

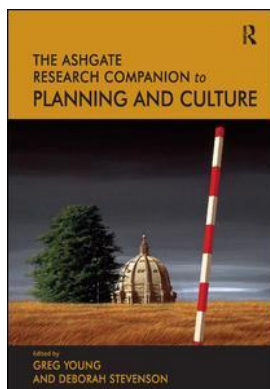
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## **The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture**

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### **Public Space and Diversity: Distributive, Procedural and Interactional Justice for Parks**

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# PART 5

## Cultural Practices

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# Preface to Part 5

Deborah Stevenson

The chapters in this Part of the book are concerned what are amongst the most critical challenges facing contemporary cities and urban planning – how to support, understand and manage the cultural practices of urban populations. At stake is the creation of environments where different social groups can live, work, mingle, and express their cultures and values. Also important is the equitable distribution of urban resources. When contemplating such issues, attention frequently turns to public space because this is where the texture, complexity and diversity of urban life is most readily revealed. And so it is with the chapters here, which in differing ways acknowledge that the quality, use and presence of urban public space are central to the way in which people experience and relate to the city as resident or visitor, and whether encountering it in the context of work, education or leisure (to name but three). Public space is also linked to the development and maintenance of civic culture. Parks, footpaths, beaches, the verges of rivers and waterways are all important in this respect, as are roads and thoroughfares – the sites of intersection, movement and transportation.

What is understood as public space also embraces publicly funded institutions, including museums, libraries and galleries, and town halls and civic centres, as well as leisure spaces, such as swimming pools. These are the places that are owned collectively by residents and managed by local councils, state or national governments and which are entwined with ideas of citizenship and urban culture. Too often, however, far from seeking to encounter diversity in public space, people actively try to avoid it and, increasingly, urban policy and planning are used to support this avoidance. Different social groups inhabit different areas of the city for work, home and leisure; they trace different paths through cityspace often in an effort to avoid encountering the ‘other’. This is a city of watchfulness and suspicion comprised of enclaves of homogeneity where the mingling with strangers is eschewed. For many contemporary city dwellers, therefore, the urban environment is one that is controlled, homogeneous and predictable – a space of managed diversity.

In the first chapter in this Part of the book, Setha Low examines the use, planning and policing of public space in order to gain an understanding of urban diversity and its consequences for social equity. She argues that in the United States in particular, as a result of economic restructuring and the hegemony of neoliberal urban policies, cities have become highly segregated with people living in different parts of the city having inequitable access to a range of services and opportunities. Public space has also been transformed because of the withdrawal of the state from its provision and maintenance. The result is the deprivation of public space in many poorer areas and its privatization

and subsidy in others. With reference to two case studies, Low suggests that in order to promote cultural diversity, social inclusion and increased equity what is needed is an expanded concept of social justice grounded in a detailed understanding of how public space is used and regarded by locals and visitors. Also important to her analysis is to probe the tensions that have emerged between the contradictory forces of globalization and 'venacularization', which is the inscribing of culture and meaning on local landscapes in the context of global flows of labour and capital.

Public space, its uses and fragility are also central themes in the chapter by Ronan Paddison who regards it as being central to the structures of feeling which residents have towards the city, which means that changes in public space have considerable consequences for the way in which people relate to their city. He argues that the increased privatization of urban space has affected the ways in which public space is produced, reproduced and used and explores the consequences of such changes to public space. The chapter focuses on considering the repercussions of two practices of 'aesthetic intervention' which have become commonplace in cities in the global North and, increasingly, in the global South – the use of iconic architecture and public art. He suggests, that contrary to what is officially endorsed or expected, the use of space and the consumption and interpretation of art and architecture can be sources of resistance, meaning and the assertion of the local.

Picking up on some of the issues probed by Low and Paddison, Torill Nyseth's chapter examines city imaging and the place identity as central elements of pervasive global competitions between cities to attract capital and people. Nyseth draws a nuanced distinction between three different strategies of place promotion – place marketing, place branding and place reinvention – suggesting that where place marketing treats place as a commodity and place branding is focused on management and place-making, place reinvention captures the complexity of place in a way that engages with its symbolic and imaginative dimensions. Nyseth explores these themes and distinctions with reference to Norwegian examples, suggesting that place reinvention undertaken in response to economic and industrial change can involve the renegotiation of local identity and a celebration of local cultures. It can be the result of both planning as well as of serendipity.

Concluding this Part of the book is a 'case study window' by John Montgomery which examines the trend of establishing cultural quarters as part of city imaging and regeneration strategies. Montgomery argues that successful cities are those with a strong place identity and a rich cultural life and where there is a commitment to developing the 'creative economy', and in this regard he argues that a well designed and managed cultural precinct or 'quarter' can be a useful element. He suggests that a thriving cultural quarter will have three key intersecting features – activity (use, venues, events, workshops), built form (public space, architecture and buildings, urban design) and meaning (gathering spaces, place identity and its markers, heritage). He then goes on to illustrate how these elements in different combinations have been pivotal to the success of the cultural quarters in Dublin, Manchester and Sheffield.

