CHAPTER 1

Cities as places and spaces

KEY TOPICS

- Definitions of place and space as applied to cities
- How and why people become attached to places and make places meaningful
- The importance of place for providing identity, community, and security for human beings
- Ways that human beings shape cities and are shaped by them
- How cities reflect changes in their larger social, political, economic, and cultural contexts

Contents

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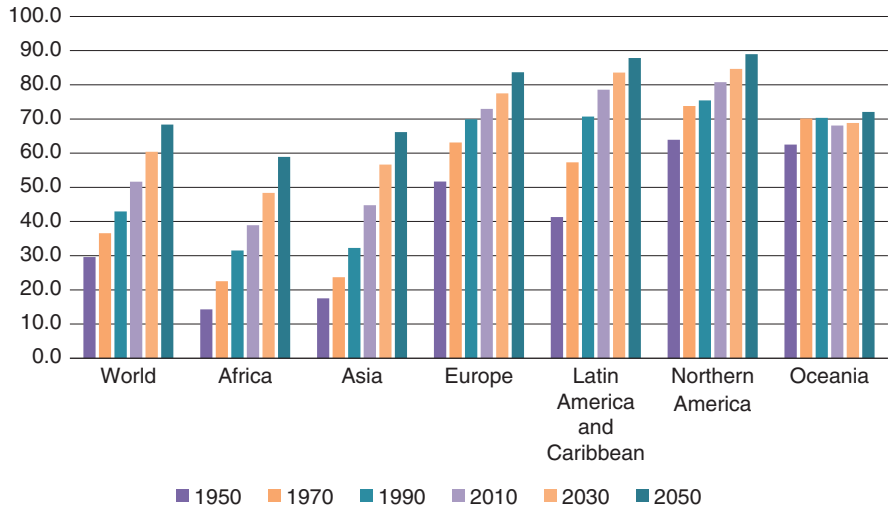
This is a book about cities, a topic that seems familiar enough but that most of us have not considered in any great depth. There are plenty of reasons why we should. We can estimate statistically that most of you live or have lived in a city or metropolitan area; more than half of the world's population now lives in cities (see Figure 1.1). We would like to draw attention, at the very outset, to the much faster pace of urbanization and much larger scale of cities in developing countries, which account for the overwhelming shares of the world's urban growth, energy consumption, and needed social services.[1] Cities are also the centers of the world's economy. They are not only sites of production, where industries cluster, but also the central nodes in service and distribution networks and the command points from which economic decisions are made. Across the globe, wealth is already overwhelmingly generated, and spent, in cities (see Table 1.1). But cities are also sites of profound environmental challenges and social problems, ranging from pronounced poverty and uneven access to the most basic of human necessities to crime, violence, and even warfare. Without a doubt, cities deserve our attention now more than ever.

Cities, in both developed and developing countries, are particularly important kinds of **places**. What do we mean by places? Places are specific sites, whether entire cities or smaller locations within cities, that are shaped by human beings and shape the lives of human beings. Places include large metropolitan areas as well as individual homes, workplaces, schools, and street corners. They are all those specific and rich sites to which we feel attached, which become a part of us. As places, cities are distinct and meaningful sites in which people live out their lives. These meanings derive from the histories of places, whether the formal history found in books or the informal history created by people as they go about their daily routines.

places Specific sites that are shaped by and shape the lives of human beings. Sites of human identity, security, and community.

Figure 1.1 Actual and projected percentage of population in urban areas by world and region, 1950–2050 (2030 and 2050 are projections). *Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Urbanization Prospects 2018*.



[1] While some scholars prefer to use the Global South instead of developing countries when referring to their cities, we will acknowledge this label for a category of cities relative to the Global North and Global East cities (Chapter 3). We also devote a whole chapter to urbanization and cities in developing countries (Chapter 10).

Table 1.1 Select cities' share of national population and share of national GDP.

City	Share of national population (%)	Share of national GDP (%)	Ratio of GDP share to population share
Auckland	31.8	47.5	1.49
Buenos Aires	32.5	63.2	1.94
Dhaka	8.7	35.5	4.08
Helsinki	21.1	30.1	1.43
Kabul	10.3	64.3	6.24
Lima	1.9	5.5	2.89
London	20.3	25.4	1.25
Manila	20.0	46.9	2.35
Mumbai	2.0	6.3	3.15
Nairobi	9.0	20.0	2.22
New York City	7.2	9.7	1.35
Paris	16.2	26.5	1.64
Sao Paulo	10.5	19.5	1.86
Shanghai	1.4	2.9	2.07
Tokyo	28.6	34.1	1.19
Toronto	17.2	19.5	1.13

Cities are increasingly the centers of economic production, with higher per capita contributions to GDP than rural areas or smaller towns. This is particularly pronounced in many developing world cities. Source: *Adapted from UN-Habitat 2011*.

In turn, these histories reflect the uses to which places are put: who has lived in a place and how, the businesses and industries that thrived or failed there, and conflicts over just what should occur where. Histories, uses, and experiences imbue places with memories and meanings that distinguish one place from another. Places are thus inherently social creations.

Attending to the histories of places draws our eyes to the important work that individuals and groups do to make and remake places. That places are human creations may seem obvious enough, but all too often, we take places as givens, assuming that they just are the way they are; that they are somehow immutable and unchanging. This is particularly common when we compare two places – two very different cities or neighborhoods, for example. An impoverished urban area is drastically different from a wealthy gated suburb, and these differences may appear almost natural. But, as we will explain in this book, places come to be different from one another through human efforts, whether the work of individuals building their own homes on the outskirts of growing cities or the policies of nations that seek to industrialize their lagging regional economies. Culture, power, nature, and resources – these and other factors affect the ways that places become what they are, and human beings are always at the helm.

