

Place identity: symbols of self in the urban fabric

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Abstract

The urban fabric contains symbols (icons) that tell us something about ourselves and something about those to whom the symbols belong. This aspect of the urban fabric has been called the glue that bonds people to place. The contention of this paper is that these icons deserve special attention in urban design decisions because they contribute to place identity and ultimately to self identity, health, sense of community and sense of place. To explore the nature of these place-based meanings, data were collected from residents of Charleston, SC following hurricane Hugo in 1989. Residents were asked to describe what they had lost to the storm, not just the physical features blown away by winds or damaged by rains, but the memories and meanings embodied by these features. Residents identified several types of features as icons of special significance: urban forest (30%), churches (27%), homes (19%), public buildings (6%), places associated with historic events (6%) and retail structures (5%). Residents' explanations for why these icons were special fell into six major categories. The icons: provided connections to residents' pasts; symbolize the social groups to which residents belonged or with which they identified; gave the community its distinctive character; satisfied important functional needs; evoked emotions or feelings; and served as reminders of personal accomplishments and concerns. We concluded that place identity, although subjective and subtle, can be assessed and managed through sensitive land development efforts.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the conceptual and empirical nature of place identity so that it might be better understood, made more tangible, and ultimately inform environmental design and planning decisions. More specifically, the purpose was to explore and develop place identity and related concepts through a case study analysis of hurricane damage in Charleston, SC. In September 1989, hurricane Hugo damaged or destroyed trees, buildings and other physical features of Charleston's neighborhoods. We used this "opportunity" to ask residents about the important meanings and values symbolized by the lost and damaged place features. Before

launching into the empirical study, a review of the relevant literature is provided.

"Place identity" refers to the contribution of place attributes to one's self identity (Proshansky, 1978; Krupat, 1983; Sabine, 1983; Shumaker and Taylor, 1983; Proshansky et al., 1983; Rivlin, 1987; Korpela, 1989). Self identity is rooted in many facets of daily life: the roles we play (i.e. mother, teacher, Colonel, son); the groups to which we belong (political, social, cultural); the things we wear (trendy clothes, perfume, hair style); the items we purchase (fast, sexy and expensive automobiles, nice homes in high status areas, books, art, landscaping); the places we frequent or remember (home town, historic church, commercial district, wilderness area); and so on (Belk, 1988; Sack, 1988). The contribution of place to self identity is the concern of this paper. It is assumed here that this contribution

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comes, in part, from the meanings and values symbolized by place features. Hence place-based meanings, or place icons, are central to the discussion and method that follow.

Almost every environmental feature has meaning associated with it. As Steinitz (1968) suggests, “What goes on here?” is not a trivial question. In order to operate effectively in environments, in order to survive by our wits in the Savannah or in the shopping mall, we need to assess the environment’s potential to hinder or facilitate our goals, that is, we need to comprehend or “read” environmental meaning (see also Duncan, 1982; Rapoport, 1982b; Sack, 1988). Stokols (1981) refers to place-based meaning as “the nonmaterial properties of the physical milieu – the sociocultural ‘residue’ (or residual meaning) that becomes attached to places as the result of their continuous association with group activities’. He further suggests that place-based meanings form the “glue” of familiarity that binds people to place.

As is suggested by the quote from Stokols, the meanings symbolized by place features communicate much more than how to function in a setting. Place-based meanings tell us something about who we are and who we are not, how we have changed and into what we are changing. Lynch (1972) argues that an important function of the built environment is fixing (in bricks, mortar, steel and stone) periods of time, thereby making them available for contrast and comparison to current times: “... the quality of the personal image of time is crucial for individual well-being and also for our success in managing environmental change ... the external physical environment plays a role in building and supporting that image of time”. Similarly, Tuan (1980) suggests that encounters with objects or places from our past have “... the power to recreate in us, briefly, vivid sensations of an earlier self” (see also Lowenthal, 1975; Lynch 1981; Norberg-Schulz, 1981; Breakwell, 1983).

Korpela (1989) suggests that people ac-

tively (but perhaps not consciously) use place-based meanings to regulate their self definitions by focusing attention on meanings that balance or respond to pressures of daily life. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), Reitzes (1983), McCarthy (1984), Rochberg-Halton (1984) and others contend that peoples interactions with place-based meanings are part of the process of socialization, similar in most regards to the socialization that occurs through interactions with people. McCarthy (1984) suggests that place-based meanings may be more effective than other socializing forces (and shapers of identity) because they can be created and controlled by the individual (i.e. through personalization) and because they are more stable than other environmental symbols (i.e. it is more difficult to change houses than clothing styles). Presumably a housing purchase would receive more deliberation, better reflect one’s stable values, and have a more substantive impact on identity than would the purchase of blue jeans.

