

THE ELEMENTS AND DIVISION OF THE CITY

We learn from an early age about the physical and sub-conscious divisions of the city and how to read them. Physical divisions are caused by the geographical make-up of the city, a river, a factory area, or a railway line. The city is divided physically into public space, parks, roads, market squares and private space, private gardens, courtyards. Like the physical divisions of the city the sub-conscious divisions can depend on different factors, your age, sex, education, or class.

It may be difficult to get an overview of a city as many cities have grown layer by layer with different and sometimes conflicting ideas of city planning. The richness of movement and life can be confusing for the senses. There is however in every city a set of clear patterns and elements that every city has, that help us understand how it is put together. The main elements that bind the city together are its thoroughfares. Thoroughfares can be for people or for transport and they bind the different elements of the city together. A thoroughfare can be a place where people can walk freely, such as a main shopping street or an inner-city highway for mechanised transport only. When two or more thoroughfares meet an intersection is created. Again, an intersection can be a hub for people or for example a major roundabout for traffic, or an intersection where, busses, cars, trains, ferries, and people meet. Intersections are often the cities nerve centres. A city is often divided up into different parts, which we can call suburbs, centres, quarters, districts etc. The divisions are often planned and are made by the geography of the land; rivers, lakes, hills, difficult terrain etc. or by the division made by a major thoroughfare or intersection. Different districts or quarters of a city will often have their own centre; they will have their own character and identity, depending upon their age, type of city plan or function. Another important element in every city is its landmarks. A landmark is the major element in a district, a focus point, often a major building, bridge, or other type of construction; sometimes they give their name to the district. They can help us to orientate ourselves from a distance and navigate in the city.

Buffalo, New York USA



PLACES FOR MEETING, WORKING, LEISURE AND LIVING

The city is a place for human activity, with spaces formed by the city plan with their own special character. Each quarter or district of the city is sub-divided into smaller elements of streets, roads, alleys meeting in squares, marketplaces, parks, and gardens. Some of these places are open and public, some are hidden and private and some are semi-private or semi-public. Some are quite and relaxing, some are hectic and full of life, some are secure, and some may be sinister or frightening. People and traffic move along the streets; narrow and winding, following the contours of the landscape from the middle-ages or wide and high, tree-lined with neo-classical splendour. Streets maybe for living in a leafy suburb or for shopping in a modern shopping mall. At the end of the street, you will find a square; perhaps surrounded by pompous public buildings and used for official city manifestations or empty except for the lively Sunday market. The city is also full of parks and gardens, which can range from a small area around perhaps a public sculpture or memorial to the dead of a forgotten war, to a park full of swings and round-a-bouts, small kids and parents, to large areas of green on a massive scale such as Hyde Park in London or Central Park in New York; with every variation of size in between. The city is also full of places that we never planned. Grey zones that we think are empty gaps but may be full of life. Look under a flyover bridge, along the banks of a railway or for example where a derelict industrial area meets the housing estate. Sometimes these grey zones become permanent and develop a life and economy of their own.

Hyde Park, London