The coupling of Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 conveys a global comparative picture of the demographic and economic dynamics undergirding cities as places from the past to the future and back. Looking toward 2050, as the levels of urbanization (percentage of people in urban areas) in Europe, North America, and Latin America stabilize at a high level,

Asia and Africa are projected to quickly increase the share of their populations moving into urban areas. With their much larger total populations, Asia and particularly Africa will account for the bulk of the world's future urban growth over the next two and a half decades. Since large cities are generally the drivers of their countries' economies, Table 1.1 gives you a comparative sense of the extent to which the demographic and economic sizes of a number of large cities matter to their national economies. On balance, large cities in developing countries (Dhaka, Kabul, and Mumbai) stood out as having a disproportionately powerful role in their national economies relative to their developed-country counterparts. While we could not locate more recent data for these cities, the dominant demographic and economic shares of large cities in most developing countries tend to persist over time. For example, Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria with around 18 million people, accounts for 26.7% of Nigeria's GDP and 50% of its non-oil GDP today (Lagos State Ministry of Agriculture 2022). Later in this book, we will introduce the concept of primacy to help you understand the demographic and economic dominance of large developing-country cities (Chapter 10). For now, we encourage you to imagine what the unusually large scale of population and economy may mean to people already living in and newcomers to such cities as local places of everyday life.

Places are not only created through social processes but also fulfill an important array of social needs. Among these needs we single out three for special attention: *identity*, *community*, and *security*. As we explain in this chapter, places provide us with a sense of who we are, and we may attach the meanings associated with a place to ourselves. Telling someone where we are from becomes an important way of announcing who we are – our identity. Places are also the cradles of community. Though some communities exist and even thrive in virtual spaces (groups on social media sites are prime examples), the places where we live, work, and play often link us to groups that care about and even share our fates. Significantly, communities may exclude as well as include individuals, and constrain as well as support them. Identity and community are actually key constitutive elements of our third dimension of place – security. When we identify with a place and feel connected to groups there, we often feel the most secure. But security extends beyond the psychological and emotional to the material. Some places provide the kinds of environments in which humans thrive – clean air and water, shelter, and freedom from violence, at a minimum – while others deprive residents of these basic elements of a safe and decent life. Moreover, some places are vulnerable to political upheavals and environmental catastrophes that undermine the security of large populations.

Cities are also important **spaces**. In distinguishing the ideas of place and space, we separate the particular from the general. Places are specific sites, whether structures or neighborhoods or entire metropolitan areas, to which people have attached meaning. As such, São Paulo is a place, as is Heliopolis (a slum area in São Paulo), or the block on which you grew up. But these particular places are also different kinds of spaces – geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

spaces Geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

Consider, for instance, a city block. As a *space* it may be dense or sprawling, accessible or remote, pedestrian-friendly or designed to accommodate automobiles. These qualities of space, and others, may predispose the block to becoming a certain kind of *place*, as human beings live out their lives and write its informal history. As you will learn in this book, the spatial forms of cities have changed dramatically over time (indeed, some would argue that the word "city" is no longer appropriate for describing the sprawling urban regions that now house many millions of persons), and this has affected them as places. While you will have a chance to fathom the gigantic scale of megacities later in the book, you will be guided to appreciate the microscopic meanings they also possess as places.

The kinds of places that cities are, and the ways in which they change over time, are always connected to changes beyond the city. As we will detail in this book, changes in policies governing things like immigration and trade have shaped and reshaped cities and their neighborhoods, as well as the opportunities of people who live there. Other types of macro-level changes and events matter, too. For example, the changing climate has dramatic impacts on the security of places – we detail this further in Chapter 12. The recent COVID-19 pandemic also remade places in interesting ways, changing where and how people work and shop and, for many, the kinds of places in which they wanted to live. We will conclude the book by considering how these changes matter and what we can learn from them about the dynamic nature of cities and places (see Chapter 13).

Finally, places also shape our destinies. They are contexts in which lives are created, and as such, they furnish many of the resources that we need to develop as human beings and to reach the opportunities to which we aspire. And, while all cities play this role as places, different cities and the neighborhoods within them do so unequally. Places are thus an important element of inequality both globally and locally. As you read this book, we ask that you keep in mind the very different and unequal types of identity, community, and security provided by urban places and how these in turn shape the fates of individuals and groups.

In this chapter, we introduce and develop these central approaches to cities as places and spaces. We expand on what it means to understand cities as places and how this will inform the material covered in the book. We then take up the points raised here in greater detail, elaborating on what it means for places to provide identity, community, and security, and the processes by which places are made and remade. We then turn to the distinction between space and place and to some central concepts in the scholarship on urban spaces. We take up the notion of how places shape our fates, previewing the great diversity of urban places that you will come to know through this book, and conclude with a discussion of how places reflect social, political, and economic changes that may occur well beyond the city limits.

Cities as places

At first glance, cities seem to be an odd jumble and mixture of things. There are streets and sidewalks, possibly parks, an abundance of housing, factories, offices, and government institutions, and perhaps some empty lots and vacant buildings. All kinds of vehicles fill cities – bicycles and buses, trucks and taxis, and more and more private automobiles. The landscape is largely paved, and what little bits of nature remain may be heavily manicured or just struggling to survive. These physical features distinguish cities from rural lands, and they certainly predispose residents to certain kinds of activities and experiences. But what makes cities places is more than the presence of these kinds of surroundings; it is the way that these surroundings become useful and meaningful over time. It is these uses and meanings that connect human beings to cities and that make cities distinct from one another. Strip away the specific everyday uses and meanings, and one city comes to look much like another.

In this book, we focus on cities as places, so their uses and meanings are central. But just what do we mean by these terms? Let us first take up *uses*. Cities often develop around very different purposes. Some, like Washington, DC, or Beijing or The Hague, are national and even international political capitals, and because of this, they contain institutions of justice and government, become magnets for a great deal of traffic in politics, and sometimes traffic in money and finance as well. Beijing also aspires to become an international financial center, for example. Other cities are like Miami

Beach or Barcelona, sites where people often go as tourists and embrace the warmth and good life they find there. As these cities come to be known as particular kinds of places (tourist destinations or seats of power, in our examples), businesses that will flourish in these places will seek to locate there (a human rights law firm in The Hague, for instance, or a chain restaurant in Miami Beach). Migration can further perpetuate distinctions between different kinds of cities. Cities might attract migrants with distinct kinds of knowledge and skills or residents seeking different kinds of pleasures and opportunities. These migrants in turn may work to preserve those aspects of the city that attracted them in the first place, thus ensuring that the distinctive qualities of a place are maintained. Though not all cities are dominated in this way by a particular type of political or economic use, all have distinct mixes of uses that differentiate them from other places and can set similar chains of events in motion.