Out of the infinitude of place features and place types, the “home” is perhaps the most fully researched with regard to its contribution to identity. Cooper (1976), Seamon (1979), Duncan (1982) and Rapoport (1982a), for example, use different theoretical perspectives to explore the meanings associated with one’s home and how these meanings supplement and signify one’s identity. Hunter (1987) suggests that people search for living arrangements that maximize congruence between place-based meanings and self-identity (see also Hull, 1992). Feldman (1990) develops and tests a related concept called “settlement identity” and found it to be empirically related to residential purchasing decisions.

Based on this summary of the literature, there seems considerable theoretical support and tentative empirical support for the proposition that place features serve as symbols or icons that can contribute to place identity (and thereby contribute to self identity). The re-

mainder of the paper describes a method to assess place-based meanings and describes the findings from an application of this method.

Method

The method and many aspects of the study are modeled after work by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). Their study focused on household items, our study focuses on place features outside the home, in and around respondents' neighborhoods. Following hurricane Hugo (September, 1989), Charleston's residents were asked to describe what was special about the place features they had lost to the storm (or were damaged by the storm). We focused the interview on features lost or damaged by the storm because we suspected that residents who had lost something would be more sensitive to what they might normally have taken for granted. That is, we hoped that residents would be acutely aware of the values of these place features because of the voids their absences created. This assumption is motivated by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) finding that respondents became upset when asked to consider life without their favorite household items (see also Latreille, 1985, p. 5).

In the late spring of 1990, 185 residents in ten Charleston neighborhoods were interviewed by telephone. For the purposes of this study, a neighborhood was arbitrarily defined as approximately 100 residential units located within a four to five contiguous streetblock area. With the help of local officials, neighborhoods were selected that were approximately equal in the type (but not in the cost) of damage caused by Hugo, and were homogeneous within themselves but varied from one another in socioeconomic status of residents, and in the age and density of houses. Average amount of education ranged from a high school diploma in one neighborhood to post Baccalaureate studies in another. The average income ranged from \$16 000 per year in one

neighborhood to \$123 000 per year in another. Home ownership ranged from 50% in one neighborhood to 100% in another. All neighborhoods had some forest canopy prior to the storm and are best characterized as detached single family housing. Half of the neighborhoods had structures older than 40 years and two were in the recognized historic district known as the "Battery".

Telephone numbers and addresses of households within each neighborhood were selected from a city directory (City Publishing Company, 1989) using a systematic random sampling method. Approximately one third of the households in each neighborhood were sampled and sent (first class) a form letter explaining that they would be contacted by telephone with regards to this study. In total, 346 numbers were telephoned, 39 (11%) could not be reached even after up to 15 recalls at various times of day, 12 (3%) were businesses, 34 (10%) had phone numbers no longer in service, 63 (18%) private households refused to participate, 13 (4%) partially completed the interview and 185 (53%) fully completed the interview. The response rate of residents we were able to contact (i.e. residents that had not moved and answered their phones) was 76%. Interviewers queried either the female or male head of household; 33% of the respondents were male.

One male and two female graduate students conducted the 20 min phone interviews. The interview consisted of an introduction, closed and open-ended questions about hurricane evacuation and recovery behaviors, place attachment, socioeconomic character and several open-ended questions about the meanings associated with physical features damaged or lost due to Hugo. The latter questions generated the data for this paper.

There were three sets of questions about place-based meanings. In the first set of questions, respondents were asked to identify a destroyed or damaged place feature in their neighborhood, or in Charleston, that was "spe-

cial” or “important” to them (i.e. the feature need not be in the neighborhood but it must have special personal significance). Respondents were then asked to explain why the mentioned place feature was special. Interviewers used three standardized probes designed to elicit from respondents the meanings and memories symbolized by the place feature: Why was it special? What did it mean to you? How did it make you feel?

In the second and third sets of these same questions, respondents were forced to focus on a specific type of place feature: first on something historic and second on something natural. If, in response to the first set of questions, the respondent identified something natural or something historic, they were not asked to do so again (i.e. either the second or third set of questions was skipped). Thus respondents could have discussed a maximum of three place features, and each respondent was forced to consider a natural and a historic feature. Respondents were free to indicate that no feature was special to them.