Themes of equity, diversity, place meaning and identity recur in this section of the book. Although differing in their concerns and emphases, the chapters all contribute to an engaged and probing understanding not only of the diversity and complexity of urban cultural practices but also of their significant spatial dimensions and embeddedness. Public space, its quality and accessibility, is important in this context because it is in public space in all its configurations that local cultures and democracy can be shaped, expressed and affirmed.

# Public Space and Diversity: Distributive, Procedural and Interactional Justice for Parks

Setha Low

## **Introduction: Neoliberal Changes in New York City Public Space**

Public space offers an empirical means for thinking about diversity in the creation of a more just city (Fainstein 2000, Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005). It is here that race, class, gender, age, sexual preference, ethnicity and ability differences are experienced and negotiated in a safe forum for political action, communication and democratic practice (Low 2000, Young 2001). Difficulties encountered in defining and studying what constitutes an equitable distribution of public space necessitate employing a broader framework of justice to utilize the lessons learned from planning and design practice and to encourage the use of public spaces for democratic practices (Fincher and Iveson 2008, Low and Smith 2006, Mitchell 2003).

In the United States, particularly in New York, there have been major transformations in public space due to neoliberal urban policies and economic restructuring. First, there are more immigrants and ambulatory vendors using public spaces due to increased immigration and expansion of the informal economy sector. Second, there is greater heterogeneity in the city due to the global relocations of labour and capital, while at the same time there is more social segregation in neighbourhoods. Third, even with increased urban heterogeneity, individuals may not have an opportunity to interact face to face because the economics and politics of home ownership and rental restrictions produce ghettos for the poor and secured communities for the wealthy. Fourth, consequently there are escalating tensions between the processes of globalization and vernacularization—particularly in the ways in which people reinscribe culture and meaning on the local landscape (vernacularization) while also participating in global flows of capital and labour (globalization). (See also Newman and Thornley, and Searle, Chapters 4, and 8, this volume.) Fifth, economic restructuring and globalization create a ‘dual city’ with social and economic disparities in economic

opportunity, goods and services available to people residing in different sectors of the metropolitan region. And finally, concurrently the city and state have less money for the operation and maintenance of public spaces and only those that are subsidized by private conservancies and individuals continue to prosper, while playgrounds and parks in poorer and marginal neighbourhoods suffer from neglect.

New York has responded to these changes in a number of ways. A new structure of feeling and a fear of others has emerged which is symbolized by City Hall Park in New York City to the extent that it is now gated off with a 'do not enter' sign. Parks and plazas are being privatized and run by corporate managers so that places like Herald Square in front of Macy's Department Store on 34th Street is now surrounded by a high fence with a gate. Rules and regulations are listed including a bronze sign that reads 'Do not sit' next to a sitting wall designed for just this purpose. Herald Square is closed at 6:00 pm each night so that the teenagers and young adults, who used to hang out there, are kept out. Video surveillance cameras are also trained on all publically available spaces. For example, 265 surveillance cameras focus on Union Square, a very popular small park at 14th Street. Post 9/11 there has also been increased policing and zero tolerance arrests. And there are new historic preservation practices in parks and other public spaces that reinsert elite class values into the landscape (Kayden 2000, Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005, Shepard and Smithsimon 2011).

Access and use of these public spaces has suffered accordingly. People of colour avoid policed and secured squares, thus, there is an absence of young men of colour in these spaces (Fiske 1998). Low-income individuals read the symbolic cues in privatized spaces that may have long lists of rules, physical deterrents on benches to limit resting or ornate landscape features that make these users uncomfortable and thus they avoid these newly restrictive landscapes. Middle-class individuals and tourists are happier with highly controlled and managed public spaces, while teenagers avoid these same places because of their long lists of rules and regulations. Homeless individuals are locked out of gated public spaces at night so they have no place to stay. Individuals who are perceived as 'Middle-Eastern' or 'Arab' in appearance worry about police profiling and surveillance cameras and are stopped for questioning making them more hesitant to spend time there (Miller 2007, Shepard and Smithsimon 2011). Immigrant vendors are having a difficult time because of both the new regulations and the degree of policing and surveillance (Chesluk 2008, Miller 2007).

