THE IMAGE OF THE CITY

Kevin Lynch

What does the city’s form actually mean to the 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, Mr. Lynch, supported by studies of Los Angeles, Boston, and Jersey City, formulates a new criterion — imageability — and shows its potential value as a guide for the building and rebuilding of cities.

The wide scope of this study leads to an original and vital method for the evaluation of city form. The architect, the planner, and certainly the city dweller will all want to read this book.

What the reviewers have said:

“. . . Kevin Lynch has come up with a readable, tautly organized, authoritative volume that may prove as important to city building as Camillo Sitte’s The Art of Building Cities.” — Architectural Forum

“City planners and urban designers everywhere will be taking account of his work for years to come . . . The importance of this book in the literature of urbanism is obvious . . . we have lacked a theory of the city’s visual perception based on objective criteria. For some strange reason, in the period dating from the late 19th Century in Germany and lasting until Lynch’s efforts . . . there was no experimentation in the matter of how cities are perceived. All of us can be grateful for the resumption of this line of thought. The impact of this volume should be enormous.” — Leonard K. Eaton, Progressive Architecture

“This small and readable book makes one of the most important modern contributions to large-scale design theory . . . To understand Lynch’s audacity, one must go back to 1953, the year when he began his studies in perception with a travel period in Italy. This was several years before all the ‘urban design’ conferences, before the coining of the phrase, and at a time when respectable planners were concerned with anything but the exploration of urban form. It took a rebellious young teacher . . . fired by the inspiration of F. L. Wright (his sometime mentor), to turn the tables on thirty years of planners’ neglect.” — David A. Crane, Journal of the American Institute of Planners
Kevin Lynch

The Image of the City

The M.I.T. Press
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England
PREFACE

This book is about the look of cities, and whether this look is of any importance, and whether it can be changed. The urban landscape, among its many roles, is also something to be seen, to be remembered, and to delight in. Giving visual form to the city is a special kind of design problem, and a rather new one at that.

In the course of examining this new problem, the book looks at three American cities: Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles. It suggests a method whereby we might begin to deal with visual form at the urban scale, and offers some first principles of city design.

The work that lies behind this study was done under the direction of Professor Gyorgy Kepes and myself at the Center for Urban and Regional Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It was generously supported over several years by funds from the Rockefeller Foundation. The book itself is being published as one of a series of volumes of the Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, an agency which has grown out of the urban research activities of these two institutions.

As in any intellectual work, the content derives from many sources, difficult to trace. Several research associates contributed directly to the development of this study: David Crane, Bernard
Frieden, William Alonso, Frank Hotchkiss, Richard Dober, Mary Ellen Peters (now Mrs. Alonso). I am very grateful to them all.

One name should be on the title page with my own, if only he would thereby not be made responsible for the shortcomings of the book. That name is Gyorgy Kepes. The detailed development and concrete studies are my own, but the underlying concepts were generated in many exchanges with Professor Kepes. I would be at a loss to disentangle my ideas from his. For me these have been good years of association.

Kevin Lynch

M.I.T.
December, 1959

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