

# Special Places as Instigators of Community Identity in Urban Neighborhoods

*Berlin*

*San Francisco*

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## Research Questions

- How do special places affect urban neighborhood identity?
- How important is neighborhood identity to the creation and successful maintenance of urban neighborhoods?

## What is a special place?

- Any place (public, public-private) where social interaction occurs.
  - Parks
  - Main Street
  - Cafés
  - Bars
  - Book shops
  - Restaurants

## What is the importance?

- Place attachment → Neighborhood involvement
- Building block of cohesive neighborhood units
- Appropriate mix of uses for specific neighborhoods

## The Cities

- Dense urban environments with definitive neighborhoods
- San Francisco → Established, well defined neighborhoods  
Demographically similar
- Berlin → Neighborhood oriented (Kiez)  
Established and forming

## Theoretical Background

- Sense of Community (SOC) Index
  - Membership
  - Influence
  - Reinforcement of Needs
  - Shared Emotional Connection
  - *Sense of Place*
- Participation, Social Capital, Community Development, Social Stability, Maintenance, Safety

## Sense of Place

- Directly facilitates
  - Community involvement in aesthetic maintenance and improvement
  - Emotional connections to physical environment and community that supports it – i.e. Place Attachment
- Motivators of Place Attachment
  - Design Elements
  - Activities
  - Social Interactions

- Current body of research focuses on
  - The implications of SOC
  - Economic and Social programs that can enhance SOC
  - The types of social interactions that lead to SOC
  - The impacts of design on Sense of Place

**There is little research that seeks to examine the effects that particular places and their uses have on Sense of Community or Place**

## Goals

- Determine the specific types of uses and other qualities of built environment that engender emotional place attachment
- Determine levels of place attachment that may exist for residents of specific urban neighborhoods due to specific use types
- Determine the role that these uses play in creating or enhancing a cohesive neighborhood identity

## The Procedure

- Online Questionnaire
  - Locational and Basic Demographic Data
  - Open ended questions:
    - Likes / Dislikes of neighborhood
    - Places (eg. Park, local café, main street...) that are unique to neighborhood and enjoyed by local residents
    - Qualities of places that exist or should exist that make neighborhood memorable
    - Levels of participation or identification with community

## Relevant Data

- Significant number of respondents naming same specific places in same neighborhoods
- Data for each specific place
  - Location
  - Design
  - Physical layout
  - Specific Uses / Activities
  - Neighborhood demographics

## Foreseeable Difficulties

- Online questionnaire precludes those who do not know how to use internet
- Age bias
- Number of respondents – too few/many?
- Language
- Methods of advertisement