Rethinking Urban Parks

PUBLIC SPACE & CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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A Note on Terminology

During the first round of copyediting of this manuscript we tried to regularize the terminology used to refer to groups of people when described by ethnicity, race, and class. We were acutely aware that these categories are socially constructed—that is imagined, created, negotiated, and used—by people with regard to particular places, times, and circumstances, and that all labels can lead to stereotyping and essentializing of what are slippery and constantly transforming social identities. We also were concerned with how racial terms have become historically merged with notions of ethnicity and class, and how racial categories are used to justify discriminatory activities. Nonetheless, our topic was cultural diversity, and to make many of our points—which we believe to be empowering—we needed to write about people as culturally and politically relevant groups rather than as individuals, and with terminology that our interviewees and community co-workers would recognize and use to represent themselves.

Equally problematic is that each chapter is based on research conducted at different historical moments when ethnic/racial terms were shifting both within the study population (from Hispanic to Latino and from black to African American) and within the academy (from black to Afro-Caribbean American or African American). We also had problems with an unmarked “white” category, frequently used in park studies in which only the marked social category of “others” is discussed. In New York City and the Northeastern region, “white” covers many distinct ethnic and cultural groups that have very little resemblance to one another in terms of history, class status, language, and residence. For example, recently arrived Russians who use Jacob Riis Park are socially and culturally distinct from long-time Brooklyn residents in terms of their beach use and interests. As another example, we found that fourth-generation Italian Americans at Independence identified so strongly with their language and culture that they did not see the Independence Historical National Park interpretation as related to their cultural group any more than did the Puerto Rican Americans we interviewed.

In view of all these problems, we are unable to provide any fixed terminology or categories for referring to or identifying the different cultural, racial,
ethnic, and class groups we discuss in this book. Instead, we relied on the categories used by the groups themselves, or employed the categories that the park managers and administrators gave us when beginning a project. Therefore, the terminology varies from chapter to chapter, and in some cases varies within a chapter if there are differences between the terms individuals use to refer to themselves and the categories that were mandated for the specific park project. Readers should not have a problem with these variations because, every day, we encounter the decision of whether to use black or African American, Latino or Puerto Rican, white or Jewish.

We hope that readers will consider the richness of this ever-changing terminology as both creative, part of the identity-making and affirming of individuals, and also destructive, in that it reflects the distinctions and dualities of black/white, white/people of color, and native/immigrant that pervade our language and can lead to discrimination in U.S. society. Although we do not focus directly on racism in the United States, racist ideology and practices underlie the cultural processes and forms of exclusion we describe in urban parks and beaches. We intend this work to be antiracist at its core, and to contribute to a better understanding of how racism, as a system of racial advantage/disadvantage, configures everyday park use and management.

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Introduction

William H. Whyte set out to discover 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 found that only a few plazas in New York City were attracting daily users and saw this decline as a threat to urban civility. 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 now-famous "rules for small urban spaces." And these rules were used by the New York City Planning Department to transform the public spaces in the city.

In this new century, we are facing a different kind of threat to public space—not one of disuse, but of patterns of design and management that exclude some people and reduce social and cultural diversity. In some cases this exclusion is the result of a deliberate program to reduce the number of undesirables, and in others, it is a by-product of privatization, commercialization, historic preservation, and specific strategies of design and planning. Nonetheless, these practices can reduce the vitality and vibrancy of the space or reorganize it in such a way that only one kind of person—often a tourist or middle-class visitor—feels welcomed. One of the consequences is that the number of open, urban public spaces is decreasing as more and more places are privatized, gated or fenced, closed for renovation, and/or redesigned to restrict activities. These changes can be observed in Latin America as well as the United States, and they are drastically reducing the number of places that people can meet and participate in public life (Low 2000).

These changes are potentially harmful to other democratic practices that depend on public space and an active public realm for cross-class and multicultural contact. At least in New York after 9/11, very few places retain the cultural and social diversity once experienced in all public spaces—but Washington Square and Union Square still do. Further, an increased defensiveness and desire for security has arisen since the terrorist attack. Concrete barriers, private
guards, and police protect what were previously open spaces and buildings. The threat to public safety comes not only from the outside, but also from the danger that Americans will overreact to the destruction of the Twin Towers by barricading themselves, and denying opportunities for expressing a sense of community, openness, and optimism.

