

KEVIN A. LYNCH

The image of the city
City sense and city design

Biography

- **Kevin Andrew Lynch (1918-1984)** was an American urban planner and author. Lynch studied at Yale University, Taliesin (studio) under Frank Lloyd Wright, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and received a Bachelor's degree in city planning from MIT in 1947.
- Lynch provided seminal contributions to the field of city planning through empirical research on how individuals perceive and navigate the urban landscape. His books explore the presence of time and history in the urban environment, how urban environments affect children, and how to harness human perception of the physical form of cities and regions as the conceptual basis for good urban design.
- Lynch's most famous work, *The Image of the City* was published in 1960.

- The result of a five-year study on how users perceive and organize spatial information as they navigate through cities. He used three disparate cities. These are Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles.
- Lynch reported that users understood their surroundings in consistent and predictable ways, forming mental maps with five elements:
 - **paths**; the streets, sidewalks, trails, and other channels in which people travel;
 - **edges**; perceived boundaries such as walls, buildings, and shorelines;
 - **districts**; relatively large sections of the city distinguished by some identity or character;
 - **nodes**; focal points, intersections or loci
 - **landmarks**; readily identifiable objects which serve as reference points
- In the same book Lynch also coined the words "imageability" and "wayfinding". *Image of the City* has had important and durable influence in the fields of urban planning and environmental psychology.

His selected writings

- Lynch, Kevin, *City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London 1990.
- Lynch, Kevin, *Good City Form*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London 1984, c1981.
- Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1960.
- Lynch, Kevin, *Managing the Sense of a Region*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London 1976, 1980.
- Lynch, Kevin, and Hack, Gary, *Site Planning*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London 1962; 2nd edition 1971; 3rd edition 1984.
- Lynch, Kevin, *A Theory of Good City Form*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London 1981.
- Appleyard, Donald, Lynch, Kevin, and Myer, John R. *The View from the Road*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1964.
- Lynch, Kevin, *Wasting Away* (with contributions by Michael Southworth, editor), Sierra Club Books, San Francisco 1990.
- Lynch, Kevin, *What Time is this Place?*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1972.

The image of the city

- What does the city's form actually mean to people who live there? / What can the city planner do to make the city's image more vivid and memorable to the city dweller?
- To answer these questions, Lynch has studied the experience of the people who live in Los Angeles, Boston and New Jersey. With a fund of new material from field studies of these three cities and personal interviews with their inhabitants together with insights from literature, anthropology, psychology and art. Lynch formulates a new criterion –imageability- and shows its potential value for the building and rebuilding of cities.

What is a mental map?

- A person's perception of the world is known as a mental map. A mental map is an individual's own map of their known world. Mental maps of individuals can be investigated
 - by asking for directions to a landmark or other location,
 - by asking someone to draw a sketch map of an area or describe that area,
 - by asking a person to name as many places as possible in a short period of time.

Understanding Neighborhoods Through Mental Mapping

- Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (1960)
- Case studies in Boston, Los Angeles, and Jersey City
- How people perceive the spatial arrangement their city - its "legibility"
- "Mental" maps with 5 elements
 1. Paths
 2. Edges
 3. Districts
 4. Nodes
 5. Landmarks

