

crowdedness, chaotic action, disorientation, noisy traffic, or being alone in the space at 3:00 a.m. We resonate with the space's energy, especially if it is strong, consistent, and pervasive.

Contextual circumstances affecting ambience were discussed earlier under Path and Portal. They apply to Place too. Temperature, wind, sun, clouds, rain, snow form context for buildings and activities. Early morning, mid-morning, lunch time, late afternoon, early evening, late evening. Each has an energy and feel. Ambience is often noticeably different on holidays, Mondays, Fridays, weekends, and Sundays. Tourist season, vacation time for locals, agricultural rhythms in the country around the town. Christmas buying frenzy, and special city events all cause inflections in place atmosphere. Yearly, seasonal, monthly, weekly, daily cycles manifest mood clues like banners, flags, posters, closed restaurants, turned-off fountains, and darkened windows.

Lighting joins weather, calendar, clock, season, and events as strong influence on space feel. Natural light can be soft and diffuse or sharp and intense. The blue of early morning light sets a different scene from the gold light of sunset. Geography, weather, season, time of day shape natural light together with the configuration of the space. Sun angle, intensity, and color rendition constantly change, producing many moods over a single day. And how is the space lit at night? By store display windows? Flickering gas lamps? White globe clusters on ornate iron poles? Down lights nestled in shrubs? Dramatic up lighting on key facades? Fountain lighting? Each of these illumination methods and fixture placement strategies contributes to evening ambience and draws attention to particular space elements and attributes.

Historical significance

The historical significance of a public space is invisible, yet powerful as a contextual factor affecting ambience. A kind of knowing that infuses all our other appreciations of the place. The shape of plaza history might include a person or group, a series of events or single happening, an extended evolutionary process, or a powerful idea. What role did the place play in the genealogy of the town? How has the space been used since first human contact? Did an important person live there? Is it where citizens assembled in times of civic crisis? Celebrations? Executions? Pronouncements? Was this the site of a revolutionary speech? Riot? Assassination? Triumphant return of soldiers? Often, historical significance is not singular but plural and layered, perhaps beginning

before there was a human settlement and spanning to present time. History contributes to ambience by being a lens through which we take in the tangibles of the site. Or a curtain behind experience whose color reflects onto all we engage with our senses. History can be embedded in a building, a spot on the plaza floor, a tree, a balcony. Somehow, magically, the spirits, echoes, energies, and emotions of history are here, mixing with and flavoring present experience. What was is co-creator of atmosphere with what is. Then is homogenized with now, resulting in a then-now ambience.

A place's past can extend and reinforce present-day energy and mood, or it can contrast, even contradict present ambience. The site might be the location where political power was first consolidated and where the seat of government is situated today. A wonderful cathedral may celebrate the site of an ancient miracle. When history contrasts with contemporary atmosphere, the juxtaposition of yesterday and today can be humorous, poignant, inspiring, tragic. Gross injustice and suffering marked by a magnificent monument. A gambling casino on the site where the town was founded. A mega department store sited where the tiny ancient town market used to be. A marvelous museum for the work of an artist who died penniless. A single, simple flame at the grave of a complex hero.

Our own present mood, health, emotions, mind state, recent experience, expectations, and personal history form another kind of contextual filter through which we behold place. Memories of the space when we were last there tilt the feel of this visit in their direction. Aesthetic preferences, political affiliation, religious opinions, moral values are ingredients in our appreciation of atmosphere and place history. Are all our senses in good health, and are we using them all to engage the place? Is our attention on the space and activity, or are we preoccupied with personal problems? Are we inclined to compare the site with other favorite places? Is this locale the culminating experience in our stroll, or is the best yet to come? We are complex instruments for appreciating ambience because there are so many kinds of filters in us through which a place is experienced. No wonder we differ in our opinions and descriptions of urban spaces.

Place reputation, symbolism, and name join contextual considerations as factors affecting ambience. These are identity-shaping issues, the way a site is known.

Reputation is the accumulated history of opinions about a place, a strong influence on what we