Security and Fear of the "Other"

Long before the destruction of the World Trade Center, a concern with security had been a centerpiece of the postindustrial American city, expressed in its fenced-off, policed, and privatized spaces. Although many Americans have based their concerns on a fear of the crime and violence they believe pervades cities, this antitrust sentiment is often translated into a fear of the "other" across social classes and has become a mainstay of residential and workplace segregation ever since the development of suburbs. People began moving to the suburbs to escape the insecurity of dirt, disease, and immigrant populations in the inner city as soon as trolleys made commuting feasible. And suburbs offered more than just a physical distance from the city—a more powerful social distance emerged, maintained through a complex discourse of racial stereotypes and class bias.

But even within cities, similar forms of social distance took shape. Today, for instance, wealthy New Yorkers satisfy their desire for security by living in separate zones and limited-access, cooperative apartment buildings. Other city residents rely on neighborhood-watch programs and tolerate increasing restrictions on residential behavior. Even in the face of declining crime rates, this urban fear has ended up justifying more rigid controls of urban space.

The enhanced fear of terrorism—evidenced by increasingly novel surveillance techniques—is only making it worse. New electronic monitoring tactics are being implemented across the United States. Before September 11, 2001, the prospect that Americans would agree to live their lives under the gaze of surveillance cameras or real-time police monitoring seemed unlikely. But now some citizens are asking for outdoor cameras to be installed in places like Virginia Beach to scan faces of people at random, cross-checking them with faces of criminals stored in a computer database. Palm Springs is wiring palm trees with electronic eyes on the main business street. What were once considered Big Brother technologies and infringements of civil liberties are now widely treated as necessary for public safety—with little, if any, examination of the consequences. What is at stake is the cost we are paying for this increased security, measured not just in salaries of increasing numbers of police officers or in retinal-scanning technologies, but also in the loss of freedom of movement

and the cultural diversity in public space that has been so characteristic of the American way of life.

Globalization and Increased Diversity

With increasing globalization this trend has intensified. Two countervailing processes are occurring. Large numbers of people are moving from developing countries to more developed regions to obtain better jobs and education and increasingly use the public spaces of the city. Yet while the macroenvironment is becoming more diverse because of increased flows of immigrants, differences in local population growth rates, and an overall "browning" of America, local environments are experiencing increased vernacularization and homogeneity—immigrant enclaves are growing in the city, and gated communities are developing in the suburbs and edge cities. In this historical era of cultural and ethnic polarization, it has become increasingly important to engage in dialogue about these changes. How can we continue to integrate our diverse communities and promote social tolerance in this new political climate? One way, we argue, is to make sure that our urban parks, beaches, and heritage sites—those large urban spaces where we all come together—remain public, in the sense of providing a place for everyone to relax, learn, and recreate; and open so that we have places where interpersonal and intergroup cooperation and conflict can be worked out in a safe and public forum.

In 1990 Setha Low, with the help of Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld, founded the Public Space Research Group (PSRG) within the Center for Human Environments at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York to address these issues. PSRG brings together researchers, community members, and public officials in a forum of integrated research, theory, and policy. The group provides a theoretical framework for research that relates public space to the individual, the community, and to political and economic forces. PSRG is concerned with the social processes that make spaces into places, with conflicts over access and control of space, and with the values and meanings people attach to place.

In our 15 years of studying cultural uses of large urban parks and heritage sites, we have observed the local impacts of globalization: more immigrants, more diversity, new uses of park space, less public money for operations and maintenance, and greater sharing of management responsibility with private entities. We have also witnessed responses and reactions to these changes such as efforts to reassert old-order values through historic preservation and to impose greater control over public spaces through surveillance and physical reconstruction. We have documented how local and cultural misunderstanding-
ings can escalate into social problems that threaten the surrounding neighborhoods, triggering the same processes that we have seen occurring in small urban spaces. Immigrants, in some ways the mainstay of the U.S. economy, after 9/11 have become the “other” who is feared. Restrictive management of large parks has created an increasingly inhospitable environment for immigrants, local ethnic groups, and culturally diverse behaviors. If this trend continues, it will eradicate the last remaining spaces for democratic practices, places where a wide variety of people of different gender, class, culture, nationality, and ethnicity intermingle peacefully.