While entire cities may have different kinds of uses when examined in broad strokes, the uses of different parts of the city matter more for its residents. Over time, cities develop districts that are known for this or that – as industrial or residential or commercial, for instance. They also take on different qualities. So, a residential area may be desolate and depressing, hip and fashionable, or quiet and insular. And the neighborhood that is desolate one day may be hip the next. All of this goes to show that the nature of an area reflects how it is used and that those uses are subject to change. So, if a residential area is, for instance, a disused site of vacant lots and abandoned buildings, young house hunters seeking a bargain may buy, build, and improve properties there. Their labors, as well as their everyday comings and goings, transform the neighborhood through what is known as gentrification, as you will learn later in the book.

The uses of places furnish the primary way in which human beings come to imbue places with *meanings*. These meanings include the memories associated with places, whether first-hand experiences or those related by long-time residents, captured in books, or written on monuments. Meanings also include associations between a place and certain kinds of social attributes – good or bad – and the senses of what a place *should* be. Some meanings are highly personal and develop through the daily routines and activities of our lives. For example, when we live in a neighborhood for a number of years, we may associate this place with major life events, like starting a family, or with the comfortable and familiar routines of family life – picking up a child from school, walking home with them, and so on. These meanings forge attachments to place that can prove fateful in the lives of individuals and in the character of the places they inhabit (see Box 1.1, Studying the City).

BOX 1.1 STUDYING THE CITY

Place attachment

Scholars interested in how places provide community, identity, and security often utilize the concept of **place attachment**. At its most basic, place attachment describes the emotional connections that people feel toward specific places such as buildings, neighborhoods, or cities. These connections are formed over time through repeated positive interactions – for instance, we may drop in at a neighborhood coffee shop each morning or walk to our team's stadium for every

place attachment
The emotional connections that people feel toward specific places such as buildings, neighborhoods, or cities.

home game. Place attachments may be intensely personal or shared by larger groups and may vary from functional and practical to social or sentimental. Scholars from fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, geography, and anthropology agree that these attachments are important for individuals and groups.

This field of scholarship began with research on places that were destroyed or threatened with destruction. Psychologist Marc Fried was one of the first researchers to work on this problem. He studied the impact of a large-scale urban renewal project that displaced thousands of residents from Boston's West End. Although scholars of the time assumed that residents would be happier in new, better-quality housing (Fried published his work in the 1960s), Fried found that relocated residents grieved for their lost homes as they would for lost loved ones. His work showed that the dense social networks of the West End fell apart as residents relocated and that social dimensions of the place had fostered residents' attachment to the area (Fried 2000).

More recently, in a study of the Walker neighborhood of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, sociologist Alice Mah examined resistance to urban renewal projects that were designed to encourage economic development. Though their neighborhood scored worst in Newcastle on the year 2000 English Indices of Deprivation (and thirtieth worst for England out of over 8000 wards), Walker residents were firmly committed to staying in their homes. In Newcastle, multiple generations of a family could be found on the same street, and residents were loyal to the few shops and pubs that remained as industry and population declined. Given the turbulent economic times in which these residents were living, and the changes to the urban environment around them, their attachment to place may have reflected a desire for stability and continuity. Moreover, uncertainty about the fate of their homes resulted in stress, depression, and anxiety, indicating the strong psychological importance of having a secure home place (Mah 2009).

Current scholarship on place attachment examines multiple facets of the concept, including ways people become attached to places and the implications of that attachment. For instance, urban criminologist Renee Zahnow has found that people are more likely to form attachments to neighborhood places when they experience them as part of social activities compared to consumption activities. In other words, going to the gym with a group of friends fosters more attachment than shopping alone (Zahnow 2024). Place attachment can also *predict* some behaviors. For instance, some scholars have suggested that attachments to places, specifically to places in their current form, can explain the so-called NIMBY (not-in-my-back-yard) opposition to large environmental projects like wind farms (Devine-Wright 2009). In these instances, resistance to change is a way of preserving aesthetics and other valued qualities associated with place.

Though personal and sentimental meanings such as these are certainly important, individuals and groups attach meanings to places of much larger scales, and with much higher stakes. This can best be illustrated by the large-scale urban redevelopment over the last three decades in Shanghai, where people on entire blocks of old houses, primarily located in the urban core, have had to relocate due to the new construction of more lucrative commercial and residential projects (see Figure 1.2). An estimated one million households and up to three million people have lost their attachments to their old residences and neighborhoods. Without sufficient compensation from the government and developers, many have experienced both the financial strain of buying the new, more expensive and less centrally-located high-rise housing and the difficulty of accessing convenient shopping and services. More importantly, however, they have lost the emotional attachments to and social networks in the old neighborhoods that once were manifest in convenient daily encounters and casual chats across the alleys

Figure 1.2 Redevelopment in the older areas of Shanghai has displaced an estimated one million households. This woman was one of the last remaining residents in her neighborhood, having refused to relocate. *Source: Image Professionals GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo*.

and on the street. This loss took a much heavier toll on older people, who were much more strongly and deeply attached to the old houses and neighborhoods as places. The Shanghai government has responded to this loss of place attachment by improving heritage preservation, including the exterior and interior restoration of old, dilapidated houses (see Figure 1.3). This not only reflects a balancing act between realizing the monetary value of land and the additional value of historical buildings but also reclaims

Figure 1.3 The shared old kitchen (left). The individual upgraded kitchen (right). *Source: Reproduced with permission of Xiaohua Zhong*.

the historical and cultural value in life spaces that combine architecture and its meaning. Urban heritage stimulates an objective process of renewal while improving urban governance, quality of life, and social psychology (Zhong and Chen 2017).

Let us return for a moment to where this section began, with a rough inventory of the kinds of physical things that one finds in a city – the streets and sidewalks, parks and factories, and so on. While this physical landscape certainly has a hand in shaping the ways that human beings make their lives in cities, it becomes much more consequential once humans establish patterns dictating what the physical spaces mean and how they will be used. For example, who will dictate the uses of public parks? Will it be children? Or people who are experiencing homelessness? Or police? Does the statue in a public square provide a rallying point for protestors or merely a roost for pigeons? Does the struggling industrial center erode, and thereby lose population, or do its leaders anticipate change and invest in new kinds of production? Actions and decisions, large and small, make cities the distinctive kinds of places that they are and, as we will discuss below, allow them to in turn shape the fates of the individuals who live there.

