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Street societies re-invented: An exploratory study of the Indian community in Chicago

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Street societies re-invented: An exploratory study of the Indian community in Chicago

by

Arpita Ray

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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Program of Study Committee:
Ferrucio Trabalzi, Major Professor
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2008

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Dedicated to my Family and Friends
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Chapter 1

Overview

“...streets are places of social and commercial encounter and exchange. They are where you meet people - which is a basic reason to have cities in any case.”

Allan Jacobs

1.1. Introduction

Building on Allan Jacobs’s idea of the street as a socially dynamic and interactive space in the city, this project analyzes the daily life of Indian immigrants on Devon Avenue in Chicago and how they use and appropriate the streets as a way to address issues of design for today’s multiple publics, through a variety of critical lenses. Devon Avenue remains an economic and cultural anchor, a place where commerce, culture, and community combine to create a place unique in its character. This study intends to be a point of departure from planning’s general tendency to superimpose the one-size-fits all master plan by closely observing how these migrant groups informally respond and appropriate in resourceful and imaginative ways to ad hoc conditions and marginal spaces. Finally, this study attempts to produce “context-sensitive” solutions for collective and individual experiences as found on these streets.

1 http://www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/placemakers/ajacobs
1.2. **Research Questions and Research Design**

Although broad in scope, this study attempts at addressing specific questions. In particular:

1) How do shop owners appropriate public space?
2) How do Indian people/customers/pedestrians appropriate public space?
3) How does the physical and regulatory setting support the practice of space appropriation by the Indians?
4) What are physical and regulatory barriers on Devon to space appropriation?

My methodology primarily involved direct observation (captured and animated in photographs), since observation has been found to be the best method to discover complex interactions in natural settings. Psycho-geographic analysis of the site (sketches, observation and literature review) helped in the exploration of how this urban form shapes the psyche and sociability of Devon. The observations were recorded over a disjointed time of about ten months (September 2007 to June 2008) – covering the range of temperatures and at different times of the day (7a.m- 9a.m, noon- 2p.m, 5p.m-6p.m and 8p.m to 10 p.m) as the activity patterns changed. The study also involved a series of interviews, mostly informal and conversational in nature in order to help describe the meaning of the phenomena that these individuals shared. This involved three levels of enquiry – the first that focused on the informants past experience of the street; second, focused on the current experience and the third, what the informant would like to see different in order to enhance the social dynamics of Devon. I have used several secondary sources of data to over ride the questions of internal validity that is said to be lacking in using photographs as a tool for research (which I explain in greater detail later) and to also lend a historical perspective to the study.
Demographic data was used only to suggest the age of the general population and what might engage them in the life of the street as well as answering questions of interest that might not be represented by the majority. For example, women found a need to justify their presence on the street – they came there only for a purpose. To eat, shop, walk the elderly and the children, to meet a friend – but never without purpose.

Though generalization of the characteristics is viable to a great extent, superimposition of results might not be. Projections based on the observations of Devon on communities with different composition of population, land use mix, density, weather, physical characteristics and demographics might not always yield appropriate results and hence weaken issues of ‘generalizability’ and ‘transferability’. Also, as with any other qualitative method, the analysis of data is not free from bias (rooting from my personal experience as a user of the street and as a woman researcher in the male dominated society of Devon) floating issues of external validity.

Figure 1.1. Devon’s geographical location and public transit routes.
Figure 1.2. The eight block study area – Devon Avenue between North California Avenue and North Western Avenue.

Figure 1.3. Map showing bus routes, bus stops, one and two way traffics, off street private parking lots.