Lessons for Promoting and Managing Social and Cultural Diversity

Based on our concern that urban parks, beaches, and heritage sites might be subjected to these same homogenizing forces, we began a series of research projects to ascertain what activities and management techniques would encourage, support, and maintain cultural diversity. These projects produced a series of “lessons” that are similar to William H. Whyte’s rules for promoting the sociability of small urban spaces, but in this case, these lessons promote and/or maintain cultural diversity. Each lesson was derived from one or more of our park ethnographies and will be illustrated in the following chapters.

These lessons are not applicable in all situations, but are meant to provide a framework and guidelines for culturally sensitive decision making in park planning, management, and design. They can be summarized in the following six statements:

1. If people are not represented in historical national parks and monuments or, more importantly, if their histories are erased, they will not use the park.

2. Access is as much about economics and cultural patterns of park use as circulation and transportation; thus, income and visitation patterns must be taken into consideration when providing access for all social groups.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Contemporary historic preservation should not concentrate on restoring the scenic features without also restoring the facilities and diversions that attract people to a park.

6 Symbolic ways of communicating cultural meaning are an important dimension of place attachment that can be fostered to promote cultural diversity.

These lessons for promoting and sustaining cultural diversity in urban parks and heritage sites are just a beginning. More research and experimentation will be needed to fully understand the importance and difficulties of maintaining vibrant public spaces. But at the very least, the lessons demonstrate how diversity can be an essential component of evaluating the success of any human ecosystem. The remainder of this chapter discusses the theoretical and practical rationales for our position. We feel it is not enough to assert that cultural and social diversity is critical to large urban sites; the argument needs to be substantiated by current social theory and practice. There are economic as well as ethical reasons for considering diversity as essential to the success of any urban place. This chapter lays the groundwork for explaining why it is so critical to planning, designing, and managing large urban spaces in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Social Sustainability

What do we mean by “social sustainability”? Following David Throsby’s (1995) discussion, sustainability refers to the evolutionary or lasting qualities of the phenomena, avoidance of short-term or temporary solutions, and a concern with the self-generating or self-perpetuating characteristics of a system (Throsby 1995). Drawing a parallel with natural ecosystems that support and maintain a “natural balance,” “cultural ecosystems” support and maintain cultural life and human civilization (Throsby 1999a, 1999b). Sustainable development is the preservation and enhancement of the environment through the maintenance of natural ecosystems, while culturally sustainable development refers to the preservation of arts and society’s attitudes, practices, and beliefs.

Social sustainability is a subset of cultural sustainability; it includes the maintenance and preservation of social relations and meanings that reinforce cultural systems. Social sustainability specifically refers to maintaining and enhancing the diverse histories, values, and relationships of contemporary populations. But to truly understand social sustainability, we need to expand Throsby’s analysis by adding three critical dimensions:

1. Place Preservation

Cultural ecosystems are located in time and space—for a cultural ecosystem to be maintained or conserved, its place(s) must be preserved (Proshansky, Fabian, Kaminoff 1983; Low 1987). Cultural conservation and sustainability
require place preservation. This rather obvious point is crucial when dealing with the material environment and issues of cultural representation.

2. CULTURAL ECOLOGY THEORIES

Anthropologists employ a variety of theories of how cultural ecosystems work in particular places over time. For example, Bennett (1968; also see Netting 1993) modeled the ecological dynamics of natural systems to understand socio-political changes in the cultural ecosystems of farmers. Cohen (1968) developed a cultural evolutionary scheme to predict settlement patterns and sociocultural development in the developing regions. Many of these cultural ecology theories have been subjected to historical critiques; nonetheless, the dynamic and predictive aspects of cultural ecosystem models are useful when examining social change on a particular site (Barlett and Chase 2004).

The case of historic ParqueCentral in San José, Costa Rica, illustrates this point. Up until 1992 Parque Central was a well-established, spatially organized cultural ecosystem made up of shoeshine men on the northeast corner (figure 1.1), pensioners on the southwest corner (figure 1.2), vendors and religious practitioners on the northwest corner (figure 1.3), and prostitutes and workmen on the center inner circle. The established cultural ecosystem, however, was disrupted in 1993 when the municipality closed the park and redesigned the historic space (figure 1.4) to remove users perceived as unattractive to tourists and the middle class (Low 2000).