The interview was not recorded, rather interviewers wrote down phrases and words as the respondent spoke and then again as interviewers debriefed themselves after each interview. Considerable pretesting of the questionnaire by these interviewers served as training and made them proficient at recording respondents' reasons. Nonetheless, the potential exists for subjectivity and errors of transcription.

Developing the categories to code these responses was largely an inductive effort, guided somewhat by results of a similar study by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). The only precondition of the categorization scheme was that the categories be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. First the responses were broken up into distinct phrases. The goal of this procedure was for each phrase or word to represent a singular reason for why a person valued a place feature. Phrases were not broken up if doing so changed the meaning

of the phrase. If the exact same word or phrase was said more than once by a respondent it was counted only once for that respondent for that feature.

Approximately one third of the data were used to develop the coding scheme. Categories were proposed, tested by attempting to code the sample of data, modified in response to noted ambiguities, and retested. The categories reported here were agreed upon by the research team (the authors plus one other) as the best at reliably capturing the diverse meanings of responses. A detailed, written coding guide was developed. Each category was defined with numerous examples taken from the sample. All of the data were then coded using this guide. Four people (the authors and one other) did the coding independently of one another. Every response was coded by at least three of the four. Inter-coder agreement averaged 87%. Differences in coding were resolved by group deliberation after independent coding was completed and inter-coder agreement calculated. More detail is provided below about the categorization process.

Results and discussion

Without prompting of any kind (i.e. in response to the first set of questions) 30% of the respondents identified something natural as the most special feature damaged or destroyed by Hugo (parks and gardens 13%, street and yard trees 17%). Churches were the most frequently mentioned building type (27% of responses). Respondents' own homes were mentioned 13% of the time and homes of friends or neighbors 3%. The low percentage of people mentioning houses is surprising since nearly everyone interviewed experienced some damage to their home and therefore could identify it as the damaged place feature deemed most special. Other built features residents identified, without prompting, as being special include: public buildings (6%), retail structures (5%), places of employment (1%), and fea-

tures that do not fall into any one category (8%). Six percent of respondents explicitly identified as being significant (in response to this first question set) a specific historic area or place (e.g. historic district, slave market, mansion).

Except for those place features associated with specific historic events it was difficult to determine from respondents' comments which of the other structures or gardens were historic. Hence, there exists some overlap between the place features in the categories defined above and those features that might be historic. Based upon respondents' descriptions of the features we concluded that some of the churches (13 of 51), homes (4 of 31), and gardens (4 of 24) were historic. In total, 32 (17%) respondents mentioned that the feature most important to them had a historic quality and 55 (30%) said that the most important feature had a natural quality. Because we were conservative in our coding and relied only on respondents' comments, it seems possible that the actual number of features old enough to be considered historic is larger than that reported.

Respondents who did not identify, in response to the first question, a historic feature or some aspect of the urban forest were asked, in the second and third sets of questions, specifically if such features were special to them. In total, 2069 codeable phrases or words resulted from the three sets of questions. A total of 185 people answered question set 1 with a total of 901 codeable responses; 153 people answered question set 2 (specifically about historic features), with 651 codeable responses; 130 people answered question set 3 (specifically about nature), with 661 codeable responses. Persons of high socioeconomic status seem likely to be more verbal and hence more likely to offer descriptions for why they value place icons. We found that minor differences exist in the number of responses per person and that slight but significantly positive correlations exist between the number of descriptions used per person and their age and education

level. In contrast, no significant correlations were found between number of responses and income or occupation.

These responses represent the meanings, values and associations residents ascribe to place features. These responses were categorized into 44 specific categories (Table 1). These categories were developed inductively, based on (seemingly) natural groupings found in the data. An attempt was then made to aggregate these specific categories into more general categories that reflected themes found in person–environment literature. The motivation for doing this was to examine the validity of the place identity data. One of the few means available to us to check validity was to examine the correspondence between the categories developed from our data and the findings of other studies. Except for Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), no similar studies were found. Hence in the discussion that follows the categories developed in this study are compared with general themes of the person–environment literature and to the specific findings of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) reported specific categories (table D.11, p. 289). These categories were aggregated for comparison with our results after our aggregated categories were developed. The aggregations that they make and discuss are not the same as those we made from their specific categories and used here as a basis of comparison. While this validity check is not entirely satisfactory, it is a start.