Though the Indo-Pak commercial strip on Devon Avenue stretches seventeen blocks between North California Avenue and North Damen Avenue, I chose to study the eight block (a typical block dimension being 660 feet by 330 feet - one eighth of a mile) stretch between North California Avenue and North Western Avenue, primarily because this stretch of Devon is the most well connected (in ward 50) by major public transportation routes and has prominent stores (in terms of number of years in business) that generate significant revenue and most of whose owners are part of community organizations that help make decisions for
the community at large. This stretch also has the largest family size and is the most diverse and has recently been rezoned as a pedestrian street.²

1.3. Findings of the Research

The people on Devon self-organize as they use, appropriate and modify while negotiating differences. Inherent in the interaction of daily life on Devon is the dynamics of gender hierarchy displayed among pedestrians and residents. This is observed in the bunching patterns, gestures and clothing.

1.4. Thesis Organization

Chapter 1: Planning and the Urban Street. The chapter introduces the importance of the study of the street as a public place. Secondly, it summarizes the ways in which the social dimensions of the street have been discussed within the academic and professional world. In particular I discuss Rational Planning, New Urbanism, and Everyday Urbanism approaches. In the chapter, I argue that contemporary approaches tends to re-evaluate the social, cultural, and political dimension of the street away from a purely functional perspective typical of past approaches.

² The regulations governing Pedestrian Streets are intended to promote transit, economic vitality, pedestrian safety and comfort. The City of Chicago (http://egov.cityofchicago.org/city/) lists the characteristics of the best pedestrian oriented streets as those having narrow rights of ways, landscaped sidewalks, numerous storefronts and lots of pedestrians.
Chapter 2: Historic Context: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis. This chapter provides a history of the Indian immigrants in Chicago and especially on Devon. It forms the base for the case study that follows in chapter three by providing important facts and figures.

Chapter 3: Case Study: Devon Avenue, Chicago, IL. This chapter deals the appropriation of spaces on Devon, in the organization of everyday survival and in the spontaneous structure of everyday practices. It explores how migrant groups informally respond in resourceful and imaginative ways to ad hoc conditions and marginal spaces.

Chapter 4: Conclusion. The issues raised in the introduction, argued in chapter one and analyzed in detail in chapter three is summarized and systematized in the conclusion. It concludes that everyday practices on Devon is heterogeneously produced, used and negotiated, the study of the street brings forward a plethora of opportunity to aid socialization, appropriation and modification by its users by providing an enjoyable backdrop and a multitude of opportunities for creative engagement with each other and with the physical environment amidst regulatory boundaries.
Chapter 2

Planning and the Urban Street

“The failure of modern planning is not in its inability to turn the city into an efficient machine for capitalism but in its inability to ensure that places are designed for people”

Whyte (1988:253)

The history of modern planning can be seen as the history of restructuring and reconstruction of the lived experience of and in the city. Modern planning aims at systemizing and regularizing the street and devaluing the role and the experience of the streets as a place for lived experiences by imposing an order on the unpredictability of social relations by re-territorializing social relationships into mutually exclusive land uses through zoning. The desire of rational planners to rationalize, define and manipulate the urban environment has resulted in the marginalization of the less mobile- the pedestrians.

Hindsight has allowed planning to be caricatured as the root cause of the failure of utopian modernism, where utopian goals of “progress” were replaced by more functional goals of “efficiency” (Relph, 1987). Planning’s statutory role, conceived as a means of regulating development, was altered to encourage growth “by any and every possible means”, as the modern city began to face the intractable problems of structural decline and the re-emergence of a substantial urban underclass (Hall, 1988:343). Such a transition led to the abstraction of planning from “the motives and conflicts that led to the production of the built environment” and to the wider processes of the capitalist urbanization (Dear, 1995:32). In contrast, Jacob’s (1961) work articulated a vision of the city that was vibrant and alive, a city of bricolage where the local was predominant. This was a reaction against the “mono-
functional” zoning (Blake, 1977) that characterized much of the “segregated” modern/rational planning system (Whyte, 1988).