The redesign, however, destroyed the social ecological balance. A new social group, a gang of young men, took over the public space, creating a dangerous and even more undesirable environment, and Nicaraguans, rather than Costa Ricans, became the main inhabitants on Sundays. This case illustrates the fragility of existing cultural ecosystems (and their diverse niches); when the socio-spatial niches (places) are destroyed, the system may not be able to maintain
itself any more effectively than before the intervention. In fact, the redesign of a site, ostensibly to improve it, may create more problems and dysfunction if the social ecology of the space is overlooked.

3. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The third important dimension is cultural diversity. Biological diversity, so critical to the physical environment as a genetic repository and pool of adaptive evolutionary strategies, has its social counterpart in cultural diversity. Cultural diversity became a “politically correct” catchphrase during the 1980s in the United States, but it has not been addressed in planning and design—much less sustainable development—practice. While sustainable development includes “maintaining cultural diversity” as a conceptual goal, there is little agreement, much less research, on what it means. But cultural diversity provides a way to evaluate cultural and social sustainability, and is one observable outcome of the continuity of human groups in culturally significant places.

This modified cultural ecosystem/diversity model provides an effective theoretical basis for defining social sustainability. But social sustainability encompasses more than understanding cultural ecosystems and diversity. It implies a moral and political stance to sustain sociocultural systems—maintaining them, supporting them, and in some cases, improving them. And it is in this sense that a new series of questions must be asked. Is social sustainability applicable to all populations? We have been assuming that human ecosystems do not compete with each other, but of course they do. A successful cultural system can over-run another. Is this what we mean by sustainability—natural selection of cultural ecosystems, and the fittest survives based on an evolutionary or sociobiological model? Or should we be protecting weaker groups, systems, urban niches from stronger ones? And who is the we? These are moral and political questions that must be addressed in discussions of application and practice.

Ultimately, when we discuss social sustainability, we need to address issues at various scales: the local, the regional, and the global. Social sustainability at the local scale has been illustrated by the examples discussed so far, that is, understanding the cultural dynamics of a place so that specific individuals and their histories and values are sustained at or near the park or heritage site, across generations, and over time. At the regional scale, social sustainability might be better conceptualized through a broader plan that supports not only individuals but also neighborhoods, communities, churches, associations, and the institutional infrastructure necessary for the survival of cultural values and places of larger groups throughout history. Dolores Hayden’s *The Power of Place* (1995; see also Hayden 1990) provides a vision of documenting and commemo-

rating cultural histories of minorities and women that goes beyond the local and sustains larger elements of society. Social sustainability at the global scale moves closer to David Throsby’s “sustainable development” based on intergenerational, and cultural, equity and environmental justice.

Thus, social sustainability is the successful maintenance of existing cultural ecosystems and cultural diversity. It is safeguarded when the systems of social relations and meanings are inclusive, rather than exclusive. In this sense, social sustainability is fostered by understanding the intimate relationship between history, values, cultural representation, and patterns of use in any culturally diverse context. In fact, the inclusion of local people, their histories, and their values ultimately strengthens any park’s long-term social sustainability.

Cultural Property Rights

An equally powerful argument for cultural diversity can be made in terms of the ethics of respecting cultural property rights. At the most basic level, ethics is the consideration of the right way to live one’s life, particularly with regard to interpersonal behavior (Lefkowitz 2003). But while ethics is about doing the right thing, it does not necessarily mean the same thing in each situation. Stated broadly, it is about being accountable for your actions and avoiding harm to others, but interpreted in specific social, cultural, and historical situations.

Chris Johnston and Kristal Buckley (2001), when discussing the importance of cultural inclusion in heritage conservation practice, point out that ethics translates cultural values into actions. This translation is most easily seen in cross-cultural or multicultural situations where many of the cultural assumptions and values differ. Johnston and Buckley provide the example of how the Australian Archaeological Association developed a code of ethics to regulate the principles and conduct of its members in relation to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Among other things, this document acknowledges the indigenous ownership of cultural heritage knowledge and the primacy of the importance of heritage places to indigenous people” (2001, 89).

In this way, the Australian Archaeological Association defined what its ethical relationship to indigenous cultural knowledge ownership would be and set boundaries for appropriate behavior with regard to indigenous peoples and their cultural heritage.

