repurposing parking spaces as parks fills an important need, at least one day a year (the third Friday in September). Now, PARK(ing) Day is an open source global event. In 2011 (the last

Figure 1.7 A parking spot in Tromsø, Norway is remade into an urban forest as part of PARK(ing) Day 2009. Source: Photo: Lepetitgarcon/Flickr.com.



year of formal counts), 975 parks were created in 162 cities in 35 countries (see Figure 1.7). People have used PARK(ing) Day to create parks in their own cities and to provide other types of services at the park as well, such as bike repairs, political seminars, and free healthcare clinics.

Cities shape the fates of human beings

All of the issues touched upon in this chapter – whether qualities of space such as privatization, the ways that groups have been segregated throughout the city, or the impact of changes in the world economy on urban development – bring us to perhaps the most important lesson that you will take from this book, and from urban studies more generally: *places impact the fates of human beings*. The cities in which we live, as well as our neighborhoods, affect our material wellbeing and our security. In large part, places also provide – or deny – access to social, educational, and economic opportunities. While all social scientists take care to balance individual and societal factors when seeking to understand people's life chances, we can say with confidence that much of a person's success or suffering can be explained by looking at where they live.

This process begins at our beginnings. *Where* you are born determines, in large part, *how* you were born. Did your mother have access to prenatal care? Were you born in a well-equipped hospital? Did you first come home to a dwelling free of toxic hazards, violence, or other threats to your family's safety? What was the quality of the

school you first attended? Was your journey to school an opportunity for friendly play or fraught with danger? Even by the age of five or six, qualities of place have left their mark on children, and understanding the complex ways in which they do requires an understanding of how cities work.

Take schools, for example. In the United States, schools are largely funded through property taxes. The budget available to a school thus depends on the value of homes and businesses in the area. These values turn on a number of factors: the strength of the local economy (which is increasingly tied to the global economy), the demographic composition of a city, the desirability of the kind of housing and lifestyle available in a community, and the attitudes of local leaders and residents toward taxation. To make things even more complex, property values can also turn on the quality of local schools, creating a vicious cycle for poor-performing school districts as families with the means to do so move to stronger districts. This drives up property values in communities known for strong schools and pulls them down in those areas that families with children leave behind. In turn, schools become more unequal, and the children in those schools have increasingly divergent chances for economic success later in life.

In many places, the ways that place affects our life chances are even more basic than access to education. For some, place generates exposure to environmental dangers that sharply limit chances for a good life. While many of China's northern cities, for example, have a severe shortage of water, a much worse situation happens in some small cities and towns, where the only accessible water is a nearby river, heavily polluted by urban industrialization, which makes the local children ill. Rising sea levels caused by global warming are threatening the basic livelihood of people living in Asia's large coastal cities such as Dhaka and Jakarta as well as smaller fishing villages. Indeed, across the world, melting glaciers and the resulting rising sea levels, as well as river flooding brought on by more intense rain events, are posing an ever-growing menace to those people who live alongside or near them. Such was the case in Pakistan during the summer of 2010, which killed over 1700 people and destroyed 1.1 million dwellings (World Food Programme 2010).

The places in which we live not only shape our destinies but also influence the everyday texture of our lives. Consider this simple example. People travel to and from work across the highways and boulevards that are built as part of the city. The more people who live in a city and the more people who travel these roads, the more time it takes to get to work. In cities like Moscow or Los Angeles, for example, those who commute by car can spend upwards of two to three hours to go from their home to work, and then, at the end of the day, they must return again. It may seem a trivial thing at first, but the very system of transportation affects our daily lives, making them more difficult than they might be. We adapt, of course, as humans always do, and in the process we may invent new techniques of living – for instance, using cell phones to connect with friends and family while we each spend hours alone in our cars. In cities where people instead spend long hours on public transit, commuters devise still different strategies such as using headphones to exert some control over their auditory environment, or simply refuse to recognize other riders as fellow human beings (for an antidote to this, see *Making the city better 1.1*). Though the details vary from one place to another, place still determines, in large part, the constitutive elements of our daily routines as well as the kinds of practical and psychological coping strategies we will use to make the best of these.

Cities and people

Human beings and cities are inextricably intertwined. Human beings make cities, and they live and work in them. Although the pace at which cities grow and change may sometimes be so slow as to avoid detection, and while the scales of urban places may confound any sense of human efficacy, we must bear in mind that these are objects of our own making. Not only do human beings shape the physical structures of cities but they also decide what those structures will mean and, as a result, suggest how other human beings will use them. We offer these insights to stir your curiosity, and as a source of empowerment. Whatever is built by human hands is, by definition, within our power to change. Indeed, throughout the book we offer examples of individuals and groups who are working to change cities in ways that improve the lives of residents.

This brings us to perhaps the most important point of this chapter, and of this book: *places, whether cities, neighborhoods, or even smaller units therein, have the power to shape human lives.* The structures of inequalities found within and across societies are quite literally made concrete in cities. Add to these a host of place-specific threats stemming from political and environmental instability, and we can trace many of the factors that diminish individuals' lives to the places where they live. Places are not the only culprit here – in many instances, places are the sites where problems stemming from larger structures manifest themselves – but understanding places allows us to understand the ways in which these forces intersect with specific populations and resources.

We hope that this chapter leaves you with a sense of why cities are compelling topics of study. Some of you likely needed little convincing: you may have had questions about why cities take the forms they do, how immigrants create communities in a new place, or why some neighborhoods are luxurious and opulent while others are sites of danger and despair. We encourage those of you who have come to this field accidentally or even reluctantly to consider cities as sites where you can readily see social processes at work, whether the construction of meanings and memories as they become attached to places or the unequal distribution of economic opportunities. Whatever path you have taken in becoming a student of cities, we hope that this book, and the concepts of space and place at its core, will help you to recognize and understand the ways that humans experience an urban world. Visit the book's companion website at www.wiley.com/go/cities for examples, case studies, and discussion questions, plus a list of useful films and other media, that are relevant to this chapter.

Critical thinking questions

- 1 Think of a place in your neighborhood that is particularly important to you. What makes this place important? Do you associate the place with certain events or memories? Is it a place you use every day?
- 2 What kinds of public spaces are there where you live? How do people use them? Do any of these spaces work as theories of public space argue – as democratic spaces? And just how does democracy play out in them? As a hint, think of public spaces like sidewalks and parks, but also things like public markets.
- 3 Do you live in a city that is experiencing a decline today in terms of its industry or population? Or do you live in a city that is experiencing boom times? How do these broader economic events affect the way people feel about the city and their attachment to it as a place?
- 4 In what ways has the city in which you live influenced your daily life? Would your life have been much different had you lived in a different kind of city? How might daily life in your own city change if you were of a different gender or racial/ethnic group?

Suggested reading

- Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001). A major book on American cities that shows how and why cities, as places, matter in the lives of people.
- Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). One of the most influential works of the twentieth century. Jacobs argues that urban planners have failed to design cities that account for the way in which people live, work, and play in cities.
- Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). One of the leading Marxist writers to re-examine issues of urbanization and the city, Lefebvre

argued that space was actually produced by the capitalist institutions of the modern world.

Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000). MacDonald's moving account of life in south Boston reveals the ways in which neighborhood, social class, and ethnicity contributed to residents' identities and how the neighborhood shaped their fates.

Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). The work that brought the importance of space and place to the attention not only of geographers but also to the whole range of social sciences.

Note

1. On a similar theme, see Glaser et al. (2003).