Pioneered by environmental design researchers such as William Whyte (1980) and the late Donald Appleyard (1981), the “livable streets” movement recognizes the importance of the street environment for the social life of cities. While popular in Europe, and with some planners and social scientists elsewhere, the livable streets movement has had limited application in the US, due in part to the reluctance of many public works departments to turn control of the street back to the people. (Livable Streets: Donald Appleyard: 1981:26)

Kevin Lynch, observer of urban life argues in *A Theory of Good City Form* (1981) that we have five basic public space rights: presence, use and action, appropriation, modification, and disposition. These rights, simply stated, are that people should not only have access to the public space, but also freedom to use, change, and even claim the space, as well as to transfer their rights of use and modification to other individuals. Lynch’s spatial rights provide an effective measurement of the streets publicness and democracy.

Every street has its own level of democracy, and a variety of techniques are useful in assaying this quality (Jacobs 1985). Some of the more effective traditional research methods involve the observation of street use with behavior mapping techniques, including counts of pedestrian and bicycle flow, tracking the street users, mapping of physical elements on the street, and overlaying behavioral data (Project for Public Spaces 1981).

Visions of order, control and appropriateness implemented through the rational desire to ensure that acceptable behaviors happened in appropriate places in order to exercise strict moral control and to romanticize the “idealized” social space has been the underlying principle of rational planning. While planning may not have a utopian future, its potential as
a mediator should not be underestimated. Planners have argued over time over significantly
different and incompatible ideas of the importance of mobility vs. the importance of place,
stressing on the design for highly ‘sanitized’ and efficient access corridors and destinations
that are comfortable refuges from such corridors (Girling, 1994; Calthrope, 91). Rather than
implementing a utopian vision, planners have created a system that is incapable of dealing
with the social problems of the city and instead focuses on delivering “meager welfare
offerings that help maintain the status quo” (Goodman, 1971:13)

In an attempt to “come out” of the heavy handed autocratic principles of modern and
rational planning, two idealistic alternative approaches to city design (in the mid 1990’s)
have brought the notion of “culture” back in the foreground: New Urbanism and Everyday
Urbanism.

2.1. New Urbanism and Everyday Urbanism

New Urbanism is not only utopian but also structuralist in its conception (it maintain
that there is a direct structural relation between physical form and social behavior). New
Urbanism’s principles call for designers to reinvent pedestrian civic space that would help
(presumably) foster a sense of community amongst its pedestrians. It embraces traditional
architecture and urban formalism by romanticizing the mythic past and deriving from the
nostalgia. Against popular belief, over-regulated environments are not conducive to vibrancy
and integration. The sense of community as defined by new urbanists is a key site for social
control and “surveillance bordering on overt social repression” (Harvey, 1997:69). New
Urbanism is one such effort. Physical factors, while by no means negligible in their influence
upon social life, set limits for social and psychological existence and development. The
ability of physical design to solve social problems outright is not only ambitious but also far-fetched. My fundamental skepticism about New Urbanism is that while being naively nostalgic, it attempts to manipulate the masses with the sign but not the power of the public realm. What is hence important is the need to consider in a realistic way, the social goals that can be affected by physical planning- community, social equity and the notion of common good (Talen, 2000).

On the other hand, Everyday Urbanism is nonutopian, conversational, and non-structuralist. It celebrates and builds on everyday, ordinary life and reality, with little pretense about the possibility of a perfectible, tidy or ideal built environment. Indeed, as John Kaliski and others in Everyday Urbanism point out, the city and its designers must be open to and incorporate “the elements that remain elusive: ephemerality, cacophony, multiplicity and simultaneity” (Kaliski, 1999, p2). It downplays the direct relationship between physical design and social behavior- it celebrates and intensifies the existing everyday conditions such as the public markets and street life, than overturning them and starting over with a different model. It, for instance, delights in the way indigenous and migrant groups informally respond in resourceful and imaginative ways to ad hoc conditions and marginal spaces. It stresses on urban design by default than by intension (Kelbaugh, 2000). Public places are ‘co-produced’.