These dramatic changes started over 20 years ago, but accelerated during the post-9/11 years as part of the growth of neoliberalism characterized by liberal governance, entrepreneurship and placing responsibility for social reproduction on the individual and local community (Harvey 2005). In the United States, neoliberalism is accompanied by homeland security practices, such as surveillance, policing and restrictive urban design, which is creating a new form of civil society called civil militancy in that it protects the home and the homeland, but abandons public space and the public sphere (Ruben and Maskovsky 2008). It celebrates the private city. The new structure of feeling based on fear mongering, war and terrorism underlies these changes (Sorkin 2008). Thus in this historically and politically fraught moment, public space in the United States has become even more important for marginalized groups and for assuring the continuance of democratic practices and urban social justice.

Of course these changes have not occurred only in the United States. Similar changes have been observed in public spaces throughout the world including in South Africa

(Banks 2011), Latin America (Low 2000), Australia (Fincher and Iveson 2008), Canada (Blomley 2004) and many Western European countries (see Low 1999 for various cases). (See also Paddison, Chapter 18, this volume.) In Costa Rica, where I had previously completed a 15-year study of plazas (Low 2000), similar public space changes were observed, but handled in a different manner. When municipal planners decided that Parque Central, the original plaza mayor – the main square – of downtown San Jose, the capital city of Costa Rica, should become a space that would attract middle-class US tourists and residents, they closed it down, remodelled, and then policed it upon its reopening so that the lower-class users, shoeshine men and pensioners could not reoccupy their places. The new design created a more barren space where homeless or men from the countryside could not sleep because of small or curved benches, and cut down most of the shade trees that had made the plaza comfortable. All of the original users were forced to relocate to less desirable spots during the renovation, and subsequently the police kept them from re-entering. As this example illustrates, the details of how public space is transformed to become less diverse are specific to each context and worth exploring comparatively, however, in this paper I focus on ethnographic cases drawn from urban parks in the northeastern United States.

## The Just City: Distributional, Procedural and Interactional Justice

With the corresponding changes in public space due to neoliberalism and a climate of fear, it is necessary that social scientists, managers, planners and designers develop clearer arguments about the substantive basis by which these changes can be considered unjust. Two models have been suggested: the first is Susan Fainstein's (2004) model of the just city based on Lefebvre's (1991) 'right to the city' and Nussbaum's (2000) concept of capabilities. Rather than arguing for diversity as the principle goal of urban planning, Fainstein (2004) focuses on the inevitable trade-offs among notions of equity and diversity as well as sustainability and growth. The strength of her argument is that it moves urban planning from a normative to a utopian framework, and asserts that we should focus on under 'what conditions can conscious human activity produce a better city for all citizens' (Fainstein 2005: 121).

A second model is offered by Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson (2008) on the role of planning in the struggle for spatial justice in the city. They assert 'the need for planning frameworks to take adequate account of *diversity* of cities, by identifying and working with the many publics which inhabit them' and thus agree with the goals of Fainstein (2005), Dear (2000) and Campbell (2006). But they proceed by defining the three kinds of intersecting diversities that must be addressed including differences in wealth, status and hybridity, that is, the range of possible identities available to any one group. This thoughtful analysis of difference forms the framework for their three goals for socially just planning: 1) redistribution of space, services and facilities, 2) recognition of the limitations of redistribution in the valuing of cultural differences and contribution, and 3) encounter of people and identity group. Their approach argues for a more relational approach to diversity (Fincher and Iveson 2008).



My work on social justice derives from ethnographic research on urban parks, plazas and gated communities (Low 2003, Low and Smith 2006, Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005), the just city concept as proposed by Fainstein (2005), and my critique of Fainstein's contention that diversity should not be at the centre of a social justice analysis of public space. A further criticism of Fainstein's proposal, however, is that she utilizes too narrow a definition of justice such that her utopian aims are only partially fulfilled. Also, like Fincher and Iveson (2008), but developed from the social psychological and industrial-organizational literature, I argue that three dimensions of justice – distributive, procedural and interactional – are essential to address the multiple kinds of perceived injustice.

In the urban planning literature of the United States and more recently Western Europe, advocating for a just city was based solely on distributive justice. Distributive justice refers to questions of how the wealth, rewards, benefits and burdens of society should be distributed to achieve an economically just city. The discussion revolves around whether the economic benefits and burdens should accrue to individuals equally, according to need, according to merit, or to those who are the least well off (Lefkowitz 2003, Rawls 1971). 'Equity theory argues that fairness means that people's rewards should be proportional to their contributions' (Tyler 2000: 118) in the hopes that by making fair allocations fewer conflicts will arise.

In terms of public space, distributive justice based on equity would ensure that public space was available to all people and that everyone would have some degree of access. Of course by distributive justice standards, New York is not a just city in that many poorer and low-income neighbourhoods have no public space at all, and the spaces that exist are inadequate for local needs or privatized and therefore expensive to use. While at the same time, wealthier parts of the city have a broad range of public space available as well as full access and the financial resources to enter more privatized locations.

