**PERCEPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**
*(COMPONENTS OF QUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERENCE)*

A lecture assembled for the course on
**Architecture Design Studio IV**

by Jason E. Charalambides PhD, PE, M.ASCE, AIA, ENV_SP

*(only for educational purposes)*

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**Imagery in Perception of Environmental Quality**

- **A Definition**
  - In ideal terms, cities would be designed to meet the environmental preferences and notions of environmental quality. If images incorporate ideals, the citizens will assess the reality of the built environment they experience against the ideals incorporated through the images.
  - Previous experiences and adaptation levels as well as culture, influence the ways of evaluating the perceived environment.

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Source: Rapoport, Amos: *Human Aspects of Urban Form*, pg. 48
Imagery in Perception of Environmental Quality

- A Definition
  - The perceived environment may also be influenced by the negative aspect of deprivation that individuals or groups may have experienced - areas with greenery, spaciousness, or single story housing may be particularly valued.
  - The aspect of security however may play a much more important role in the perception of the environment, particularly to people who are exposed to an unknown situation.

Source: Rapoport, Amos: Human Aspects of Urban Form, pg. 48

Imagery in Perception of Environmental Quality

- A Definition
  - Urban environments must match the imagery and environmental quality criteria of the intended occupants.
  - Take as an example the notion of city center with respect to the social status of the occupants. In pre-industrial cities, like many European cities, the city center is the area of the elite. Unlike that, in newer cities, the center becomes more of a high density, high crime, and low environmental quality area. Thus the relationship of center and desirability is reversed.

Source: Rapoport, Amos: Human Aspects of Urban Form, pg. 49
Preconceptions

The relative nature of priorities is of great importance in the environmental context and it involves the subjective evaluation of the relevance of various things for satisfaction as well as the costs involved.

As an example we can take the strong preference in the US for single family dwellings. That affects the relative acceptability of various other forms which are evaluated against rural images of space and trees, and social images associated with different housing types, to the extent that political decisions are affected independently of economic realities, the object being to maintain the desired community image.

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Preconceptions

This leads to the conclusion that to the minds of the users, designs that match a set imagery will be perceived as more successful than those designs that meet or surpass the set criteria but do not conform or violate expectations in terms of imagery.
Preconceptions

Different groups within cities select different neighborhoods, leading to differentiation and social stratification within the urban environment. Yet such segregation does not necessarily pertain to imagery only but also to voluntary social grouping.

Nevertheless, an example where the imagery was so strong that it impacted the project of reconstruction is that of post WWII West German cities. It is clear that the concern of preserving old forms prevailed over any possibility of remodeling. Compactness, traditional appearance and street layout were kept. There was more interest in the human interaction that is supported by street markets and small shops over the possibility of spacious living.
A set of standards

Consider the set of preferences among the social classes within the American culture, and how specific details are perceived:
- Upper class people appreciate and respect natural vegetation.
- Middle class prefers clipped, highly manicured vegetation.

Similarly, the suburban settings are set as the first choice for the lower class, as the second by the middle, but are disliked by the upper class.

At the same time, lowered density in such a form of development is of very high importance to the upper class population, of moderate importance to the middle class, but of no importance to the lower status group. There are also major differences in relation to style, materials, fences, and the evaluation of older areas.

There are also differences in how sexes perceive the environment, and in this specific case, the suburban areas. Men tend to appreciate the peace and quiet character of the suburbs whilst women focus on nice neighbors and friendliness.

Source: Rapoport, Amos: Human Aspects of Urban Form, pp. 51-52
The effect of appearances

Environmental evaluation is a matter of overall affective response rather than of a detailed analysis of specific aspects, and it is largely affected by images and ideals. It can, however be clarified by identifying some of the constituent elements.

In the UK, one main constituent is the housing unit appearance,

In the US it was suggested that “practical considerations” were prime, but it is proven that appearances are just as important, only in different ways according to the understanding and interpretation of the components according to various social groups.

The effect of appearances

It is necessary to pinpoint the components which define environmental quality and specify the preference in terms of space.

The simpler one is related to aspects such as pollution (air, water, soil etc), depletion of resources, radiation (of different kinds) and the like. Although the above mentioned biologically hazardous conditions are very easy to evaluate, there is always a partially subjective evaluation applied by various groups.

The more complex evaluation that incorporates a large compilation of subjective constituents, is related to the fuzzy, ill-definable and more variable qualities of the natural and manmade environment which pertain to the sensory criteria of groups of people or individuals. These could be called the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of the environment.