The involvement of public process that recognizes both the cultural and the political importance of place and respects all citizens and their diverse heritage, require only modest expenditures to enhance social meaning in public spaces (Hayden, 1997). Therefore, instead of approaching the city through the lens of a complex, heavy-handed one-size-fits-all master
plan, we should view it as an agglomeration of neighborhoods, each influencing people’s worldviews, perceptions, attitudes, and values while strengthening the United States social fabric.

Streets are social settings for activities that bring people together. The interplay of humans, the social, economic characteristics are crucial variables in street design. They are not simply channels of automobile traffic, but rather, constitute a network of public spaces for diverse users that can be used to organize and unify the urban system. “The best streets encourage participation…. participation in the life of the street involves the ability if people who occupy buildings (including houses and stores) to add to the street, individually and collectively, to be apart of it…the best streets are those that can be remembered. They leave continuing positive impressions” (Jacobs, 1993:9).

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3 [http://www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/issuepapers/great_cities_initiative](http://www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/issuepapers/great_cities_initiative)
Chapter 3

Historic Context: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis

In this chapter, I address the context of the Indian immigrant lives on Devon Avenue. The first part of the chapter deals with the place of the Indians in the American Society and how they has adopted and to some extent assimilated into the host society while still keeping territorial rights for themselves. I have elaborated on some facts and figures establishing the trends in population, income, modes of transportation (mostly from secondary sources) and community concerns to aid in understanding of the community better. The issues are explored in greater detail in chapter three.

“...I was also fully aware of the diversities and the divisions of the Indian life, of classes, castes, religious, races, different degrees of cultural development. Yet, I think a country with a long cultural background and a common outlook in life develops a spirit that is peculiar to it and that is impressed on all its children, however much they may differ among themselves.”

Jawaharlal Nehru

In Nehru’s words, echo the complexity of relationships between language, ethnic origin, regional and religious identity, that add to the variety on Devon Avenue, Chicago. Devon is a happy cauldron of various communities and culture. The differences have more room for expression in the ethnic neighborhoods of Devon than any other place in Chicago. This is true not only for the South Asians on Devon but also for the other ethnic communities that live there.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, cities in Europe and America became centers of industry, as opposed to just centers of learning and commerce. The postindustrial city moved away from the factory system that was the hallmark of the Industrial Revolution
to a city whose economic heartbeat derived from advanced research into new technologies, a flourishing service sector, and advanced manufacturing (Richard, 2006). The unprecedented transformation of the American economy from industrial to postindustrial demanded the kind of skills that Indians had in abundance, and the Midwest, as the traditional magnet for employment seekers, attracted Indians in large numbers who while trying consciously to recreate their “Indianness” in their new environment forged new links with their immediate environment – acknowledging, adopting and appropriating values, culture and space (Rangaswamy, 2000). Indian Immigration to the United States was aggravated due in part to the political unrest that followed the declaration of independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, around the same time when United States opened their ports again to Indians in 1946 after a thirty year period of restrictions adopted by the Department of Homeland Security to ban Indians from entering the United States between 1917 and 1946.

The Indian population is not only noted for its steady and continuous growth since the mid-1960s (Menon, 2003), they have become remarkably diverse within a comparatively short period of time, from jobs primarily in farming in the initial years to commercial and professional jobs as the community matured and settled. On one end are highly educated and

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4 Pakistan and Bangladesh (then West and East Pakistan) were declared as separate countries only on 14th of August 1947.