In emphasizing the importance of place, we do not intend to overshadow the roles of other social forces in the lives of city dwellers or to imply that all residents have the same experiences of places. Take for example the contrast drawn above between cities that serve primarily as tourist destinations and as seats of government. These uses may not be immediately relevant in the day-to-day lives of every resident. For instance, the lives of a low-wage service worker in Washington, DC, and one in Miami Beach might actually be quite similar. Each would likely struggle to find adequate housing and transportation and would have little time or income to enjoy the museums and restaurants, or beaches and clubs, for which these places are internationally famous. This illustrates a key caveat when studying cities as places: it is important to keep in mind the differences between places, but larger social structures still shape the lives of residents. The types of racial/ethnic, gender, and income inequalities present in a society will extend to places there, though the specifics of how inequalities operate will vary from one place to another.

Differences and inequalities also matter in shaping the meanings that people make of places – as do immigrant status, religion, physical ability, age, sexuality, and any other dimension of inequality. Women and men, for instance, often experience the same place very differently. As we will discuss in Chapter 7, men have long enjoyed the ability to move freely about cities, while women's movements have been more confined. Racial and ethnic minorities may develop negative associations with places where they have been regarded as "suspicious" outsiders, profiled by police, or explicitly told that they are not welcome. We can continue this line of thinking to acknowledge the distinct experiences and meanings that members of different groups have in urban places. When considering the meanings associated with places, we must be mindful of exactly *whose* meanings those are.

Identity, community, and security

Places as the site of our identity

In recalling his childhood in Southie, a poor, predominantly Irish-American neighborhood in Boston, the author Michael Patrick MacDonald conveys the powerful and multilayered ways in which young people constructed place-based identities. For

them, being from Southie meant being Irish (or Irish-American), and even youth who were several generations removed from their Irish ancestors relished cultural displays such as caps and jackets bearing the University of Notre Dame's Fighting Irish name and logo. Symbols like these helped to connect the young people not only to their ancestors' home but also to the ethnic enclave from which they hailed. Southie youth also announced a specific neighborhood identity with a small tattoo on the wrist known as the "Southie dot." This indelible mark conveyed to all who understood it just where a young person was from – for better or worse. As MacDonald recounts, the dot could make one a target for gangs from outside neighborhoods or other ethnic groups. "But everyone went ahead and did the Southie dot anyway," he writes, "to prove their loyalty to the neighborhood, regardless of the consequences in the outside world" (MacDonald 1999, 63). At that time, solidarity and toughness were central to what it meant to be a young person from Southie.

Even if we do not announce our place-based identities with a tattoo, the places we are from still constitute an important part of who we are. This is in part because the meanings attached to places also attach to people. When a stranger asks you about yourself, one of the first things that you tell them is likely to be where you are from. What do we say about ourselves when we tell people where we are from? To start, our home places convey something about our cultural roots. For instance, one religion or ethnicity may predominate in a particular city, or the city may be known for a distinct set of values. Our hometown may have a well-known art or music scene, or it may be recognized as a place that is rabid for its sports teams. Places also announce social differences, and stating the city or the neighborhood where we are from can serve as shorthand for our social class. It is important to keep in mind, however, that individuals do not identify wholesale with the cultures of their places and that places and their residents can be stereotyped in just the same way that ethnic or racial groups are.

The sense of identity derived from places allows us to understand ourselves as well. We are socialized in specific places and learn how to be of a place at the same time that we learn how to be members of society more generally. To return to the Southie example above, MacDonald and his friends learned a certain set of local traits and behaviors, from how to speak, stand, and dress to just whom one should trust. Our families and peers typically share the norms of our place, and in this way, much of our culture is derived from, or mediated through, the places we inhabit.

Places as the site of community

Places furnish not only a sense of identity but also a sense of community – of our social connections to other people. Neighborhoods do this for people, and people become attached to those neighborhoods. The daily routine of our movements through the neighborhood, the people that we see, gives us a strong sense of a community that surrounds us. A famous student of cities and neighborhoods, Jane Jacobs, wrote at length about her neighborhood in the Greenwich Village area of New York City (see Figure 1.4). Jacobs pointed out that people who lived in the neighborhood created the kind of community in which residents could feel a sense of belonging and trust. For example, the local delicatessen owner, Joe Cornacchia, served as the eyes of the neighborhood. Because his shop opened early, Joe kept a watchful eye over the street at hours when others were attending to matters inside their homes. Moreover, because everyone visited the delicatessen regularly, Joe acted as an important source of information in the community. He even held the keys to various buildings and residences in the neighborhood – a strong indication of the level of trust there (Jacobs 1962).

Figure 1.4 Jane Jacobs at the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village in 1961. For Jacobs, the neighborhood tavern was an important place for locals and visitors alike to renew connections. *Source: Cervin Robinson / Architects' Journa*.

social capital
Networks of relationships among people that foster trust.

third places
Places outside of home or work where people can spend time and connect with others in their communities.

Ideally, places help foster communities with a high degree of **social capital**. Small, local places can be particularly valuable in this regard – for example, playgrounds where parents will gather with their children in the afternoon. They meet with other parents and their children play with one another, creating strong bonds of friendship for both generations. Businesses are well aware of these features of places. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg refers to places where people can gather and establish connections to one another as **third places**, following home and work in their importance (Oldenburg 1999). He offers that pubs, taverns, and other locations where friends can gather on a regular basis help to create this strong sense of community. Indeed, Oldenburg was a consultant for the coffee company Starbucks, and he urged them to create not merely a site where people could get a good cup of coffee but one where they could sit around and chat with one another.

It is easy to idealize places as sites of strong and supportive communities. But, in many places, the trust and mutual support that communities provide is largely absent. This may be because populations are highly transient or because neighborhoods lack the kinds of spaces and institutions that would facilitate positive interactions (no parks, no pubs, and so on). In other places, communities may have strong ties, but these ties may not extend to all members. Ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual minorities have often been excluded from place-based communities and, as a result, have made their own communities where possible (see Chapters 7 and 8). In other places, any newcomer or new way of thinking is suspect. It is important to remember that, while places *can* facilitate community, we should not assume that they always do or that community is universally inclusive or positive.