The six major categories are as follows: (1) place and personal history; (2) social groups to which one belongs; (3) perceptual character; (4) person–environment fit; (5) feelings and emotions; (6) accomplishments and miscellaneous values and concerns (Tables 1 and 2).

History of place and of self

As noted in the introduction, scholars such as Belk, Lynch, Tuan and others defend the

Table 1
Categories and examples of responses

Category	Example	Percentage
<i>Personal values and accomplishments</i>		
Accomplishment	Ownership, status	0.4
Spiritual belief	Salvation, hope, beauty of life	1.0
Endurance	Rare, lasted, did not give up	2.9
Environment	Wildlife, air, ecology	3.5
Preservation	No exploitation, preserve for children	0.9
Other		4.2
Subtotal		12.9
<i>Personal and cultural history</i>		
Way of life	Slow, old southern, early American	0.8
Cultural event	Civil war, first election	0.5
Famous person	George Washington	0.5
Cultural history	Represents early Charleston.	3.8
Personal traditions	Been going there for 60 years	0.9
Personal events	Raised there, married there, made it	2.0
Family traditions	Children baptized, parents built it	2.8
Subtotal		11.5
<i>Emotions/feelings</i>		
Attached	Belonging, welcomed, love	5.5
Delight	Great, excellent, bliss, happy	11.0
Excited	Interested, high, uplifted, awe	0.7
Relaxed	Relief, peaceful, calm	3.0
Reflective	Nostalgic, reminiscent, roots	1.5
Prideful	Important, unique, distinctive	4.2
Other positive	Treasure, safe	2.2
Negative	Unsafe	0.1
Subtotal		28.3
<i>Distinctive character</i>		
Character	Beautiful, quaint, bricks, unique	15.3
Landmarks	Can be seen or heard from afar	0.8
Barriers/edges	Fences, privacy	1.2
Subtotal		17.3
<i>Person-environment fit</i>		
Shelter	Shade, house things	6.0
Convenient	Close, good selection of products	1.1
Economics	Money, income, electricity, retail	2.0
Safety	Support, police	0.9
Public good	Transportation, education	0.6
Socialize	People always there, meet friends	1.4
Eat	Picnic, restaurant	0.5
Escape	Relief, take a break, place to think	1.6
Passive past time	Movie, theater, watching others	0.9
Active past time	Exercise, walk, run, practice,	1.2
Other	Commute, live there, holiday	1.5
Subtotal		17.3
<i>Reference to a group</i>		
Family	Close family, take kids there	1.6
Religious	Congregation, Catholic, Christian	1.7
Community	City is of national importance	0.9
Neighborhood	Affordable, nice neighborhood	0.5
Other groups	Travel club, bridge club, ethnicity	0.8
Subtotal		5.6
Total number of responses		2069

Table 2
Cross-tabulation of aggregate value categories and environmental features¹

Values	Environmental features						Total
	Church	Nature	Home	Public	Historic	Other	
Personal values	34 (1.6)	153 (7.4)	18 (0.9)	16 (0.8)	54 (2.6)	11 (0.5)	286 (13.8)
History	70 (3.4)	42 (2.0)	23 (1.1)	17 (0.8)	84 (4.1)	18 (0.9)	254 (12.3)
Group	63 (3.0)	20 (1.0)	12 (0.6)	8 (0.4)	15 (0.7)	7 (0.3)	125 (6.0)
Distinctive	29 (1.4)	235 (11.4)	9 (0.4)	14 (0.7)	84 (4.1)	11 (0.5)	382 (18.5)
Person-environment fit	40 (1.9)	197 (9.5)	24 (1.2)	28 (1.4)	46 (2.2)	51 (2.5)	386 (18.7)
Emotion	113 (5.5)	259 (12.5)	48 (2.3)	39 (1.9)	133 (6.4)	44 (2.1)	636 (30.7)
Total	349 (16.9)	906 (43.8)	134 (6.5)	122 (5.9)	416 (20.1)	142 (6.9)	2069 (100.0)

¹Number of values given (% of total coded values). Features are based on respondents' descriptions, not on-site inspection.

importance of opportunities to compare oneself with others and with past states of oneself. This provides a sense of continuity and a basis for future decisions. Natural areas, wilderness in particular, are valued because they remain constant and untrammelled by man, hence providing a constant basis of comparison (Haggard and Williams, 1991). Similarly, historic resources seem to have the capacity to serve as a basis of comparison (Breakwell, 1983). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that 16% of household items identified as being special were associated with memories about the past (e.g. mementos, heirlooms, souvenirs).