5 Barred Zone Act of 1917.

6 The huge increase began with the easing of restrictions when the United States Congress passed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished the Nationals origin quota and granted visas to persons with the skills needed in the US because of the Cold war with USSR and the war in Vietnam. Physicians, engineers and scientists were in short supply. Substantial number of professionally qualified Indians came to Chicago and the United States to remedy this shortage. By the mid 1980’s, relatives sponsored under the family reunification clause of the Immigration Act of 1965 began to arrive in Chicago-they lacked language proficiency and negotiated their new surrounding while settling down in Rogers Park near Devon Avenue where ethnic shops were readily accessible. This led to the vigorous commercial growth along Devon Avenue where shuttered stores and neglected spaces offered new entrepreneurs a perfect venue. Soon the street was transformed into a vibrant array of stores, music and food. From a modest beginning in 1973, the Indian business district on Devon became the largest ethnic commercial district in the United States. (Menon, 2003: 9-10)
successful elite professionals who have six figure incomes dominate the Indian population in the United States and live the American dream in the suburbs, were followed in the 1980s by the lesser-skilled relatives who moved into nonprofessional fields such as retail trade, food, and the service industries. On the other end of the spectrum are the still-struggling newer arrivals those of who lack English language skills, need basic job training, and remain on the fringes of the society. These trends, which have been well documented for the Chicago area, are fairly typical of all major Indian immigrant communities in the United States, no matter where they are located. But they all bring along with themselves their own distinct language, cultural heritage and religious faith. They differ, too, in their country of origin, hailing not only from India but also from the global family of Indians in other countries such as England, Canada, South Africa, Tanzania, Fiji, Guyana and Trinidad (Rangaswamy, 2000).

Certain characteristics of the South Asian populations on in this community as seen in the 2000 census are worth noting. The ratio of male to female population (56% to 44%), the percentage of foreign born (84%), those who speak English less than “very well” (45%), those in low wage occupation (32% in transportation, machinery and production), and the low median per capita income ($12,768 as compared to the U.S national average of 21,587).  

In the struggle to create a new meaningful identity, they draw upon a variety of resources – family ties, religious affiliation, and economic opportunity, to name a few. The street forms the only common place of interaction and appropriation. Here they bring along with them their values, norms, and culture to mould it in a way that encourages the street to act as a space seen as the extension of the living room. Comfortable, familiar and secure.

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7 Data collected by SAAPRI.
3.1. **Space as the Mirror of the Society**

Previous research on the Indian communities have not emphasized the important role played by practices of space appropriation, what it has instead emphasized on is the condition of day to day life at home and work and how over the last few decades they have created a niche for themselves despite the discriminations. Notions of a successful Indian community has revolved around the need to establish intellectual and monetary success (Menon, 2003), this has often overlooked the more important need to study how these Indian immigrants-rich and poor, negotiate the usage of space and in turn appropriate and modify it for ontological security and comfort. This study adds to the volume of existing knowledge of how people use space at home and work (see Suburban Sahibs, 2003) by exploring how these Indian immigrants use and appropriate the street as a space for socialization and commerce beyond the regulatory boundary of the City of Chicago.

Immigrants react differently (at least initially) to the new environment. Ranging from total rejection to minimal adaptation to a more balanced acculturation to complete assimilation. The choices are many. “The thriving business ventures on Devon Avenue provide an excellent example of how the Indian community has connected with the larger community while keeping territorial rights for itself” (Rangaswamy, 2000:273).

The Indians in Chicago are similar to Indians elsewhere in the United States in their attempt to celebrate their differences from other suburban ethnic groups, to maintain their connection with India, to link up with the Indians in the global family, and to build solidarity with their fellow Americans (Rangaswamy, 2000:10). If there is a “Devon Avenue” in Chicago, there is a “Jackson Heights” in New York, a “Little India” in New Jersey and an “Artesia” in California.
It is rather interesting to study how Indians in Chicago, over the course of six decades of steady and continuous growth, have organized themselves into an identifiable yet varied community responding to a variety of needs and different aspects of the identity building process that forms a part of the collective consciousness.