At the heart of the argument about cultural property rights are questions about who owns the past and who has the right or responsibility to preserve the cultural remains of the past. “These questions raise important philosophical issues about the past . . . They also bring to the fore both the diversity of values associated with the preservation of cultural properties . . . and the conflicts of
or controlled by others rests on assumptions that power should be equitably distributed and that all cultural groups have rights to their native inheritance and/or home places. The same argument can be used to stress the importance of maintaining the cultural diversity of parks, beaches, and heritage sites.

Community Participation, Empowerment, and Citizenship

But cultural property rights are not the only way to think about these ethical issues. Wendy Sarkissian and Donald Perlgut (1986) give two reasons for seeking community involvement in the use of parks and heritage sites: 1) it is ethical, that is, in a democratic society, people whose lives and environments are directly affected should be consulted and involved, and 2) it is pragmatic because people must support programs and policies in order to mobilize their participation. One might add that the cost of top-down approaches to maintaining parks is staggering and that few governments can afford the economic costs of imposing external controls. Yet the benefits of collaborative approaches have not been fully realized. Even though community members who use a park often possess the knowledge and physical proximity to park resources, they are frequently not included in the planning and maintenance processes. This may be because of mistaken attitudes on the part of park administrators about the capabilities of residents and users, and because park managers do not have the staff, language, or collaborative training to work effectively with local community groups (Borrini-Feyerabend 1997).

Discussions of community participation and empowerment have become increasingly important as cities have become more ethnically diverse and more demographically and racially divided (Gantt 1993). Parks that originally served relatively homogeneous white middle-class or working-class neighborhoods must now provide recreation, educational and social programs, and relaxation for an increasingly multicultural and multiclass population. Mayors and city council members, as well as park managers and planners, are hard-pressed to mediate the conflicts that arise as park resources are stretched thin and as neighborhoods deteriorate because of the inability of local government to provide adequate services for all residents. And as we already know from the history of decreasing municipal funding, parks and heritage sites are low priorities when education and health care needs loom large.

The question arises, then, whether increased cultural diversity in the city can be utilized to improve the lives of residents (Gantt 1993). We argue that it can by empowering local groups to voice their needs and claim their histories in both local and national park contexts. By empowering communities to claim park resources as their own and to engage in the decision-making process that allocates funds and labor for park maintenance and programming, park...
managers gain collaborators in keeping the park well-attended, safe, and well-maintained. At the same time, city administrators and park planners learn more about the diverse needs of ever-changing neighborhood social and cultural groups and their values, making it possible to more accurately match cultural group needs with available resources.

There are a number of urban programs that have used community participation and empowerment strategies to structure the running of local cultural resources and park offices. For example, the “Charleston Principles” of Seattle, Washington, require that any proposed change include a community cultural planning process involving a broad spectrum of community members—public agencies, civic and social groups, educators and students, business and economic interests, artists, community leaders, and cultural organizations of all types. In this way, community empowerment is a legally mandated part of any planning and design process (King County Landmarks and Heritage Program 1999).

Another example is “Taking Action,” a project in Australia that has produced a handbook for actively involving communities in heritage projects (Johnston and Clarke 2001). Using the same ethical and practical arguments we have discussed here, the authors see community involvement as part of participatory democracy whether a project is run by an elected government or initiated and directed by the community itself. By involving the community, it is possible to: 1) understand community aspirations and values, 2) find out about community needs, 3) learn about the locality and community, 4) share perspectives, 5) find out about differences as well as similarities, and 6) ultimately create new solutions that draw upon a wider range of ideas (2001, 3). Johnston and Clarke’s report supplies a checklist of ways to communicate with people and involve cultural groups, and it is an excellent guide for beginning any community involvement project.

Other collaborative programs emphasize the inclusion of indigenous communities often overlooked in park planning and administration and marginalized by local politics. Barbara Harrison (2001) summarizes the experiences of working with indigenous groups and researchers in North America as well as New Zealand and Australia to develop her guide to collaborative working relationships in research and applied practice.

The concept of citizenship, and its accompanying rights, underlies each of these projects. The liberal notion of citizenship defines people as individuals who have civil, political, and social rights within the nation-state. But this definition is limited in that citizenship must also be considered full membership of a community within a neighborhood, region, or state, and membership of individuals within one or more community groups. Citizenship should be understood as inclusive of state, regional, neighborhood, and community levels of individual participation, thus producing a multistranded and multilayered model of the sociopolitical relationship of people and society (Yuval-Davis 1998).