Even if New York City could distribute public space more fairly, a distributive justice model in and of itself would not create the just city, in that there are other issues of citizenship related to fairness. Specifically, there are two additional kinds of justice that must be considered: procedural and interactional.

The term 'procedural justice' refers to the way that the processes of negotiation and decision making influence perceived fairness by individuals. Psychologists have found that distributional outcomes are not the only relevant issue when determining fairness (Tyler and Blader 2003). The way that a person is treated is equally important. While early research on social justice supported the findings that people felt most satisfied when outcomes were distributed fairly, subsequent research found that distributive justice outcomes were often biased, and that the favourability of an outcome is less crucial when the underlying allocation process is perceived as fair (Cropanzano and Randall 1993, Tyler and Blader 2003).

An example of procedural justice is the US legal system and the formal procedures related to decision-making processes in court settings (Thibaut and Walker 1975). If a person perceives the legal system and its procedures as fair, then the complainant is more willing to accept the outcome regardless of whether it is the outcome initially desired. The case of Prospect Park, a large urban park in Brooklyn, New York, offers a public space illustration. Frederick Law Olmsted had designed Prospect Park in 1867–73 to resemble an English landscape garden using large-scale earth moving techniques to

form so called 'natural features' such as the pond and wetlands area that over time had deteriorated due to poor park maintenance and neglect. The administrator of the park applied for funding to restore this area without consultation with some local residents. There are two neighbourhoods surrounding the park, one populated by mostly African Americans and Caribbean Americans in Crown Heights, and one populated by mostly White professionals and Hispanics in Park Slope. Snow fences (light heavy wooden fences used to mark locations that should not be snow ploughed or damaged under snowy conditions) were put up by the park managers to allow for an ecological reconstruction of this Olmsted-designed water feature, and were not a problem for the Park Slope residents. But in our interviews with residents of Crown Heights we found that these snow fences were perceived as a way for the park managers to keep 'Black' people out of the 'White' part of the park. This sense of injustice was created by the lack of procedural justice for Crown Heights residents – they were not consulted or informed before this reconstruction project started, while Park Slope residents, many of whom were members of the Prospect Park Conservancy, participated in the decision making. Not including Crown Heights residents in the process produced charges of racism even though the fences kept everyone out. In other words, from a distributive point of view, no one could use these spaces while they were being reconstructed, but the difference in the procedure by which the project was communicated and decided influenced the reaction of residents in both neighbourhoods.

The concept of interactional justice is about the quality of interpersonal interaction in a specific situation or place. Psychologists find that to a large extent, individuals make justice appraisals based on the quality of interactional treatment they receive (Cropanzano and Randall 1993). Attributes of interactional fairness include truthfulness, respect, propriety and justification (Bies and Moag 1986). In terms of public space, interactional justice is reflected in whether people are being treated in a discriminatory way, or whether they are targets of harassment, insults, or other rude behaviour. In the case of Union Square, a square in the middle of New York City, young men of colour and people who look Middle Eastern or 'Arab' by US phenotypic stereotypes are followed by the police, spoken to rudely and asked inappropriate questions. It creates a hostile environment for them so they often avoid the place. Similarly, teenagers in public markets and in semi-public malls are often followed by private guards and asked whether they intend to buy anything. This pattern also influences their desire to use the malls as public space, even when these are sometimes the only spaces in the suburbs available for them to hang out, meet their friends, go to a movie or go out to eat.

If we want to talk about fairness in public space, we need to consider all three of these types of justice and ask the following questions:

- Distributive justice – Is there equal public space for everyone? Is there a fair allocation of public space resources?
- Procedural justice – Is there a way to gain access to public space? Is there a fair system for applying to use the park grounds for games or picnics? Can all people apply for these rights? Do park managers consult equally with diverse residents before deciding on a plan of action? Are park managers sure that all residents understand the reason for any particular action, especially those that restrict the use of park resources?

- Interactional justice – Does the public space allow for all individuals to interact safely? What about women interacting with men? Can children interact with everyone freely? Can teenagers? Can young men of colour? Are people treating each other in a way that promotes a sense of citizenship, equality and social justice?

## **An Ethnographic Approach to the Study of Social Justice and Diversity**

One way to work towards this expanded concept of social justice, is to collect better information about how public space is being used and thought about by local residents and visitors with diverse ethnic, class, age, ability, racial and gender identities. (See also Watson, Chapter 1, this volume). William H. Whyte (1980) set out to find out why some New York City public spaces were successes, filled with people and activities, while others were empty, cold and unused. After seven years of filming small parks and plazas in the city, he developed 'his rules for small urban spaces' based on what he had observed. He found that only a few plazas in New York City were attracting daily users and saw this decline as a threat to urban civility. Instead he began to advocate for viable places where people could meet, relax and mix in the city. His analysis of those spaces that provided a welcoming and lively environment became the basis of his famous rules of how to make small urban spaces work. And these rules were used by the New York City planning department to transform the public spaces in the city.