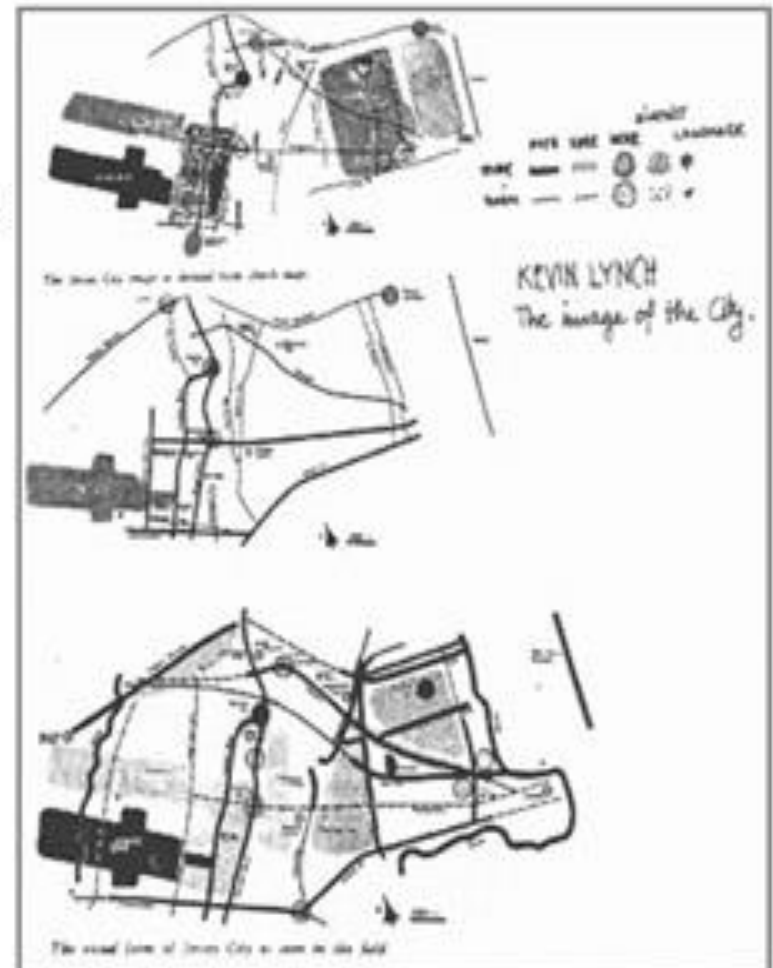



Image: examples of hand-drawn maps of Jersey City portraying Lynch's theory (pages 148-149 in *The Image of the City*)


Building the image

- Environmental images are the result of a two way process between the observer and his/her environment. The environment suggests distinction, relations and the observer selects, organizes and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed limits and emphasizes what is seen while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process.
- Different environments resist or facilitate the process of image-making.

Structure and Identity

- An environmental image can be analyzed into 3 components: identity, structure and meaning.
- A workable image requires first identification of an object which implies its distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else but with the meaning of individuality or oneness.


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- Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other object.
 - Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation.

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- If an image has value for orientation in the living space, it must have several qualities;
 - It must be sufficient
 - It must be sufficiently clear and well integrated to be economical of mental effort
 - It should be safe

This criteria for a 'good' image.

imageability

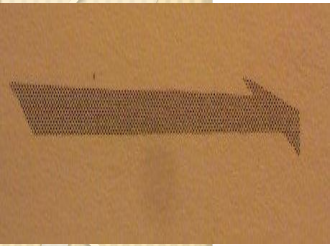
- Imageability is another term introduced by Lynch. It is the quality of a physical object, which gives an observer a strong, vivid image.
- He concluded that a highly imageable city would be well formed, would contain very distinct parts and would be instantly recognizable to the common inhabitant.
- He also explains that a well-formed city is highly reliant upon the most predominant city element, paths. Examples of well-designed paths may include special lighting and having clarity of direction.

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- Similarly, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks are favorable contributors to imageability if they are meaningful, distinct, and not confusing. These elements, when placed in good form, increase human ability to see and remember the patterns.

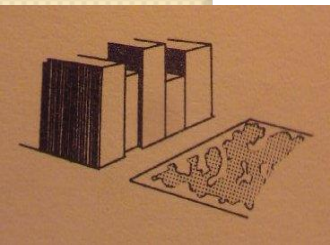
The city image and its elements

Legibility

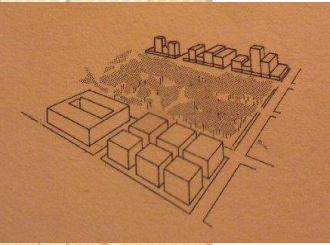
- Legibility is a term used to describe ***the ease with which people can understand the layout of a place.*** By making questionnaire surveys, Lynch defined a method of analyzing legibility based on five elements: **paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.**

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- **Paths:** familiar routes followed- *"are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads ."*

These are the major and minor routes of circulation that people use to move out. A city has a network of major routes and a neighborhood network of minor routes.

