

INTRODUCTORY MAP: THE STORY OF ME

Draw a cognitive map of your hometown. This map will have Paths, Edges, Districts, Nodes and Landmarks identified. Make your map as interesting and colorful as possible. The map is designed to introduce YOU to your classmates through a visual representation of what is important to you about your town. You may pick any town – your childhood home, or your current residence. You may use a computer or paper and pens; this is not a professional mapping assignment. The goal is for you to convey **the way you see your town, its emotional, practical, recreational elements that give this place meaning to you.**

When you have completed your map, take a photo and upload your map to the Discussion Board titled **“Introductory Maps: The Story of Me.”**

Specific Instructions follow below:

Understanding Neighborhoods Through Mental Mapping: An Application of Kevin Lynch's Theory Using Universal Design for Learning Principles

Background

Kevin Lynch's classic text *The Image of the City*, published in 1960 by The M.I.T. Press, introduces urban designers and planners to a new way of thinking about the urban form of a city. Rather than emphasize the traditional way we learn about our city (through professional maps and plans), Lynch focuses on how people in the city actually use and perceive their physical environment. A common exercise in urban design and urban planning courses is to ask students to draw a map of their neighborhood or city (or of a common geographical area such as the university campus) in order to develop a better understanding of the differences between the physical map and layout of an area and how people actually perceive the same area. For example, the physical path network of a university campus may not reflect how students actually travel throughout the campus. Popular shortcuts may not show up on any campus map, but the users are well aware of them. Another example could be gang territories. These are rarely depicted on any city map, but the gang members and residents of the community are well aware of the different gang districts.

The learning objective for this type of mental mapping activity is rarely how well a student can draw a map. The point is for students to start thinking differently about cities and their urban form. This task can easily be accomplished through different instructional media including drawings, written text, or oral presentations. By allowing students to choose the form of their mental map, we provide a learning environment where students with disabilities that may make drawing a map difficult or impossible, as well as students who may simply prefer a different type of expression, the opportunity to participate fully in the process without the stigma of a special accommodation.

Assignment Description

For this assignment, students will prepare a mental map of their neighborhood (or any other geographic area relevant for the course such as university campus, hometown, etc.). The mental map should depict Kevin Lynch's five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks. Students are free to choose the best media to develop their mental map. This could be a hand or computer-aided drawing (as long as it is not a "professional" map), a written essay describing their neighborhood, or an oral presentation (short video-tape or audio file). Students could also prepare short (5 min. max) PowerPoint presentations incorporating multiple modes. As part of the assignments, students should explore the concept of legibility and how this type of exercise could be useful for urban planners and designers in gaining a better understanding of how residents perceive their community.

Additional Resources

Lynch, Kevin. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Boston: The M.I.T. Press.
[Center for Spatially Integrated Social Science](#)
[MIT Institute Archives & Special Collections](#)

Paths

Paths consists of the "channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves" (Lynch, p. 47). These can include streets, paths, transit routes, or any other defined path of movement. It is important to note that the paths an individual identifies may not correspond to a traditional street network. These are often the most predominant items in an individual's mental map as this is main mechanism for how they experience their city.

Edges

Edges provide the boundaries that separate one region from another, the seams that join two regions together, or the barriers that close one region from another. They are linear elements, but are not the paths along with the individual experiences the built environment. They can be physical edges such as shorelines, walls, railroad cuts, or edges of development, or they can be less well-defined edges that the individual perceives as a barrier.

Districts

Districts are "medium-to-large sections of the city" (Lynch, p. 47). They are typically two-dimensional features, often held together by some commonality. The individual often enters into or passes through these districts. According to Lynch, most people use the concept of districts to define the broader structure of their city.

Nodes

Nodes are points within the city, strategically located, into which the individual enters (and which is often the main focal point to which she or he is traveling to or from). There are often junctions – a crossing or converging of paths. They often have a physical element such as a popular hangout for the individual or a plaza area. In many cases, the nodes are the centers of the district that they are in.

Landmarks

Landmarks are also a point-reference (similar to nodes). However, unlike nodes, which the individual enters during his or her travels, landmarks remain external features to the individual. They are often physical structures such as a building, sign, or geographic features (e.g. mountain). The range of landmarks is extensive, but the commonality is that there are used by the individual to better understand and navigate the built environment.