The Public Space Research Group, in response to the problems that we have observed in larger parks, has expanded Whyte's initial ideas and developed a series of principles that encourage, support and maintain cultural diversity. They include some planning guidelines that are similar to Whyte's rules for small urban spaces that promote their social viability, but in this case, we call them 'lessons learned' based on our ethnographic fieldwork, and suggest that their application will promote and maintain cultural diversity. The lessons from our studies are not applicable in all situations, but are meant as guidelines for park planning, management and design. They can be summarized in the following six statements and examples.

First, if people are not represented in urban parks, historic national sites and monuments, and more importantly if their histories are erased, they will not use the park. For example, one of the reasons that African Americans do not visit Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia is that their institutions and public spaces were torn down with the building of the colonial park and are not marked in the contemporary site.

Second, access is as much about economics and cultural patterns of park use as it is about circulation and transportation, thus income and visitation patterns must be taken into consideration when providing access for all social groups. An illustration is the explanation of why poor African Americans living in Jersey City just 400 yards from the Ellis Island Museum do not visit even though they say they would like to: the cost of the ferry ride (\$10 per person). This high fare is complicated by the fact that most family activities include the extended family of more than ten people, so that the cost

and pattern of use together make it financially impossible for a low-income family to visit, even when there is no entrance fee.

Third, the social interaction of diverse groups can be maintained and enhanced by providing safe, spatially adequate 'territories' for everyone within the larger space of the overall site. Prospect Park, a culturally and socially diverse New York City park is successful in maintaining its diversity because there is adequate room for a variety of activities and groups from open playing fields for soccer and Frisbee as well as baseball diamonds, picnic areas, secluded groves for lovers, semi-secluded areas for Muslim mothers and children who like to stay away from men, and a loop road for walkers, runners, bicycle-riders and roller-bladers where everyone can mix.

Fourth, accommodating the differences in the ways social class and ethnic groups use and value public sites is essential to making decisions that sustain cultural and social diversity. For example, being aware of different user values – from flower lovers, family-focused activities, naturalists and bird-watchers – allows park managers to accommodate all users in their decision-making process and provide for each.

Fifth, contemporary historic preservation should not concentrate on restoring the scenic features without also restoring the facilities and diversions that attract people to the park. The case of Central Park's restoration of Olmsted's vision illustrates how elements of the park such as the grounds and bandstand can be restored without the social programmes Olmsted intended. In Prospect Park the boathouse no longer has boats and food is no long sold in the places where it used to be. So part of the historic vision of what it would mean to recreate a vibrant social park is eliminated. Unfortunately only restoring the historic design elements and reconstructing a classic turn-of-the-century park is seen as elite and exclusionary by some groups of people who do not share this historic vision, but look to parks for the provision of outdoor activities and family programming.

Sixth, symbolic ways of communicating cultural meaning are an important dimension of place attachment that can be fostered to promote cultural diversity. For example, playing salsa music every Saturday night in the summer at Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx has encouraged Latino immigrants and local Spanish-speaking residents to enjoy the space and claim it as their own.

These principles for promoting and sustaining cultural diversity in urban parks and heritage sites are just a beginning. More research is required to understand the importance and difficulties of maintaining a vibrant public space. (See also, Ashworth, Chapter 11, this volume.) But at the very least, they demonstrate how diversity can be an essential component of evaluating the just city. In the remainder of this chapter I illustrate how our ethnographic approach uncovered distributive, procedural and interactional injustice in two National Park Service parks and heritage sites that the Public Space Research Group studied.

## **Independence National Historical Park**

In 1994, Independence National Historical Park began developing a general management plan that would set forth a basic management philosophy and provide strategies for addressing issues and objectives over the next 10 to 15-year period. The

planning process included extensive public participation including a series of public meetings, televised town meetings, community tours and planning workshops. As part of this community outreach effort, the park wanted to work cooperatively with local communities to find ways to interpret their diverse cultural heritages within the park's portrayal of the American experience. This study was designed to provide a general overview of park-associated cultural groups, including an analysis of their concerns and the identification of cultural and natural resources used by and/or culturally meaningful to the various groups.

Park-associated groups including African Americans, Jewish Americans, and Italian Americans, whose recent ancestors previously lived in the general area, were identified as the initial groups for contact. These groups were selected because the area has had special importance for them. Other cultural groups such as Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans were included because they were identified as rapidly growing communities who use the park grounds for ceremonial and recreational purposes, and thus would be affected by the proposed changes to Independence National Historical Park.