Most debates over citizenship are about the basic right of entry into a country—whether a person can stay, maintain a residence, and not be repatriated—and about work-status issues, participatory duties such as voting, and availability of social welfare benefits. But these same notions can be applied to the rights of individuals and groups to participate in decisions about places, resources, and services that touch their lives. We argue that citizenship also should focus on the role that individuals and communities play in determining the success or failure of their local open spaces and historic resources. Full citizenship includes community involvement and participation in the ongoing life of the neighborhood and region, and as such it provides another justification for community empowerment and participation in park planning processes. If all community and cultural groups are included, then we are also empowering citizen-leaders and participants who will continue to contribute to the area and its growth and stability over time.

**Dissonant Heritage, Negative Heritage, and the Politics of Meaning**

With the empowerment of community and cultural groups, however, there emerges a set of problems and conflicts that J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth (1996) have called “dissonant heritage.” The concept of dissonant heritage is derived from the idea that heritage is a contemporary product shaped by history in which different narratives exist. Dissonance in heritage suggests a discordance in these histories and lack of agreement and consistency in the way that the past is represented (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Dissonant heritage is present whenever there is more than one meaning for an object, place, or landscape; most often it is embedded in a conflict between tourism and sacred use of a site or between global and local meanings (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000).

The creation of any heritage site—and any park, we would add—“potentially disinherit[s] or exclude[s] those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning defining that heritage” (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000, 24). It is a common condition in multicultural societies in which inclusiveness is determined by a group’s proximity to political and economic power. Despite the development of pluralist societies, heritage—and many other aspects of the landscape and built environment—often reflects only the dominant culture. Certain European societies typically do not acknowledge
their former colonial subjects (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000), while white Americans often avoid recognizing their being the beneficiaries of slavery and the early dependence on slave labor in the plantation economy.

Kenneth E. Foote (1997) addresses these issues of unresolved meaning and the politics of memory by arguing that the invisibility of some violent or tragic events, especially those dealing with minority populations such as African Americans or Latinos, indicates a certain tolerance or acceptance of such events as part of American life (294). Other tragic events, such as the Battle of Gettysburg, are celebrated as fundamental to understanding the American past. This dual tendency—to ignore and to celebrate—reflects Americans’ ambivalence toward events that both bind and divide us and “casts an unusual shadow over American history and the American landscape” (Foote 1997, 294). Thus, the practice of telling all sides of the story and of uncovering uncomfortable and conflicting views of the past that produce dissonant heritage has never been popular. But the pervasiveness of dissonant heritage is vital to our discussion of urban parks and public spaces in that it provides another rationale for why cultural diversity and community inclusiveness are so important. The negotiation of dissonant meanings and their resolution in forms representative of all cultural groups and communities is the ideal toward which we should be working.

Cultural Values

In historical preservation practice “values,” like ethics, means the morals and ideas that guide action as well as the specific qualities and positive characteristics of things as seen by a particular person or group (Mason 2002). Sociological approaches consider values “generalized beliefs about what is or is not desirable, but also as motives . . . that influence people’s actions” (Feather 1992, 111). Psychologists such as Joel Lefkowitz (2003), on the other hand, define values as “relatively stable cognitive representations of what the person believes are desirable standards of conduct or generalized end states” (139; also see 151); Lefkowitz adds that values have emotional and evaluative importance to one’s ideal self-concept, and provide motivation for people’s actions and choices. In our discussion, we draw upon elements of each of these definitions and utilize the concept to refer to the meanings and feelings, positive or negative, that people attribute to their lives, environment, actions and behaviors, and world as a whole. Values, however, are not inherent in an object, action, or landscape but are contingent on the circumstances—the place, time, and company—in which a judgment is being made. As opposed to the psychological definition of values as relatively fixed and stable within a person, our perspective identifies community values as often fluid and changing, although they may be relatively fixed depending on the domain.

“Cultural values” refers to the shared meanings associated with people’s lives, environments, and actions that draw upon cultural affiliation and living together. They are often expressed as value judgments, that is to say, something is considered bad or good depending on how it registers with a person’s or group’s attitudes at a particular moment. These value judgments, usually expressed as liking or disliking some person, place, or object, provide information about underlying unspoken cultural assumptions, beliefs, and practices. Cultural values are our best indicators as to what people think and feel about a landscape such as a park or heritage site, and they can act as a guide to understanding park use and disuse, place attachment or lack of it, and symbolic meanings. According to Randall Mason, “sociocultural values are at the traditional core of conservation—values attached to an object, building, or place because it holds meaning for people or social groups due to its age, beauty, artistry, or association with a significant person or event or (otherwise) contributes to processes of cultural affiliation” (2002, 11).

