

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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Francis, Mark

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## Planning in Place: Region, Landscape and Place

Mark Francis

I was struck by the substantial number of region-scaled plans and projects submitted for this year's EDRA/*Places* Awards Program. My first thought when examining these was that our consideration of place research and place design should be limited to individual places designed at a human scale. Yet there were a number of intriguing and even compelling entries that spoke to the regional landscape as a place.

We have known for some time that regional thinking is important in environmental design. The work of Michael Hough (*Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*, 1992), Ian McHarg (*Design with Nature*, 1969), Kevin Lynch (*Managing the Sense of a Region*, 1976) and Gary Snyder (*A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics and Watersheds*, 1996) all remind us that place making at the scale of the region or watershed is critical.

Nevertheless, this year's bumper crop of large-scale planning submissions raised a dilemma for the jury, which was charged with identifying excellence in place research and place design. How should we treat them? As design? As research? Or invent a new category of plans? There were simply too many, and they were of too good a quality, to ignore. Our concern turned to determining the effectiveness of the relationship of the plans to research and design.

Examples of large-scale plans or studies of cities or entire regions submitted included a vernacular study of an Alpine valley, a pattern book for a well-known New Urbanist community and a city design for a Middle East oil company town. In addition, there were a number of entries that organized research information in a way that could be used for regional thinking or planning. These included design and planning responses to disasters such as floods in North Dakota and earthquakes in California, a citywide "Experiment in Democratic Action" for Buffalo, and a forty-year update of research on visual forms of communities completed since Kevin Lynch's seminal *Image of the City* study was published in 1960. One project even used the entire American West as its

study area, documenting the vernacular landscape from a J. B. Jackson perspective.

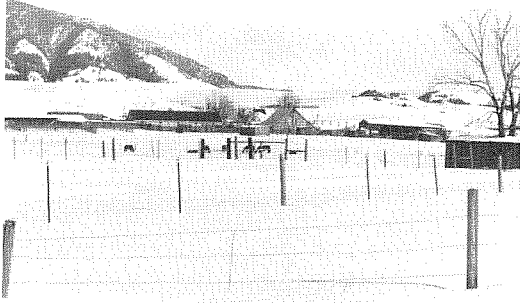
A number of these entries made effective links to the research and design processes, utilizing innovative methods of studying or designing regional landscapes. For example, one study assessed people's sense of rural place using a combination of techniques including observation, interviews, mapping and detailed case studies. Another used emerging electronic technologies such as web sites as a participatory tool for a "Community Vision Survey" for a town in New Jersey. Still another used focus groups, on-site surveys and in-depth interviews with more than 5,000 stakeholders to examine the relationship between communities and the Chicago River along a 150-mile-long corridor stretching from Lake Forest to Lake Calumet. Color simulations were used in another visual assessment study, which was used to develop a management plan for the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

One of the design winners, the Thames Landscape Strategy, was particularly successful in organizing research into actions useful for place management, planning and design. The strategy established a new form of regional thinking and design for a twenty-nine-mile-long corridor of the Thames River between Hampton and Kew in southwest London, establishing a new framework for countless public and private research and design initiatives.

Another design winner, Living Water Park, located along the Fu River in Chengdu China, was a more direct case of generating local form from regional analysis, incorporating regional landscape patterns into the site design for a waterfront park. Chengdu's modernization program included the construction of a new sewage treatment plant and several parks along the reclaimed rivers; this park is a wonderful example of integrating social and natural systems, too often separated in ecological planning today.

Taken together, this work represents an emerging and impressive body of place-based design and research at the citywide or regional scale. These projects show clearly that designers and researchers are proactively

## A Rural Way of Knowing



How do people learn about the landscape in which they live, and how does that understanding influence their approach to caring for that landscape? This study used a range of research approaches to learn how third- to fifth-generation ranchers in rural Gallatin County, Montana, gathered and applied knowledge about their environment.

The project, by Montana State University architecture professor Máire O'Neill, found that the most prevalent place-related perceptions were shaped by haptic experience (tactile and motion related) and social narrative. Knowledge gained through visual, spatial understanding seemed to play a small role in people's understanding of the locality.

Essentially, the ranchers understood the natural and built landscape through physical labor and local folklore. The demands of working on and moving over the terrain made them acutely aware of its character; stories about family history, local events and ranching practice—accumulated over generations of experience—helped them understand their place on the land.

O'Neill suggests that designers who understand these modes of perception and learning can better address the concerns people have when faced with planning for new development. She also notes, however, that this information is most useful in situations where the affected population is not displaced by new development.