Four local neighbourhoods were selected for study: Southwark for African Americans, Little Saigon for Asian Americans, the Italian Market area for Italian Americans and Norris Square for Hispanic Americans based on the following criteria: 1) they were within walking distance from the park (excluding Norris Square); 2) they had visible spatial and social integrity; and 3) there were culturally-targeted stores, restaurants, religious organizations and social services available to residents, reinforcing their cultural identity. We selected the Vietnamese American community to represent the Asian American cultural group because of its proximity to the park, and its recent population growth.

A number of methods were selected from the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedure (REAP) methodology to generate data from diverse sources that could then be integrated to provide a comprehensive analysis of the site. Behavioural maps recorded people and their activities located in the park throughout the day and early evenings on weekdays and weekends. Transect walks recorded what identified community consultants described and commented upon during guided walks across the site. Individual interviews based on the study questions were completed in Spanish, English or Vietnamese. Expert interviews were collected from individuals such as religious leaders, local historians, historic preservation specialists and tour guides identified as having special expertise to comment on the cultural significance of Independence National Historical Park. Focus groups were set up with major religious institutions in the neighbourhoods – churches and synagogues – as well as with active community organizations. Historical and archival work accompanied all phases of the study, and newspaper clippings, articles in local magazines and other media-generated materials were collected. The data were then organized by coding all responses from the interviews, and then analysed for content by cultural/ethnic group and study question.

From the findings we learned that African Americans are the most concerned about their lack of cultural representation in the park's colonial history, that Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are less directly concerned but would like to see their stories integrated as part of the American experience, while Italian Americans and Jewish Americans are at best ambivalent about presenting themselves as distinct from other Americans. Three of the cultural groups, African Americans, Hispanic Americans and

Jewish Americans, mentioned places they would like to see commemorated or markers they would like to see installed to bring attention to their cultural presence within the park boundaries. And many of the cultural groups – particularly the Hispanic Americans, the African Americans and the Asian Americans – were anxious to have more programming for children and activities for families. The Hispanic Americans were particularly interested in the recreational potential of the park, and their sentiments were echoed by at least a few consultants in each of the other cultural groups.

Overall, there are distinct messages from each cultural group, as well as general preferences that relate to the majority of the groups. They include: 1) most of these local residents do not use the park except to take visitors, and although many have fond memories of the past some now find the park unsafe; 2) most cultural groups feel that the park's meaning is related to the struggle for freedom and relate this history to their own histories; 3) some cultural groups have appropriated the symbol of the Liberty Bell and given it their own cultural meanings; 4) many cultural groups feel excluded from the park because of the lack of cultural representation and identification; and 5) most of the cultural groups would like more participation in the park.

The case study of Independence National Historical Park demonstrates that cultural representation of cultural groups is critical to their use of and relationship to the park. The erasure of history documented for the African American and Jewish American communities, and the exclusion of the Hispanic American and Vietnamese American communities through monolingual programmes and signage illuminates how cultural/ethnic groups respond to the cues and affordances of the physical and social environment. If we want culturally diverse groups to participate in designed public spaces, then it is the responsibility of the designers and planners, as well as the federal, state and municipal governments, to take seriously the words of these consultants: 'Design places that erase our history, and/or create places that exclude us in subtle ways, we will not come.' Cultural representation in urban space is material evidence of its history and local politics of exclusion. Urban parks provide social and environmental mnemonics that communicate who should be there, and historical buildings and places, markers and monuments set the stage for human behaviour.

This also provides evidence of how planning and design practices of historic preservation can disrupt a local community's sense of place attachment and disturb expressions of cultural identity for local, ethnic populations. New ethnic and immigrant groups can be excluded because of a lack of sensitivity to cultural barriers such as an inability to read or speak English, non-verbal cues of formal furnishings and dress, as well as signs of cultural representation. Understanding the intimate relationship between ethnic histories, cultural representation and park use is critical to successful design and planning in any culturally diverse context.

## **Jacob Riis Park: Conflicts in the Use of a Historical Landscape**

Jacob Riis Park is a beach with a boardwalk and playground and concession facilities located in Gateway National Recreation Area in southwestern Queens. The park is named for Jacob Riis, a late nineteenth-century reform figure famous for his photographic documentation of life among immigrant children in the Lower East Side slums of New

York. The National Park Service inherited Jacob Riis Park from the New York City Parks Department in 1974 to be incorporated within Gateway National Recreation Area. The National Park Service has made some improvements, but deterioration rather than upkeep is the dominant note. Part of the problem with park maintenance is the difficulty of obtaining funds and federal support because there is no political constituency for urban parks at the national level. Further the majority of new park users are recent immigrants who do not necessarily speak English or have the citizenship status or knowledge to demand facilities or services. Even more problematic for the National Park Service is that the new users' recreational and social needs do not fit the historical landscape design of the park. Because of park deterioration, lack of funding for new facilities, and changing visitor use patterns, attendance fell off sharply during the 1990s.