We would add that cultural values also accrue to objects, buildings, and landscapes through living in a place for a long period of time, working in a place, narrating stories and telling myths about a place, and engaging in any activity that would generate a relationship between a person or group and a particular location. This kind of “cultural place attachment” (Altman and Low 1992; Low 1992) often develops between people and places, particularly places such as parks, beaches, and heritage sites that have potential meaning and cultural significance through their ongoing use and role in memory making.

One important concern when discussing cultural values is that the term cultural is politically as well as socially constructed and manipulated for a variety of ends. Cultural values, similar to cultural identities, are not necessarily definable attributes that can be measured or codified, but they must be understood as negotiated, fluid, and context-dependent. The political importance of a neighborhood can change depending on how the residents present themselves and their values to the various players involved. Sociopolitically constructed cultural labels such as black, African American, white, Jamaican, or Haitian evoke different meanings and responses from New York City officials and planners and are actively manipulated by the community in neighborhood descriptions and media coverage (Low 1994). Poor people and their values, however, are often the most vulnerable because the local constituency does not have the political and economic power to struggle against the definitions and decisions of government officials and private entrepreneurs.

Further, processes of cultural hegemony—that is, the preeminence of one
cultural group's ideas and values over another's—maintain the control of middle- to upper-middle-class white values over the definitions of what can be considered relevant to other cultural groups in a neighborhood or region (Lawrence and Low 1990). The values of planners, managers, administrators, designers, and National Park Service employees are also hegemonic because of the entrenched belief that professionals know more than the local community. Yet when elites and professionals dictate what should happen to an urban space, their landscape preferences do not necessarily correspond to the needs and desires of the local users.

Cultural values and their representation in park planning and renovation processes are decisive in producing programs that will work in a specific community location. Prospect Park, discussed in Chapter 3, is an excellent example of how local cultural values do not necessarily match the values of the professionals who are managing the park and making decisions about renovations and financial investment in the park's future. Relying on professional expertise rather than taking seriously cultural values about park resources reinforces the traditional inequality of power relations and exacerbates race and class conflict already in evidence. Another example of the importance of understanding cultural values is discussed in Chapter 4, on the Ellis Island Bridge Proposal. Historic preservationists did not understand why it would be important to build a bridge for local residents until they confronted the value placed on visiting the park in large family groups by the black community. Suddenly the $7.50 price of a ferry became $75.00 for 10 family members, putting visiting or attending programs or activities out of the reach of these families.

What Is Cultural Diversity Good For?

Ulf Hannerz (1996) suggests that the value of diversity is so entrenched in the contemporary discourse about culture that it is difficult to reflect clearly on it. So he offers what he calls his “seven arguments for diversity” to make the point that there are many basic reasons to consider cultural diversity important to our lives. He includes many of the points that we have made in this discussion and adds others that we have not emphasized, arguing that cultural diversity is important because it provides:

1. the moral right to one's culture, including one's cultural heritage and cultural identity;
2. the ecological advantage of different orientations and adaptations to limited environmental resources;
3. a form of cultural resistance to political and economic domination by elites and power asymmetries and a way to counteract relations of dependency;
4. the aesthetic sense and pleasurable experience of different worldviews, ways of thinking, and of other cultures in their own right;
5. the possibility of confrontation between cultures that can generate new cultural processes;
6. a source of creativity; and
7. a fund of tested knowledge about ways of going about things. (Hannerz 1996, 56–57)

We would add that attention to cultural diversity also leads to community empowerment, expanded citizenship, and the involvement of people in the governance and maintenance of their neighborhoods and workplaces. It expands the notion of individual rights of citizenship to include the survival of one's culture and/or cultural group, and the marking of its importance in the landscape. We would also add that creativity from cultural contact and interaction flows from cooperation as well as from working out solutions to conflicts and confrontation. Therefore, cultural diversity, utilized effectively and honestly, leads to more democratic practices and peaceful relationships between people within a locality especially if all groups are treated equally with respect for their needs, desires, and adequate space and resources for work, home, and recreation.

