

Land/Site Analysis—Part 7  
by David R. Lewis, ASA, SR/WA

In Part 6 of this series on land/site analysis it was stated that just as appraisal principles assist the appraiser, the techniques developed by Kevin Lynch to analyze human activity on a neighborhood/community/city scale can also assist the appraiser in analyzing external physical features.

It was further noted that whether created by nature or by human effort, the environment can present an identity/structure. The pattern of use can be analyzed in how it meets human needs. Locational attributes will emerge and economic activities will evolve. Lynch states that, “The contents of the city images...can conveniently be classified into five types of elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.” Just as appraisal principles guide the appraisal process, the physical elements guide the analysis of the physical environment.

For the purposes of this article, edges will be briefly discussed. “Edges are the linear elements not used or considered paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axis. Such edges may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region off, or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. These edge elements, although probably not as dominant as paths, are for many people important organizing features, particularly in the role of holding together generalized areas, as in the outline of a city by water or wall.”

Edges help define human perception of neighborhood and community. The sense of place and the boundaries of economic activity can be analyzed by understanding edges. Edges have a quality that aids in how comparables may be used outside the subject property neighborhood. A weak edge may allow the rational argument, neighborhoods overlap. Therefore, the use of comparables on the other side of a weak edge may be appropriate appraisal practice. In litigation work, a reasonable argument presented by the appraiser is that comparable is appropriate because the “weak edge” does not isolate the neighborhood where the subject property is located. On the other hand, a strong edge may suggest economic activity in another neighborhood is substantially different and makes the comparable on the other side of the edge less reliable.

Analyzing neighborhood cycles is an essential element in the valuation process. Neighborhood cycles may first be evident along edges. Again, the degree of strength of the edge may help define the importance of any observed change or the life cycle of growth, stability, decline and revitalization. A neighborhood entering a revitalization stage may first appear along an edge. Understanding the revitalization phase is important to appraisers since investors may want a greater degree of analysis in such cases because of possible risk and uncertainty.

Edges are important to legal and economic considerations. For example, zone changes often occur along edges. While there is not a hard and fast rule where one land use zone ends and another starts, edges provide a rational reasoning for legal boundaries. Edges may also indicate where a given area may have a comparative advantage in the market. On the other side, an edge may be used to define locational obsolescence.

Some assignments may require a degree of analysis where the scope of work requires mapping development patterns and associated economic activities. Plotting/identifying edges may help explain valuation principles. Defining the quality/condition of the edges helps frame the subject in relation to the larger community and adds credibility. The word “edge” and its associated meaning becomes part of the professional nomenclature.