This research has urgency in Gallatin County, where a quarter of the agricultural land has been subdivided in the past twenty years. According to Derek Strahn, a preservation official in Bozeman, it sheds light on "methods of adaptation and cultural survival, factors motivating important decisions to subdivide or preserve traditional farmlands, and the reciprocal nature between cultural and environmental change."

Project: People, Memory and Haptic Experience: A Rural Way of Knowing

Researcher: Máire O'Neill, Montana State University



Upper left: McIlhattan farmstead, settled before 1868 on Churn Creek and the East Gallatin River

Upper right: Farmhouse from 1890, added onto seven times, with dairy barn and new machine shed.

Above: The old barn, still used for harnessing draft horse teams, with hay sled after morning feeding.

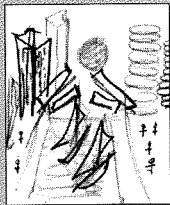
Photos: Máire O'Neill

engaged in their regions, providing fresh insights into place making that may in fact add up to a cohesive system of designed and natural places.

These landscape-scale plans and studies provide a useful lesson for place making. They show that planning, when done well, can inform both research and design. While not all planning involves fresh or rigorous research, most that results in successful place

making does. Good planning, like good research and good design, requires rigors of thought, method and execution. Similarly, good planning demands an understanding of place and design. Planning in place is not only about the making of future visions, it involves the construction of attitudes, processes and understandings that enable design actions. Good planning can be good design.

## People and the River

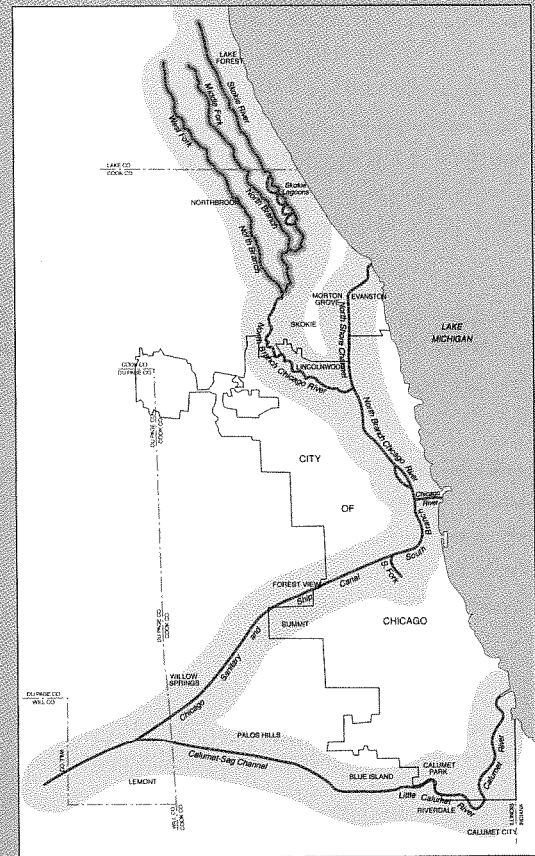


The 150-mile Chicago River corridor offers a transect of metropolitan Chicago—from tony suburbs to gritting working-class neighborhoods, from pristine forest preserves to asphalt hardscapes, from vibrant business districts to dying industrial areas, from solid ethnic communities to multicultural neighborhoods.

Planners from the National Park Service and from Friends of the Chicago River, a local advocacy group, envisioned the river as a thread that could sew this diverse region together, and commissioned a study of the way various groups of people used, perceived and valued the river. The study team, led by Paul Gobster and Lynne M. Westphal of the U.S. Forest Service, conducted focus groups, interviews and surveys and collaborated with similar research being undertaken by others.

The findings of these diverse studies converged on a core set of issues and priorities that were held in common by various groups of people in various places—improve water quality, increase access, provide for appropriate recreational development, enhance visual and natural environments and increase public safety.

The findings resulted in specific implications for planning and management. The study demonstrated, for example, that although many river planning efforts aim at regional-scale initiatives like trail networks, most residents relate to the river through discrete places with individual personalities, problems and solutions. This finding reinforced the idea that a plan for the river should focus on locally defined and driven improvements.



Map of the Chicago River and its tributaries  
Courtesy U.S. Forest Service

### PEOPLE AND THE RIVER



Project: **People and the River, Perception and Use of Chicago Waterways for Recreation**

Principal Investigators and Volume Editors:  
**Paul H. Gobster, Lynne M. Westphal,**  
USDA National Forest Service

Contributors: **Charles Nilon, Scott Huckstep,** University of Missouri—Columbia; **Dan Stolze,** Metro Chicago Information Center; **Tingwei Zhang,** University of Illinois—Chicago; **Joan M. O'Shaughnessy,** Chicago Botanic Garden.