On the latter aspect, there is a general aesthetic factor, which in the case of natural landscapes, seems to be the most important, comprising terms such as colorful, beautiful, natural or primitive; also leaving room for emphasis on the antithesis between rugged and complex on one hand, and delicate and simple on the other.
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Actual preferences and evaluation may be studied in many ways, like observation, studies of migration patterns of groups of people, questionnaires etc, but also in deeper terms of cultural analysis where songs or poetry are analyzed, art, literature or even advertisement.

It should be noted however that the methodology used may affect the results of a study of environmental preferences. It is evident that real environments are judged differently than environments presented verbally.

There are certain subtle differences in stressed aspects in any type of presentation of an environment. In advertisements or even in the naming of locations specific terminology suggests qualities that may be perceived in different ways. It may be vegetation, views, location, features of a housing unit or the site, the environmental atmosphere, recreational facilities or even status of the people of the context.
The effect of appearances

- Subdivisions tend to include terms such as hill, views, crest, heights, cliffs, dales, manours, estates, park, lake and the like, indicating clearly the kinds of “images” that are highly valued.

- The role of vegetation and even more, of trees, clearly generates a positive image of environmental quality. Most desirable residential areas are well treed. There was a plethora of stories of Dutch Elm tree disease, using the customary “before” and “after” set of images to implicitly present the point.

Similarly, positive evaluations of a 110 acre middle income housing project in the US were mainly related to the preservation of “natural systems.”

It is therefore safe to conclude that trees, outdoor space and freedom of choice are very important components of environmental quality.
The specific organization of a city and the behavior of the “culture” within, are the results of the interaction of environmental characteristics, the choice of processes by individuals and groups, and the varying constraints. In any ideal situation, each group of people would have to match their preferences, and the city will consist of a set of areas expressing a social identity, status, and the preferences of various groups.

At given areas, the characteristics of in – and – out immigrants are similar and people tend to move to areas of similar character. The selection of areas to immigrate involves +ve (pull) and –ve (criteria). Affected by filtration (verbal, literal etc) the relative attractiveness of various social and physical characteristics are evaluated.

Given the opportunity, people (and even animals) will select habitat which best matches their needs, preferences, lifestyles and images, whether these be suburbs, old areas, or urban villages; large metropolitan areas or small towns.

Nevertheless, the prospect of acculturation becomes a prime factor in the decision of individuals to migrate. Social aspects (compatriots, coffee shops, clubs etc) play vital role on such decisions.

Different groups select different types of dwelling but they attach varying importance to the presence of relatives and friends, schools, to the dwelling or the neighborhood, to gardens and space; they also handle gardens and front and back differently.

Peoples decisions to be located at any environment depend on matching desires and images with environments, while actual moves depend on differences between presented and perceived opportunities and various constraints.

Source: Rapoport, Amos: Human Aspects of Urban Form, pg. 81
HABITAT SELECTION AND MIGRATION IN RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Choice of location however varies greatly depending on duration and possibilities of adaptation.

A group of people that migrate on a temporary basis may be considered that of college students. The main factors of relocation will be the issues of programs to be followed, school status and financial conditions. Yet, students do not frequently chose to spend a number of years at locations where the environment will be perceived as totally unrelated to their home. They will however spend a year or half a year on an exchange program to a location totally unknown, where all the cultural social environment is different in order to enrich their education and broaden their horizons.

Another group that relocates temporarily are tourists who may visit for any length of time. To them, the choice of temporary relocation is dependent upon imagery and cultural activities. It is a temporary recreational escape from the known environment.

People sharing values and lifestyles surely tend to cluster and select environments that match their priorities. Groups may stress art, music concerts, overseas travel etc (experience oriented) and another may stress outdoor bbq, tv sets, outboard motors etc (material or home oriented). The kinds of artifacts people use spring from their lifestyle. Included are environmental artifacts and products, so that the element of choice involved in lifestyle has environmental consequences.

Four generalized lifestyles that have environmental consequences are proposed:

- Consumption oriented (Central apartment locations)
- Social prestige oriented – related to job and position in the community; location in certain areas of prestige value.
- Family oriented – right environment for children; maximize size of dwelling, yard and other family oriented facilities.
- Community oriented – interaction with others of like values.

Source: Rapoport, Amos: Human Aspects of Urban Form, pp. 82-83.