The Public Space Research Group was asked to conduct a Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedure (REAP) study at Riis Park for the National Park Service as part of an effort to understand this decline in park use. Specifically, park managers wanted to know more about their new immigrant users and how to meet their social, recreational and cultural needs. Our goal was to find ways to enhance their park experience with an idea to increasing the number of users and accommodating their activities within their limited budget and historic landscape constraints.

At Riis Park, the boardwalk, the bathhouse and other buildings along the boardwalk, the parking lot and the landscaped grounds constitute the Jacob Riis Park historic district. The effort to tether the park to a 'period of significance' leaves management less able to be flexible in adapting to changing needs. While a non-historic playground can be rebuilt or eliminated as needed, the historic 72-acre parking lot, which is more than half empty on even the hottest summer days, must be preserved. As of 2000, the Park Service had spent \$15 million to reconstruct portions of the bathhouse structure in keeping with historic preservation standards, yet the public still has no place to shower and change clothes.

Picnicking – and people and cultural groups who take part in this activity – is the point of sharpest conflict at Riis Park between contemporary park use and a management policy based on historic preservation. The Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedure helped to understand the new immigrant users so that the park could begin to find ways to accommodate their picnicking needs while at the same time providing the necessary services for long-term beach users and protecting the historic landscape.

A number of REAP methods were used during the various phases of the research process. Individual interviews were completed in Spanish, Russian or English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. The interviewers had a map of the park available for noting any specific site and to stimulate discussion about Jacob Riis Park. Expert interviews were collected from park staff and volunteers identified as having special expertise to comment on current park problems.

Overall, Jacob Riis serves a diverse population of users, from recent immigrants with limited economic means who are coming for the first time, to wealthy professionals who have visited the park for over 20 years. Household income, education and occupation is evenly distributed, so that from a socioeconomic point of view, it is truly a park for everyone. Even the distribution of first-time and once-a-summer users (32 people out of 131, or 24 per cent) and frequent users – people who come one to four times each week (46 people out of 131, or 35 per cent) – is somewhat balanced. There are more long-term users than first-time users (25 people have been coming for more than 20

years compared to 17 first-time users), but the park still attracts an influx of newcomers while retaining strong ties to long-term users who come from local neighbourhoods.

At the same time there are distinct territories claimed by their users, and these territories and users have distinct needs and desires. To develop a plan of action for renovation and change, it is important to understand that the different areas of the park – the bays and back beaches – have clearly articulated, yet distinct concerns. From the perspective of planning and design, it is difficult, therefore, to develop one proposal that will meet the needs of all constituents.

For instance, the back beach picnickers are the newest visitors to the park. These visitors – many of whom speak only Spanish and have recently come to the United States from Central and South America – are the poorest and least able to provide services and resources for themselves. They need more picnic areas equipped with tables, shade (trees, tents or cabanas), and grills. Bathrooms for the large number of children and elderly in these families, safe playgrounds so that children can play nearby and be supervised, and adjacent beach lifeguards are all necessary for their visit to be optimally successful and satisfying. These newcomers prefer to visit as large groups of families and friends. They prefer shade and are accustomed to hanging fabric for shade and hammocks for seating.

Currently the historic landscape does not accommodate these visitors' desire for shade and large gatherings. The limited number of dying trees must be replaced with the historic black pines that provide little shade, and there are very few picnicking areas in the original 1930 plan. Robert Moses intended that visitors would sit on blankets on the beach and never envisioned (and never wanted) large groups of people barbecuing at what he designed as a 'middle-class' park. In order to accommodate the new visitors' needs, creative designs and better communication between the park and these users will be necessary to solve this culture/landscape dilemma.

Further, immigrant visitors are concerned that their children learn as much as possible about their new life in the United States, so programmes including swimming, safety, as well as educational and recreational programmes are desirable. But many of the parents cannot read or write English, so letting them know about the programmes requires specifically targeted and innovative forms of outreach. Finally, these groups enjoy music and dancing – especially Latino rhythms and salsa – and would enjoy summer afternoon concerts that remind them of home (and bring a bit of home to their new beach). Because these newcomers are the poorest visitors, and a population that Jacob Riis can effectively serve, their needs should be the focus of the first intervention made in the park.

On the other hand people who use the beach bays would prefer not to see limited park resources distributed in this way, and have no interest in picnic areas and educational or cultural programming. Instead, short-term changes should focus on lifeguards, bathrooms and garbage cans. Lifeguards are a top priority for the safety of visitors and because visitors identify with just this one particular part of the beach. For a variety of reasons – gay identity, tolerance and safety issues – Bay 1 visitors have less flexibility of movement at the beach. Therefore, when there is no lifeguard these visitors are at risk. While immediate funding for another lifeguard may not be feasible, an arrangement could be made whereby a lifeguard would be posted at Bay 1 several times a week.