Places as sites of security

The last element so important to places is that they can furnish us with a sense of security. Security often follows from identity and community. When we feel connected to a place and to the people there, we often feel secure. We know our figurative "place" in the world and know that we are surrounded by individuals we can trust to support us. The positive implications of this type of security cannot be understated – it allows us to truly be ourselves.

But security has a more practical side as well. We need to feel that our person and our family, as well as our property, are safe. This is fundamental to our well-being. Knowing that our home will be there as we left it when we return from work, that we are safe walking to a friend's house, or that our children are able to play outside allows us to then turn our minds to the myriad other interests and responsibilities that life presents.

The lack of such security is a major concern for city dwellers today. Especially in large and dynamic cities, the safety and security of neighborhoods varies widely. When people choose to move to a particular place, they often do so because they have heard that that neighborhood is safe and secure for them and their children. Anthropologist Setha Low has found that this desire to *feel* secure, even when real threats to that security are largely imagined, is a major factor behind the spread of **gated communities** in the United States and around the world (Low 2003). The 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin in a Florida gated community illustrates the tragic consequences of this heightened level of fear and suspicion. Although the Sanford, Florida gated community of Twin Lakes was fairly diverse (49% non-Hispanic white, 23% Hispanic, 20% Black, and 5% Asian), resident George Zimmerman was particularly concerned about the presence of "young black men who appeared to be outsiders" (Robles 2012). In a call to police before the shooting, Zimmerman described Martin – who was young and Black – as suspicious. He then confronted Martin and, during the ensuing altercation, fatally shot him. This tragic incident reminds us that within the same place, different people can experience vastly different levels of security.

gated community A residential community surrounded by walls, fences, gates, water, and/or natural barriers that admits only residents and their guests.

Larger-scale forces also threaten places. Political and military conflicts have the potential to undermine the security of neighborhoods and even entire cities. For example, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza are largely urban conflicts in which homes and infrastructure have been destroyed, in addition to the loss of tens of thousands of lives. In these places, bombings as well as infantry combat have made familiar neighborhoods into dangerous and deadly places. Rebuilding structures and infrastructure, and restoring a sense of security within these communities, will take decades. Environmental forces also threaten the security of places, such as the flooding of coastal areas due to climate change (see Chapter 12). Whatever the threat to security, it is important to keep in mind that, when people lose the places to which they are attached, they lose much more than their physical environment: they also lose the potential of that environment to generate a positive identity or community. For that reason, displacement is among the most disruptive events that an individual can experience.

Human beings make and remake places

Places, whether they are cities or their constitutive parts, are human creations. Though the age and scale of places such as London or New York City may obscure the efforts of the people who envisioned and built them, we must always remember that even these cities reflect the work of human hands and that these hands are never idle. One generation designs one kind of city – for example, the generation of people who

Figure 1.5 Salters Garden in London reveals how places are made and remade across the centuries, both deliberately and as a result of larger forces. Here one can see traces of ancient Roman and medieval London (the wall on the left), which were revealed when the Cripplegate area was bombed during the Blitz of World War II. The garden was built in the 1990s.

developed cities during the Industrial Revolution – and another generation then seeks to change and modify that city. Cities and other places must therefore be seen as fundamentally human and social constructions that change and evolve over time (see Figure 1.5). For instance, some older industrial cities are finding that their infrastructure capacity exceeds their current population and economic output, resulting in efforts to reimagine local economies and attract new migrants. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Chinese agricultural lands are now sprouting factories and worker housing as cities large and small grow outward. Between 1987 and 1992 China lost an estimated 100 million acres of farmland each year to urbanization and the expansion of roads and industries. During a stretch of accelerated urbanization from 1990 through 2000, 74% of the new urban land use in the Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei (Province) region was converted from arable land (Tan et al. 2005).

Great Migration
The movement of a large number of African Americans from the US South, especially during the interwar period.

These kinds of urban changes mark important shifts in the world economy, but changes in social arrangements at the local and national levels are also visible in the forms that cities take. Consider, for instance, the patterns of segregation seen in US cities. For many years, Black and White residents lived near one another, albeit often in unequal circumstances. Following the **Great Migration** of the early twentieth century, a period in

which millions of African Americans moved from the rural south to industrial cities of the north, segregation became much more pronounced and was enforced by violent means. This coincided with an initial boom in suburban construction that facilitated the movement of affluent Whites to the urban outskirts, where racial and ethnic minorities were denied residence by legally enforceable covenants (this process is detailed further in Chapters 6 and 7). As a result, US cities took on a form that George Clinton of the 1970s funk band Parliament called "chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs."

Patterns of segregation by class, race, and ethnicity are common in cities across the globe as groups map their social positions onto the urban landscape. In South Africa, the patterns of segregation under the system of Apartheid essentially separated people by race so that Black South Africans were compelled to live in areas entirely separated from the white population of Afrikaners and British. The Apartheid system was overturned partially because Black South Africans began challenging these racial boundaries by moving into areas designated as white-only neighborhoods. With the end of Apartheid, legal racial segregation was eliminated. Yet today these formal barriers have been replaced, in part, by the emergence of new barriers of separation that are both race- and class-based. Thus, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, one now finds enormous slums populated by poor Black South Africans but also by a flood of recent refugees from nearby Zimbabwe and migrants from countries like Nigeria and Mozambique who have come in search of work. At the same time, wealthy white residents have deserted the central city and, along with the new Black elite, have consolidated their financial and political power in nearby Sandton, a former all-White suburb that has become the new social and economic capital of metropolitan Johannesburg (Murray 2008).

Difference not only results in negative and exclusionary forms of place-making but can also foster positive outcomes. As immigrants flood into cities across the world, they create and recreate neighborhoods in ways that make them comfortable. They create **urban enclaves** – social settlements that provide immigrants with a way to remain attached to others from their homelands and to mark and identify their place as a distinct ethnic space in their new country. In Chicago, for example, various enclaves have grown up in and around the city, consisting primarily of recent immigrants from Mexico as well as from Korea and Ukraine. These immigrants develop shops and restaurants, places where recent immigrants can come to buy groceries and other products from their homelands. One particularly well-known Chicago neighborhood is Pilsen, home to many thousands of recent immigrants from Mexico. Its residents have attempted to recreate elements of their homeland for themselves and marked the area with various public artworks and murals – a twentieth-century Mexican tradition they have reinvented in Chicago. Spanish is spoken as often as English, if not more often, in the enclave, and the whole range of institutions – from churches to schools – reflects the Mexican influence. As you will see in Chapter 8, cities and their ethnic enclaves have long served as important points of transition for new immigrants, and these immigrants have in turn remade their cities in vital ways.

urban enclaves
Residential areas dominated by members of the same social group. Immigrant enclaves are one type of urban enclave.

