

Land/Site Analysis—Part 9  
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Earlier articles on land/site analysis discussed that the pattern of land use can be analyzed in terms of how it meets human needs. Locational attributes will emerge and economic activities will evolve. Kevin 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, “landmarks” will be briefly discussed. According to Lynch “Landmarks are another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities. Some landmarks are distant ones, typically seen from many angles and distances. They may be within the city or at such distance that for all practical purposes they symbolize a constant direction. Such are isolated towers, golden domes, great hills. Even a mobile point, like the sun, whose motion is sufficiently slow and regular, may be employed. Other landmarks are primarily local, being visible only in restricted localities and from certain approaches. These are the innumerable signs, store fronts, trees, doorknobs and other urban detail, which fill in the image of the observers. They are frequently used clues in the identity and even the structure, and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar.”

The last element that Kevin Lynch uses to describe the image of a city is landmarks. The five elements are a useful tool that appraisers can use to make sense of a physical environment. They are the organizer of activities. How humans perceive and relate to their environment is a social and psychological consideration. The image of the environment is a fundamental tool for living. The environment must meet our collective needs to be organized. Landmarks can provide a sense of familiarity and therefore may provide comfort and convenience, a sense of place. Landmarks can also be an organizer of activity by being a reference point.

We often do not think about landmarks until we must organize our thoughts. The simple task of describing to someone how to find a place without a map is telling. Certain landmarks that are easily identifiable are usually referenced in the instructions. Street names are important, but physical objects identify the landscape the traveler must understand in relation to the task of finding a place. The easier the instructions, the more likely the location has a comparative advantage.

Mapping the elements can assist in relating the subject property to the surrounding area. It is a form of organizing and identifying those locations that have a comparative advantage. Locational references are important. Shortly after graduating from planning school, I went to work for a small Southern California city. I had limited knowledge as to how this city was laid out or functioned. From the freeway entering the town, I drove along the primary commercial artery. I instinctively pulled into a real estate office to

inquire about finding a place to live. It felt about right to stop at that particular location. Several months later, one of the city planning commissioners who worked in real estate indicated that particular real estate office had the most drive-in business. It was on the main path and was oriented in distance and view to have a comparative advantage. To some degree it was psychologically subtle but tangible as to how people organize their activities. It was an efficient location that could be measured in terms of its ability to satisfy the needs of the users in the market.