I stand to believe that Devon Avenue is not a place, but a process that is constantly evolving and maturing. It is the expression of the society it houses. It allows for anonymous disappearance in the masses and also establishes identification with the crowd. It is a space of negotiation and appropriation in its daily actions and reactions – in its similarities and differences. Heterogeneously produced, used and negotiated, the appropriation of spaces on Devon, in the organization of everyday survival and in the spontaneous structure of everyday practices can be attributed to “people’s active role in the construction of space associated with achieving a kind of ontological security” (Henk De Haan, 2005:10). “It is thus necessary to recognize human action as both motivated and intended, at the same time both mediated by social structure and generative of it” (Agnew, Mercer, Sopher, 1964:2). Elaborating on Holloway and Hubbard’s (2001) concepts of “dominance of space structure”, I agree that imposed order is not only challenged but also transformed in ways different from the intended conceptions of bureaucrats and administrators. To avoid anxiety caused by environmental changes that alter the experience of the familiar social and material environment, men and women appropriate space in a way that is comfortable to the senses. “As peoples’ life worlds are scattered in space, (ontological) security is most often sought in familiar places (Giddens, 1990), which are transformed into ‘known’ and ‘own’ places” (Henk De Haan, 2005:11). Neighborhood appropriation, apart from being a strategy to achieve ontological security, it can be argued is a direct result of resistance against
domination (Henk De Haan, 2005). Over the decades, dynamic processes of social and material appropriation on Devon have resulted in the establishment of different dominant cultures along the street that reproduce the character of space through time. The spontaneous socio-spatial encounters and social redefinition by dominant users may fundamentally change the character of space, resulting also in material appropriation (Henk De Haan, 2005). This is apparent in the interaction code, architectural styles, street names, clothes, complexion, smells and language.

3.2. Facts and Figures

According to the U.S Census Fact Finder, almost five times as many Asian residents live in West Ridge as compared to the City average. Devon is an important enclave for the Chicago’s Asian community, particularly the South Asians who make up for over 55% of the Asians within West Ridge. In addition to the Asian Community, West Ridge is also home to Chicago’s largest Jewish community and a sizable Irish-Catholic community.\(^8\)

As the international cultural hub of the Midwest, it has come under the microscope of many a academicians, for here, the street is movement: to watch, to pass, movement especially of people: of fleeting faces and forms, changing postures and emotions. The people of Devon understand the symbolic, ceremonial, social and political roles of their streets, not just those of movements and access. It is not simply a channel of automobile traffic, but rather, constitutes a network of public spaces for diverse users that is used to organize and unify the urban environment. That being said, the problem of automobile traffic

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\(^8\) Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990: Edited by the Chicago Fact Book Consortium 1995, University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Sociology.
cannot be ignored. The Chicago Transit Authority reports average daily passengers on routes 49B, 93 and 155 commuting on North Western, North California and Devon as below:

Table 3.1. CTA Data for January 2008 – Winter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CTA Bus Route</th>
<th>Route no.</th>
<th>Weekday (Av. Daily)</th>
<th>Saturday (Av. Daily)</th>
<th>Sunday (Av. Daily)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Western</td>
<td>49B</td>
<td>4,835 (+11.5%)</td>
<td>3,066 (+6.5%)</td>
<td>2,272 (+10.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North California</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2,689 (-5.3%)</td>
<td>1,509 (-5.5%)</td>
<td>No Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>6,275 (+3.7%)</td>
<td>5,214 (1.7%)</td>
<td>3,722 (+8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.2. CTA Data for May 2008 – Summer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Western</td>
<td>49B</td>
<td>5,810 (+16.5%)</td>
<td>4,357 (+33.4%)</td>
<td>2,969 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North California</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3,676 (+13%)</td>
<td>1,936 (+15.6%)</td>
<td>No Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>7,462 (13.6%)</td>
<td>6,895 (29.1%)</td>
<td>4,790 (19.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As is evident, a significant amount of traffic travels to the area (by bus alone) and results in huge volumes of pedestrian traffic. It is hence important if not mandatory to direct attention to the needs of the pedestrians and make the walk on Devon enjoyable.
3.3. **Background and Research Methodology**