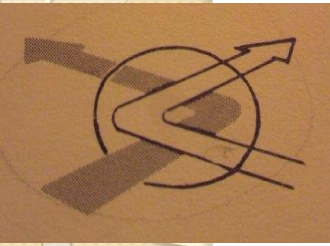
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- **Edges-** dividing lines between districts- (Izmir Bay) *"are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls.'*

The termination of a district is its edge. Some districts have no edges at all but gradually taper off (gittikçe incelen) and blend into (karismak) another district. When two districts are joined at one edge they form a seam. (dikis yeri)



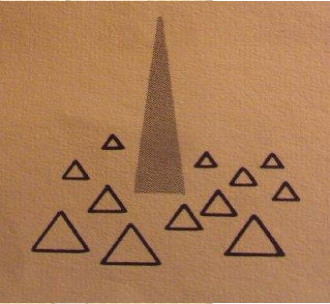
- **Districts-** areas with perceived internal homogeneity "*are medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of,' and which are recognizable as having some common identifying character*"

A city is composed of component neighborhoods or districts; (its center, midtown, its in-town residential areas, organized industrial areas, trainyards, suburbs, college campuses etc.) Sometime they are districts in form and extent.



- **Nodes-** centres of attraction that you can enter -"are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are intensive foci to and from which he is traveling. They may be primary junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another. Or the nodes may be simply concentrations, which gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character, as a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square . "

A node is a center of activity. Actually it is a type of landmark but is distinguished from a landmark by virtue of its active function. Where a landmark is a distinct visual object, a node is a distinct hub (göbek) of activity.

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- **Landmarks-** point of reference- (Clock Tower, İzmir/ Cumhuriyet anıtı, Taksim) *"are another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain"*.

The prominent visual features of the city are its landmarks. Some landmarks are very large and seen at great distances, like Hilton Hotel in Alsancak. Some landmarks are very small (e.g. a tree within an urban square) and can only be seen close up. Landmarks are an important element of urban form because they help people to orient themselves in the city and help identify an area.

Having identified these elements Lynch describes the skeletal elements of city form.

City sense and city design

city satisfactions

- The city can provide several satisfactions which are summarized as orientation, warmth, stimulus, sensual delight and interest. In addition, 'functional' satisfactions which however have such a direct emotional impact as to be worth including: movement, shopping and climate.

orientation

- The sense of clear relation of the observer with the city and its parts with the larger world around it. In the simplest sense it may be taken where one is at any time and how to reach any other part.
- This self location is largely achieved by:
 - a)direct lines
 - b)sequence
 - c)landmarks
 - d)spaces and areas
 - e)grid system
 - f)diffuse
 - g)topographic
 - h)symbolic

a) Direct lines

- Strongly organized lines with a visible or felt direction, concentrating transport and intensive uses from which other points can be related as from a spine or axis. (Corso, Roma; Borgo Albizzi; Halsted st.)

b) sequences

- Linear but not necessarily directed. (Venezia: any habitual path)

c) landmark

- isolated objects of peculiar form associated with key locations and to which observers can be radially oriented by sight. (Duomo, Firenze)

d) space and areas

- Several locations which have key importance and are of significant form (spatial, topographic, character of structure etc.)

e) grid systems

- Coordinate street system which give compass direction and a basis for measure of distance and location by coordinates. (Manhattan, Chicago)

f) diffuse

- Compass orientation only, from various effects: streets which run in one or two general direction not on a grid. (Bologna)

g) topographic

- Orientation from the slope and configuration of ground in the city. (Oltrarno; Perugia)

h) symbolic

- Use of maps, street signs, numbers, shop signs, directional symbols etc.

Warmth and attachment

- A feeling of response projected onto the physical surroundings of its intimate adjustment to humanity. A sense of protection, ease and affection. In part it springs automatically from familiarity and the sense of history but it is reinforced by physical forms:
 - a) evidence of human care and adaptation
 - b) If there are distinctive forms, they have no symbolic content at first, can more readily if all is undifferentiated.
 - c) 'human scale' which can impress outward marks of his personality on the environment.

References

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