We end this introduction where we began, by asserting how crucial understanding cultural diversity and community values is to having a successful park, beach, or heritage site. Assessing social and cultural values remains the best way to monitor changes in the local neighborhood or region, and we offer a number of ways to elicit and collect these values in the following examples. Each case study emphasizes one of the lessons for large urban spaces. For example, Independence National Historical Park focuses on cultural representation and its impact on local group attendance. But each case also encompasses all of the lessons. Any inclusive urban space exemplifies many of these principles and others that we have not yet examined.

This book begins a conversation between social scientists—anthropologists and environmental psychologists—and the decision makers who direct, design, plan, and manage our nation's parks, beaches, and heritage sites. The goal is to contribute what we have learned from our research experiences to making urban parks the best places they can be for the most people. Parks offer urban residents a place away from home that is essential to their physical and men-
tal health and well-being. This is particularly true for the poor and working-class residents who do not have backyards, much less vacation homes, where they can rest and recreate. We hope the lessons and the research on which they are based help to improve and promote these socially important and wonderful places—the urban parks, beaches, and heritage sites of New York and the rest of the Northeast.

Organization of This Volume

The book includes case studies drawn from our research on National Park Service parks, seashores, and heritage sites: The Ellis Island Bridge Proposal (Chapter 4), Jacob Riis Park in the Gateway National Recreation Area (Chapter 5), and Independence National Historical Park (Chapter 7), as well as two case examples drawn from our work on New York City parks: Prospect Park (Chapter 3) and Orchard Beach in Pelham Bay Park (Chapter 6). Chapter 8 provides the methodological background and specific anthropological research techniques used to gather these data for those interested in undertaking this type of research in their own parks and communities. The conclusion revisits the six lessons we identify for promoting, maintaining, and managing cultural diversity in urban parks and reflects on what was learned from this long-term research project on urban park policy.

As Michael Brill (1989), Sam Bass Warner (1993), and perhaps others have noted, the variety of park types has multiplied since parks first appeared in North America in the early nineteenth century. Many kinds of public spaces fall under the general rubric of "park." The case studies in this volume are a sampling of urban park types: a landscape park, two recreational beach parks, and two historical parks. To situate these cases from New York and Philadelphia within a national context, this chapter provides a comparative review of the history of various park types in the United States.

The first urban parks in the United States were relatively unimproved commons, places originally set aside for grazing cattle and training militias. New York’s original common is now the heavily gated City Hall Park. Boston Common is perhaps the best example of the type. Set aside only six years after the original settlement, Boston Common has maintained its 44 acres and something of the informal, unornamented character of a colonial common. Straight, paved paths lined with benches crisscross its territory in practical fashion, enabling people to cross over easily in their travels about town. Large trees shade the grass-covered ground with no shrubs, ornamental trees, flower beds, or other plant varieties to complicate the picture. The Common has several frankly recreational facilities: tennis courts, ball field, children’s playground, and seasonal skating/wading pond. Like many smaller city squares in New York and elsewhere, Boston Common is more an extension of urban space than a refuge from it. No perimeter plantings screen the surrounding cityscape from view. Rather, much of the character of the place comes from the visibility of adjacent structures from within the grounds.

Boston Common was less parklike before the early nineteenth century. The 1820–1840 period brought a movement to create tree-lined paths for strolling by the fashionable citizens who lived nearby (Domosh 1998). The formal paths and tree-lined promenades date from this period, and the practice of grazing cattle was ended. Similar improvements were made at this time to the coarse open spaces of town commons and squares throughout New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Philadelphia’s original five squares were similarly devoid of landscaping until this time, when paths were laid and trees
Rethinking Urban Parks

In a democratic society could come only from a network of volunteer and recreational activities that was the crucial ingredient, reading groups, gymnasiums, and other associations, examples of communication and social capital. Olmsted believed that such associations could take advantage of the great interracial and interclass settings for the fundamental process of making community. Cultural diversity is a new term because the point is that people are scattered over far-flung cities of today lack the spatial environmental rapid-assessment programs have appeal and critics: not in my yard, for "not in my yard," refers to a generalized sentiment to new development of all kinds of people in an amicable setting. The expression nimby, for "not in my yard," refers to a generalized sentiment to new development of all kinds of people in an amicable setting. The expression nimby, for "not in my yard," refers to a generalized sentiment to new development of all kinds of people in an amicable setting.

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