Twelve percent of the reasons Charleston residents gave for valuing place features fell within this category. For example, 5.6% of the reasons pertained to cultural history (e.g. a civil war battle, famous person, a past way-of-life). Nearly 6% of reasons pertained to some specific aspect of respondents' personal past (e.g. major life events, family activities, traditional events).

Social groups

Place features were valued because they serve as icons for social groups with which one identifies (i.e. the group has values which one respects or dislikes). Both endorsement and rejection of a group's ideals help define self by

suggesting who one is and who one is not.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that nearly 22% of household items were deemed special because they represented the values of groups such as family, ethnicity and religions. Over 17% of their responses pertained to remembrances of family. In our data, less than 6% of the responses seemed linked to groups. Less than 2% of the responses were related to family. The other responses pertained to religious groups, neighborhoods and other social groups. The difference between our findings and those of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) may result from their focus upon household items, which seem more likely to reflect family (and hence group) meanings than do neighborhood features.

Distinctive character

Place features may be valued because they distinguish one place from another, perhaps defining territory (Brown, 1987) or creating a strong perceptual image (Lynch, 1960). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that 8.5% of household items were valued because of their decorative style or because of other distinguishing physical characteristics. Over 17% of the responses to our questions were coded in this category. Most

of these responses were descriptive characterizations of a place feature (e.g. beautiful, distinctive, old). Whenever a respondent said they valued a place feature because it was old or beautiful they were prompted to explain why it was important that the feature was old or beautiful. If they could not offer a more specific reason, the response was coded here. If a respondent noted the feature was a landmark it was coded here because landmarks can help define and characterize a place.

Person–environment fit

One of the dominant themes in the environment–behavior literature is person–environment fit. A central tenant of stress theory, for example, is that stress can result from poor fit between a person's objectives and the opportunities facilitated by an environment (Evans and Cohen, 1987). Likewise, it has been suggested that a major contributor to residential satisfaction is the degree to which the needs of residents are conveniently met by the environment (Michelson, 1976).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that over 4% of favorite household items were valued for their utilitarian functions of saving time, money or energy, and that nearly 16% of household items were valued because they provided opportunities for enjoyment or escape. We assumed that by facilitating the respondent's desired activity of escape or enjoyment the feature facilitated person–environment fit and hence was coded here. Approximately 18% of responses fell within this category. Over 5% of these responses pertained to activities such as escape or socializing. The largest block of responses in this category (6.2%) suggested that many place features were valued simply because they provided shelter.

Emotion and feelings

Place features seem to be valued because, on their recollection and/or experience, they

evoke desired emotional states. The memories stored in a place icon and triggered by its encounter/recall may have the power to trigger emotional states previously experienced and associated with past events. Mood and emotion are a fundamental component of persons relationships with place (Russell and Snodgrass, 1987). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) did not find this type of response in their study, which is surprising given the many other similarities between our two studies. Perhaps this category of responses was prominent here because we explicitly asked respondents to describe how the place feature made them feel.

This was the most frequently mentioned reason for why place features were special, with 31% of all responses. (For a word/phrase to be categorized as a description of an emotional state it must be similar to one of the categories of emotion/mood derived from work by Shaver et al. (1987) or Russell and Snodgrass (1987).) The most frequently used emotional description was the delight or pleasure a place feature evoked (11%). A feeling of place attachment and affection for place, which reflects a quality of person–place relationships similar to love in person–person relationships accounted for 5.5% of the total. Often place icons made respondents feel distinctive or full of pride (4.2%), which would be expected if the place icons contribute to one's definition of self. Some place features made respondents feel reflective or contemplative (1.5%). This feeling may result when one steps back from the here and now and considers one's position in life.

Personal values and accomplishments

This was the catch-all category and contains 14% of responses. The largest subgroup of responses in this category is other (4% of total), into which were coded all idiosyncratic responses. What seems significant is that this category was not much larger: there seemed

enough similarity among the other responses to form distinct and obvious subcategories. Other statements coded here include: respondents' hopes and beliefs about the future (1%), appreciation of things that have endured (2.9%), and concern about the environment (3.5%).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that 5% of household items were special because they were associated with respondents' values, such as an embodiment of an ideal and/or one's personal accomplishments.

Differences among respondents

Neighborhoods differed significantly from one another in the features identified and the meanings attributed to these features (χ^2 significant at 0.0001). Differences were also observed to correspond with residents' socioeconomic characteristics (e.g. age, income, gender, education level; χ^2 significant at 0.01). Limited detail about these findings is presented because it is not possible to suggest whether a particular socioeconomic variable or a particular neighborhood characteristic or some other covariate caused the observed differences. Our sample was not random relative to, nor representative of, socio-economic characteristics.