People using the beach bay – rather than the picnic areas – felt strongest about the condition of facilities behind the beach: the rough concrete on the boardwalk with weeds coming through the cracks and sand drifts on the surface, the deteriorated ball courts, the closed bathhouse. The basic amenities are most important: a smooth, resurfaced boardwalk, free of sand; a railing in good condition, and basketball and handball courts in good working order. More showers – ideally in the bathhouse, with some changing facilities were their highest priorities.

Most visitors to the beach bays complain about the lack of restrooms or showers or type of food concessions. Perhaps there are not enough visitors to justify such amenities, but even some improvements would likely attract new visitors. For example, users like the quiet, secluded atmosphere located at the farthest beach bay, but providing the basic amenities – bathrooms and showers – would change the atmosphere too much, and there are more bays to the west for people who want real seclusion. Almost all the users of the beach bays were not concerned with picnic tables, grills, playgrounds or music. These visitors come to Jacob Riis for the beach and swimming, so their concerns focus on the cleanliness of the beach, the availability of bathrooms and showers, and having a lifeguard nearby. The focus is on individual activities rather than family oriented activities. Other than bathrooms, the needs of the different cultural groups are distinct.

The REAP at Jacob Riis Park, thus, uncovered the conflicts that arise when cultural and social groups compete for very limited resources in a restricted, historical landscape. But at the same time, Jacob Riis has been extremely successful in attracting a wide variety of users by offering diverse niches that allow people to enjoy the park. Even though visitors would chose different improvements, they all agree that it is a wonderful park that accommodates their activities and cultural patterns of park use without conflict with others. And the boardwalk provides a place for everyone to come together and experience the diversity of users in a safe and supportive way.

The contradictions in the National Park Service policy towards urban parks, particularly beaches such as Jacob Riis, can be read in the neglect of the contemporary landscape. Even the good intentions of management and staff and the local efforts of committed users can not reverse the lack of funding and attention to the park's deterioration. Yet at the same time, Jacob Riis Park works as a beach that serves recent immigrants and poor to middle-class residents of Brooklyn and Queens. The spatial organization of beach bays and back beach areas creates territories that encourage a strong sense of stewardship and place attachment. And at the same time, these 'territories' promote social tolerance and cultural integration at the level of the site.

## **Social Justice and Diversity in Public Parks**

These two case studies illustrate how a social justice analysis that includes distributive, procedural and interactional dimensions promotes cultural diversity and a sense of inclusion and fairness in urban parks. From a distributive justice perspective there was not equal public space for everyone. At Independence Historical National Parks the remains of African American historical presence were destroyed and not recorded in this national vision of US colonial history. Similarly, new immigrants such as the Vietnamese and the Puerto Rican communities did not have any claim through

language or symbolic marking for use of this space. They were not overtly excluded but the lack of representation and programming defined this National Park Service park as 'White' and 'for tourists'. At Riis Park the unequal distribution of space is also determined historically through a system of historical preservation of a design that gives priority to the beach and little thought or space for the picnicking or play needed by new immigrants. Further, many of the beach bays did not have lifeguards, bathrooms or concessions while other, whiter or heterosexual, parts of the beach did. Thus, in both parks some users and residents did not have accessible or welcoming public space.

Procedural justice is a problem especially at Jacob Riis Park where the immigrant users are not able to participate in the designation of park design and management. In a sense, the REAPs that we undertook are one step toward remediation of this lack of fairness, and certainly an indication that the park managers are aware that they do not have open communications with many of their resident and user groups. The problem of communication with residents and citywide users is an ongoing one, since park staff is often limited in terms of their language skills and time restrictions in these underfunded urban parks.

Finally, interactional justice is also not evident in these parks because of the barriers to interaction discussed. Although the absence of interactional justice is subtle in Independence, that is, there is no visible discrimination or incidents like in Riis Park, nonetheless, residents interviewed did talk about how they felt treated by tourists when in the park environs. Many of them talked about how they felt afraid in the park, which could be explained in a number of ways, but could derive from their ill treatment because of ethnicity or colour. Interactional injustice is most evident, however, at Riis Park where the needs and demands of Central and South American immigrants were overlooked and when the staff cannot speak the language of their largest user group. We were not able to study some of the subgroups as thoroughly as we would have liked, but we did learn that there was physical violence and verbal abuse of people of colour who entered Bay 14 that was territorialized by White local males. There were also conflicts between the gay beach users and families over appropriate behaviour and dress.

Overall, by examining these incidents of inequality, inequity and unfairness we were able to articulate the social justice problems we uncovered throughout the research. Although it is only a first step, it is one that we were able to take in prompting better relationships and fairer use of resources in these large public urban areas.

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