We should look at cities not merely as bricks and mortar, buildings and streets – as the work of architects and urban planners, engineers, and laborers – but also as cultural and social creations providing insights into the ways and customs of the people who live in them (Figure 1.6; Box 1.2). Cities reveal to us how people live, people's values and priorities, who has power, and other aspects of social life. As a result, looking at the changing uses of places tells us something about society. One example of this is the ongoing debate in the United States regarding whether and how to commemorate places associated with slavery and the Confederacy, particularly following events like

Figure 1.6 Destruction from the 2010 Ōtautahi earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, left open spaces throughout the city. The creative placemaking agency Gap Filler worked to fill some of those spaces with sites for play and healing. This giant, social media-friendly swing, called #chchswing, was developed through collaboration with local youth organizations. *Source: Bernard Spragg. NZ / flickr / Public domain*.

BOX 1.2 PLANNING AND BUILDING THE CITY

What is placemaking?

placemaking
The practice of collectively remaking places so that they become more meaningful and useful within their communities.

In this book, we give substantial attention to the ways that human beings make places, whether through their everyday activities or through the deliberate work of city building. Within the field of urban planning, however, there is a specific practice called **placemaking**. This refers to a collective practice of remaking places like plazas, parks, or shopping streets so that they are more meaningful and useful to communities. The Project for Public Spaces – a leading advocate for authentic placemaking – stresses that placemaking is not just about redesigning places that are dated or disused. They stress that placemaking "is centered on observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole" (Project for Public Spaces 2017).

Although placemaking is a complex process, reviewing the Project for Public Spaces' five basic steps points to the key elements of this work as well as the philosophy that guides it. First, when a site is proposed, planners must identify and assemble key stakeholders. These might include residents, local businesses, cultural organizations, and the like. Planners need to understand these stakeholders' visions for the site, and the resources they can bring to its renovation. Second, planners and stakeholders should evaluate the site's current use and identify any challenges associated with the place. Planners and stakeholders can then embark

on the third step – creating a vision for the remade place. This can include statements of shared goals, conceptual renderings, plans for improvements and maintenance, and other elements.

To ensure that site revisions are successful, short-term experiments can be a helpful fourth step. For example, if providing children's play spaces is part of the plan, inexpensive or temporary play equipment can be installed to learn whether and how this is used and to make any necessary refinements. Finally, once the project is finished, both planners and users of the space should continue to evaluate the site and identify areas for changes or improvements. Since the context around places is always changing, the elements of a vital and valuable public space will need to change as well!

the 2015 mass shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. A report by the Southern Poverty Law Center documented that 377 Confederate memorials were renamed, relocated, or removed from 2015 to 2022 (Southern Poverty Law Center 2022). Many of these monuments were created in the early twentieth century, at a time when white racist movements were particularly powerful in the United States. As these monuments are removed, and others erected in their place – like the statue of US Civil Rights leader John Lewis that now stands outside the DeKalb County, Georgia, courthouse – we see public spaces reflecting shifts in both culture and power.

Place and space

The concepts of space and place are often used together, as each turns our attention toward the importance of land and structures, and people's connections with these. For many years, social and behavioral sciences – except for geography – paid limited attention to the roles of place and space. In looking for the general patterns in human behavior, they often focused on factors that transcended locations. They knew that people might behave differently in one city or country than they did in another, but believed that this was only because other important variables – income, religion, level of education, and so on – differed in those locations. But in recent years, social scientists have recognized that places and spaces differ in ways that are more than the sum of a handful of demographic or geographic variables and that these differences have important consequences for people's lives. This has led to more cross-disciplinary discussions of the roles that place and space play in people's lives, conversations that will continue through this book.

We have said quite a bit about place but so far have not said much about space. Just how do the two differ, and how do they work together? The distinction is partly one of the general versus the particular: space is different from place in that *places represent specific locations in space* (see Table 1.2). As spaces are used and made meaningful by human beings, they become places. The same location is therefore simultaneously a certain kind of space and a particular place. Thus, a plaza is a certain kind of *space*, and Mexico City's Plaza de la Constitución is a *place*.

Beneath the meanings and uses that distinguish spaces as places, spaces differ from one another in important ways. Some spaces are constructed for certain kinds of uses – ball fields, for instance, or streets – though this does not always mean that

Table 1.2 Place versus space.

Place	Space
A specific site, whether an entire city or a smaller location therein, that is shaped by human beings and shapes the lives of human beings.	Geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.

they are used for their intended purposes (indeed, a street may come to serve as a soccer pitch or baseball diamond). Scale also matters, as small spaces suggest intimacy and privacy, while large spaces seem to foster anonymity. Other qualities of spaces matter too in suggesting uses. And, as you will learn later in this book, even the same *kinds* of spaces can have qualities that make them inviting or repellant, well-loved or reviled. For instance, not all parks and plazas are created equal: Jane Jacobs observed that parks with a sense of enclosure, for instance, will actually be more inviting, and William H. Whyte, whose work we discuss in Chapter 4, found that something as simple as the presence of movable seating will make a plaza more popular.

While some urban spaces are as small as plazas and parks, spaces can scale up to entire cities and metropolitan regions, whose spatial attributes are more complex and variegated. Think about the difficulty of orienting yourself spatially in downtown Shanghai, which has almost 25 million people, with its crowded high-rises and people, compared to in a small, empty suburban park in the United States. Then imagine the likely scenario of Shanghai and a dozen other nearby million-plus cities growing into one another in the Yangtze River Delta and forming a megacity region of 80 million people. These gigantic spatial units make it difficult to visualize myriad concrete places such as streets and parks embedded within and across many scalar units and boundaries (see Chapter 11 for an extended discussion of this topic). From their scaled-up vantage point, cities and metropolitan regions amplify the more abstract quality of space relative to place.

private spaces
Spaces to which access is restricted by those who own the property.

public spaces
Spaces that are open and accessible to every person in a society, in particular its citizens.