Implications

It is difficult, based upon a single case study, to make general recommendations about building types, landscape features, or other design elements that might promote place identity. It seems probable that the icons found to be salient in this study are unique to Charleston, reflecting the residents' place identities formed over years of interacting with their environments. However, it does seem possible to make some general observations that might have relevance in the broader context of urban planning and design.

Churches were named as being important

and special by 27% of those interviewed. With this degree of popularity, it is easy to see why Charleston is often called the city of churches. This finding reinforces Morton (1988) who contends that the buildings most likely to be preserved (hence valued) are those associated with religion.

The frequency with which trees (17%) and parks and gardens (13%) were mentioned illustrates a powerful bond between people and nature. Although residents seemed to value the nature that existed within the urban fabric, only a few (0.5%) noted the significant energy savings trees can produce by shading houses, for example. This finding suggests that people might not know enough about the benefits of urban forestry to engage in the strategic planting of trees needed to realize the enormous energy savings and other benefits of urban forestry (Moll and Ebenreck, 1989).

One additional finding with potential design and planning implications is that in response to all our questions about special features, mansions and plantations, were mentioned only infrequently (2%) while other historic features (i.e. those areas associated with specific historic events, those areas having a general historic patina, specific old homes and churches) were mentioned more frequently (22%). This may provide further support for the current shift in preservation efforts away from the "best of the High-style American building and design tradition toward the common and the vernacular" (Stipe, 1988).

On balance, it appears that residents value their environment for much more than purely functional and economic reasons. Part of this value seems wrapped up in the meanings symbolized by place features and the contribution this meaning makes to place identity. This quality of the environment exists in an intangible transaction between people and place. It is not easily seen by officials or professionals concerned with community renewal, reconstruction, and/or development efforts. Hence, it is easily ignored, resulting in the production

of sterile, identity-less environments that may further disassociate residents from their place-based communities. Yet methods such as the one employed here can help articulate these qualities of the urban fabric. Thus, one recommendation that follows from this line of reasoning is to encourage development practices that promote and exploit existing or potential place identity and hence encourage (or at least do not discourage) people's psychological investment in their local, physical communities. Perhaps, then, this study could be interpreted as providing additional justification for vernacular architecture, historic preservation, community tree plantings, community gardening, commemoration/association of community events with physical icons, and similar efforts which might symbolize local values and hence promote place identity.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper it was suggested that place features serve as icons for meanings that contribute significantly to one's place identity, which is part of one's self identity. Place icons serve as symbols of peoples' memories and values and thereby make the experience of place more personal, more intimate. When these icons are encountered they may evoke the valued memories and/or other associations, and thereby evoke a sense of place. In support of these assertions we have only the quantity and quality of responses made by Charleston residents to our query about why place features were special to them. From the outset we recognized that the questions we were asking would be difficult to answer. They forced people to be introspective and explicit about things that are rarely discussed and are normally implicit. Yet despite these difficulties, we received an enormous response from residents of over 2000 reasons for why they valued place features.

Additional support for these assertions about the importance of place icons and their contri-

bution to place identity comes from the categorization scheme which overlaps, with the findings of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and seems to reflect themes found in the environment and behavior literature. Convergence such as this would be expected if place identity were to reflect the relationships between persons and places. Hence, in a very indirect way, this study supports the existence of place identity.

We conclude, by speculating well beyond the data, by suggesting that place identity potentially is a significant construct in that it may be causally linked to at least three important qualities of the human condition. (1) One's place identity may influence one's sense of coherence and hence one's health by influencing the meaning and significance attributed to place, to others, and ultimately to oneself (Antonovsky, 1987). (2) Place identity may increase sense of community. Communities are built upon commonalities. These commonalities may be represented by the physical environment which defines, or reminds people of histories common to them. Settings rich in place icons may evoke this shared past and be more likely to evoke a strong sense of community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). (3) Place identity may be a subset of sense of place in that it influences peoples' connectedness or relatedness to place. Many theories on sense-of-place and place attachment (e.g. Lynch, 1972; Relph, 1976; Canter, 1977; Seamon, 1979; Sack, 1988; Altman and Low, 1992) suggest that part of a sense of place is a sense of relatedness or sense of connectedness that one feels when experiencing or recalling place.

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