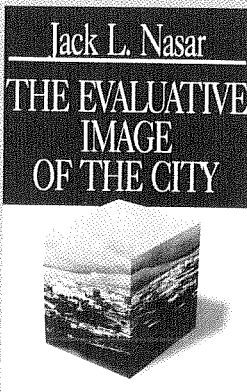
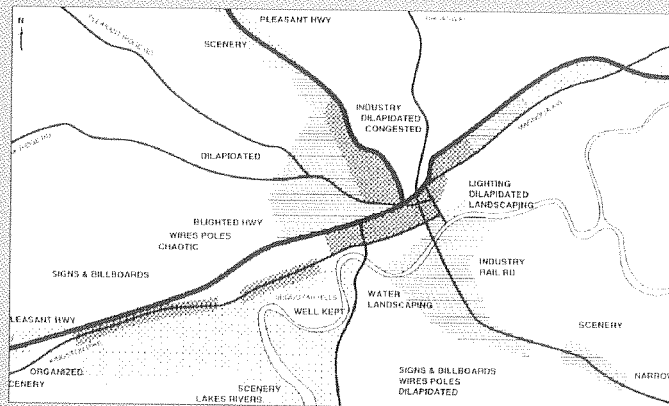
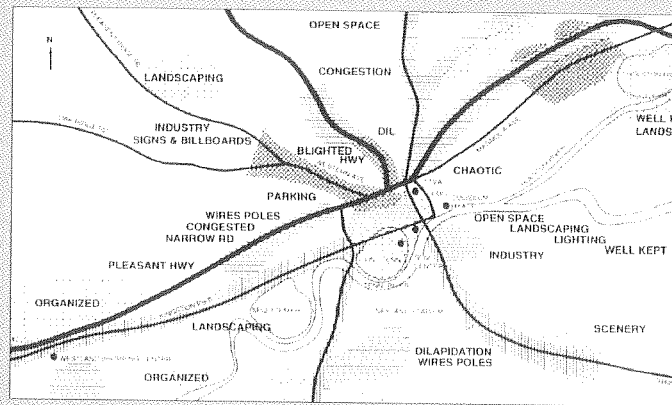
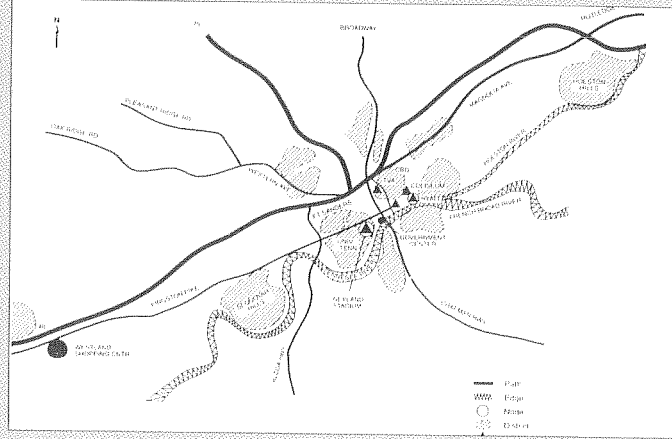
Chicago Rivers Demonstration Project:  
**Wink Hastings,** Project Director,  
National Park Service



# The Evaluative Image of the City

In 1960, Kevin Lynch wrote *The Image of the City*, which transformed the way design professionals and social scientists dealt with urban form and design. *The Evaluative Image of the City*, by Jack Nasar, follows on that work, introducing the concept of the "evaluative image," or "how the public evaluates the cityscape and what meanings they see in it." Nasar discusses two studies he directed of how people value elements of the city landscape, reviews similar projects elsewhere and explores how this evaluative image can be used to direct city design policy.

Nasar's team sampled 160 residents and 120 visitors at random in Knoxville, and interviewed 60 residents and 60 visitors in Chattanooga. Interviewers asked each person to identify areas they liked and disliked visually, and to give their reasons. The findings of each interview were translated to a map, and the maps were overlaid to create composite findings of likes, dislikes and reasons. Nasar suggests how the findings of such studies might influence city appearance policies. He also frames future research questions: How do meanings vary with time, or across cities with different physical and population characteristics? Can communities use the method to track the impact of design policies or development strategies?



*The Evaluative Image of the City*  
Jack Nasar  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998

Top: Physical form of Knoxville

Center: Evaluative map of Knoxville from verbal descriptions by residents.

Bottom: Evaluative map of Knoxville from verbal descriptions by visitors.

Graphics: David Miller