One of the most important qualities of spaces is the degree to which they are freely accessible. Scholars are increasingly turning their attention to the distribution of **private spaces** and **public spaces** within urban areas. Cities have always contained private spaces, which provide a degree of protection from the outside world, and where the owner of the property may dictate just who is allowed to enter and what they may do on the premises. Homes are key private spaces, as are most sites where we work, particularly private businesses and firms. Both family spaces and work spaces are protected by certain laws in democratic societies: they are private and thus cannot be subject to unlawful entry by public authorities such as the police. These laws, among other things, help to establish the boundaries and contents of security, and thus they provide an added layer of protection, above and beyond our own families and friends, to our sense of security in places.

But it is public spaces that in many ways represent the heart of societies – democratic societies in particular. Public spaces are, by definition, open and accessible to every person in a society. These include gathering spaces like streets, parks, and plazas. In democratic societies, public spaces enable all kinds of people to gather and participate with others in activities that they enjoy.

Accessible public spaces are key to democratic freedoms such as speech and assembly – people can only assemble and speak freely if they have places in which to do so (see Figure 1.7). And, where public spaces are not used, or in fact not available to everyone, the very nature of democracies and the very quality of communities is substantially diminished, even threatened.

Of increasing concern to scholars is the degree to which the kinds of spaces that were once unambiguously public are increasingly becoming private. They refer to this process as the **privatization of space**: efforts to make space less accessible and to curtail the freedoms of those who use it. Take the shopping mall, for instance. While it may appear to serve many of the same functions as a town square or an open-air market, malls are privately owned and the rights of those who use them are specified by owners and management. Neighborhoods, too, particularly gated communities, are extending private control of space beyond individual residences to the formerly public areas of streets, sidewalks, and parks. Anthropologist Teresa Caldeira has chronicled the increasing use of walls, gates, and guards to seal off residential compounds in São Paulo, Brazil. There, what are called closed condominiums include not only residential spaces but also parks as well as sports and entertainment facilities. Even the utilities are provided independently of the surrounding city (Caldeira 2000).

privatization (of space) The shift in ownership of spaces from public to private, whether corporations, management companies, or homeowners' associations.

One of the major issues of the twenty-first century will be how the public spaces of cities, such as parks and plazas, even sidewalks and corners, are treated and preserved so that they can truly represent sites and sources of cultural diversity and

Figure 1.7 Cairo's Tahrir Square during the Egyptian uprising of 2011, when as many as one million protestors would gather there. This public space became a crucial site for organizing and communicating, and it became a symbol for the movement itself. In other countries experiencing the Arab Spring uprisings, public spaces also played key roles, such as the make-do use of a traffic circle in Bahrain. *Source: Jonathan Rashad/Getty Images*.

democracy in the modern world. Those of a more cynical turn of mind believe that the privatization of public space will be one of the great tendencies of modern life, whereas those who seek to protect the democratic elements of modern societies believe that movements of resistance must be made in order to establish the rights of all citizens to be able to enjoy the public spaces of cities. Geographer Don Mitchell has promoted the point of view, which originated with French urban scholar Henri Lefebvre, that every person has the right to use the public spaces of cities – that's what cities are all about, he argues (for more on how people assert their right to public spaces, see Box 1.3). But Mitchell details how local authorities across the United States, for example, have limited and infringed upon these rights. He suggests that marginalized people such as those experiencing homelessness must resist the efforts of local authorities and demand their own rights to the use of public spaces (Mitchell 2003).

BOX 1.3 MAKING THE CITY BETTER

Remaking space through "DIY urbanism"

As people live and work in cities, they often recognize ways that, with slight or simple improvements, these places could better suit their needs. For instance, a bus stop may lack trash cans or benches, or street signs may be absent or confusing. Sometimes city governments respond to these kinds of requests, but formal responses can be slow and expensive. In a number of cities, residents are taking things into their own hands, engaging in "DIY urban design" or "**DIY urbanism**," sometimes called "tactical urbanism." These terms refer to direct actions to improve the urban environment without official approval or support. This might include installing a bench or chairs on a street that lacks them, planting flowers, or even painting a bicycle lane on a public street. Sociologist Gordon C. C. Douglas has studied these activities and activists in several North American cities. He finds that most DIY urbanists are seeking to improve the spaces where they live, responding to governments' disinvestment in these neighborhoods and the lack of public amenities and space in particular (Douglas 2014).

DIY urbanism direct actions to improve the urban environment without official approval or support.

Another example is PARK(ing) Day, which began as a way to expand the amount of public space available in urban environments. In downtown San Francisco, where the majority of outdoor space is dedicated to private vehicles, an organization called Rebar first took action in 2005, paying for a parking space and converting it into a real park that passing pedestrians could use to relax. They laid down sod, put in some benches and trees, and watched as people came by to use the park or stare in wonder. And no one stopped them. Repurposing parking spaces as parks fills an important need, at least one day a year (the third Friday in September). People have used PARK(ing) Day to create parks in their own cities and to provide other types of services at the park as well, such as bike repairs, political seminars, and free healthcare clinics. In 2011 (the last year of formal counts), 975 parks were created in 162 cities in 35 countries (see Figure 1.8); in 2024, myparkingday.org recorded hundreds of park projects across the globe. PARK(ing) Day is an open source global event – find out if a park is planned for your city, and if not, consider making one happen!

Figure 1.8 Park(ing) Day in Luxemburg. Created in 2005 in response to the lack of public open space in city centers, Park(ing) Day has become a global event in which people remake parking places as sites for play, relaxation, and community-building. *Source: Verkéiersverbond / flickr / CC BY 2.0*.

Cities shape the fates of human beings

All of the issues touched upon in this chapter – whether qualities of space such as privatization, the ways that groups have been segregated throughout the city, or the impact of changes in the world economy on urban development – bring us to perhaps the most important lesson that you will take from this book and from urban studies more generally: *places impact the fates of human beings*. The cities in which we live, as well as our neighborhoods, affect our material well-being and our security. In large part, places provide – or deny – access to social, educational, and economic opportunities. While all social scientists take care to balance individual and societal factors when seeking to understand people's life chances, we can say with confidence that much of a person's success or suffering can be explained by looking at where they live.

This process begins at our beginnings. *Where* you are born determines, in large part, *how* you were born. Did your mother have access to prenatal care? Were you born in a well-equipped hospital? Did you come home to a dwelling free of toxic hazards, violence, and other threats to your family's safety? What was the quality of the school you first attended? Was your journey to school an opportunity for friendly play or fraught with danger? Even by the age of five or six, qualities of place have left their mark on children, and understanding the complex ways in which they do requires an understanding of how cities work.

The structures of inequalities found within and across societies are quite literally made concrete in cities. We can see this, for instance, in the infrastructure that helps people meet their basic needs. In some cities and neighborhoods, residents have access to safe, clean water,

informal settlements
Residential settlements developed without official permission or planning, often without formal ownership of land.

to reliable transportation, and to decent shelter. In other places, these basic needs cannot be taken for granted. For example, as you will learn in Chapter 10, **informal settlements** are common in many cities in the Global South. In these places, residents have built their own dwellings, usually without official title to the land and in areas that lack well-developed infrastructure such as electricity, clean water, or sewers. As we discussed above, other places are sites of specific threats stemming from political and environmental instability. All of these factors shape the daily lives and opportunities of residents. Places are not the only culprit here – in many instances, places are the sites where problems stemming from larger structures manifest themselves – but understanding places allows us to understand the ways in which these forces intersect with specific populations and resources.

Human beings and cities are inextricably intertwined. Human beings make cities, and they live and work in them. Although the pace at which cities grow and change may sometimes be so slow as to avoid detection, and while the scales of urban places may confound any sense of human efficacy, we must bear in mind that these are objects of our own making. Not only do human beings shape the physical structures of cities but they also decide what those structures will mean and, as a result, suggest how other human beings will use them. We offer these insights to stir your curiosities and as a source of empowerment. Whatever is built by human hands is, by definition, within our power to change. Indeed, throughout the book, we offer examples of individuals and groups who are working to change cities in ways that in turn improve the lives of residents.

Cities reflect changes in the contexts around them

As you learn about cities and places and the ways that they change over time, remember that these changes reflect shifts occurring at larger scales. For example, the changes in global migration patterns discussed above, or the diminishing tolerance for Confederate monuments, are not exclusively urban changes. Rather, these examples show how the kinds of places that cities become are shaped by shifts in policies, politics, culture, the economy, and other domains. In fact, studying changes in cities can provide an important lens into social change more generally, as cities – as well as neighborhoods and smaller places – are sites where transformations that can otherwise seem abstract become visible and tangible.

Let us consider shifts in the economy as one example. The development of modern cities reflects a shift to industrial production in the late eighteenth century. As factories grew larger, cities grew larger as well, and the neighborhoods around factories became home to industrial laborers. The industrial workforce propelled population growth in cities like Chicago, Illinois, where the population grew by a factor of 10 between 1870 and 1930, and Dayton, Ohio, which grew nearly as fast. But in the late twentieth century, many cities in North America lost their industrial dominance as new policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement and technologies like containerized shipping made global trade easier and less expensive. As a result, manufacturing jobs in cities like Chicago and Dayton moved to other countries. Neighborhoods there suffered economically and socially, while cities in other parts of the world – China, Mexico, and other countries – saw new industrial expansion as well as the residential and commercial development that follows. Today, jobs in the "knowledge economy" are replacing industrial labor, bringing educated, middle-class workers to Chicago, once home to blue-collar laborers. As a result, these places are experiencing gentrification, complete with its changes in housing, retail and street life.

We hope that as you learn more about cities and places, you will be able to connect the changes you see in places you know to these broader patterns of social, political, and economic change. For instance, when you see sites of disinvestment or deindustrialization, you might consider whether economic and trade policies played a role. Conversely, if you see a bustling new commercial district, ask yourself what broader economic or cultural shifts might explain why this place is flourishing in this location and time. By asking questions like this, you will refine your critical thinking skills regarding not only cities and places, but social change more generally. We have provided Critical Thinking Questions at the end of each chapter to help you practice.

We hope that this chapter leaves you with a sense of why cities are compelling topics of study. Some of you likely needed little convincing: you may have had questions about why cities take the forms they do, how immigrants create communities in a new place, or why some neighborhoods are luxurious and opulent while others are sites of danger and despair. We encourage those of you who have come to this field accidentally or even reluctantly to consider cities as sites where you can readily see social processes at work, whether the construction of meanings and memories as they become attached to places, or the unequal distribution of economic opportunities. Whatever path you have taken in becoming a student of cities, we hope that this book, and the concepts of space and place at its core, will help you to recognize and understand the ways that humans experience an urban world.

Critical thinking questions

1. Think of a place in your neighborhood that is particularly important to you. What makes this place important? Do you associate the place with certain events or memories? Is it a place you use every day?
2. Thinking about important places in your city or town, how might these places have different meanings or associations for different groups of people? What is the basis for these different meanings?
3. What kinds of public spaces are there where you live? How do people use them? Do any of these spaces work as theories of public space argue they should – as democratic spaces? And just how does democracy play out in them? As a hint, consider why and how people gather, what kinds of ideas are expressed there, and so on.
4. Do you live in a city that is experiencing a decline today in terms of its industry or population? Or do you live in a city that is experiencing boom times? How do these broader economic events affect the way people feel about the city and their attachment to it as a place?
5. In what ways has the city in which you live influenced your daily life? Would your life have been much different had you lived in a different kind of city? How might daily life in your own city change if you were of a different gender or racial/ethnic group?

Suggested reading

Cresswell, Tim. 2015. *Place: An Introduction*. 2nd edition. Wiley Blackwell. A succinct but thorough examination of the concept of place.

Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House. One of the most influential works of the twentieth century. Jacobs argues that urban planners have failed to design cities that account for the way in which people live, work, and play in cities.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell. One of the leading Marxist writers to re-examine issues of urbanization and the city, Lefebvre argued that space was actually produced by the capitalist institutions of the modern world.

MacDonald, Michael Patrick. 2000. *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*. New York: Ballantine Books. MacDonald's moving account of life in south Boston reveals the ways in which neighborhood, social class, and ethnicity contributed to residents' identities and how the neighborhood shaped their fates.

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