Though I was studying the cross roads, sometimes straying into the residential areas to study the pattern of activity to get a feel of what goes on, the street I spent most time on was the commercial corridor on Devon Avenue—specifically, the eight-block stretch from the Western to California avenue where the population is primarily South Asians dominated by Asian Indians. This street consists of low-rise commercial structures (two to three storeys maximum), significantly oriented to the automobile, with about forty percent of its area devoted to surface parking. The sidewalks are narrow and crowded; their pavements are cracked in need of repair and obstructed by a host of badly designed street-light standards, parking signs, mailboxes, trash containers; and much of the store fronts are in permanent display of merchandise and signs-old and new, hand written and in print, advertisements for stores that do not exist anymore and some ambitious businesses that hope to come into business in the near future reduce the visual appeal of the street. “The place is, in sum, a mishmash of activities – the kind that zoning was originally set up to prevent” (Whyte, 1988:80). It is important here, to initiate a plan that would provide a different direction for future growth and socio-economic development of the area. The neighborhood is also burdened by the challenges posed by its diversity and economic decline. It is important to be able to bring a greater level of intensity, variety, and amenity, particularly for the people on foot for Devon to be able to continue to serve as the symbolic space that strengthens South Asian American identity and community.

With the use of time-lapse photography, Whyte was able to quantify and document qualitative urban behavior in his book City (1988), of how urban spaces are used. Following closely in his footsteps (and realizing that remaining anonymous and unnoticed on Devon
was way harder to achieve as compared to remain unnoticed in Manhattan), I tried to document the use of street spaces on Devon Avenue, Chicago over a disjointed period of about twelve months and all seasons. My methodology primarily involved direct observation (captured and animated in photographs). Though I started off trying my luck at being unobtrusive (given my gender and role as a researcher), my later realization that people often thought of me as an intruder into the community with a camera in hand, spying on their daily activities. Some storekeepers gave me all the information I wanted (or did not want), and posed for happy photographs believing it was all going to be featured in some newspaper in town. My utopia of unobtrusive observation did not last long. Soon, I found it easier (and in a way more ethical) to gain access to the community to help me better understand the dynamics of social behavior in public spaces by revealing the purpose of the research and its outcome. Once clear about where I stood with my involvement with the community and street life, I was left to myself in gathering the necessary data. Occasional stares, questioning looks and some stray comments came from the outsiders who immediately put me in the standard mould of gender hierarchy.

“[S]ociety reveals itself to people who watch it attentively for a long time, not to the quick glance of a passerby.”

Becker (1981:11)

The use of the camera as a research tool for documenting such a social process\(^9\) and cultural inventory\(^10\) was rather introspective, which definitely benefited from the rapport. The value of photographs in this kind of research methodology depends directly on the amount of time the researcher spends in the field. This involved shooting a series of photographs that

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\(^9\) Documenting social processes are photographic records of social events that provide insight into the dynamics of social interactions and relationships. (Collier and Collier, 1990:91).

\(^10\) Cultural inventories are photographic investigations that capture images of how people use and organize their everyday space (work, home, recreation) as a way to analyze cultural values (Collier and Collier, 1990:45-47).
formed the base for the extraction of qualitative information to document the identified criteria’s for good street design, in the cultural context.

3.3.1. Integrating Photographic Images with the Research

A photograph is a “minute time sample – a hundredth-of-a-second slice of reality” – that freezes “the particularity of a specific moment in time and space” (Collier and Collier, 1990:13; Prosser and Schwarz, 1998:119; Scott, 1969:54). Photographs as a tool for research cannot answer questions of why or how and hence need to be supported by other sources of (empirical) data. Also known as the “eye-witness principle” (Gombrich, 1980:246-248), it places the researcher in the physical context of the research topic. According to Prosser and Schwarz (1998:116) – “We can provide a degree of tangible details, a sense of being there, and a way of knowing that may not readily translate into other symbolic nodes of communication.”

Since, the Photographic Survey Research method is oriented towards the eye level view of the community, it strives to capture more complex aspects of the community. Establishing a rapport with the people of Devon Avenue required a couple of visits, but living in the community for a stretch of two and a half months in the summer of 2008 allowed me a different perspective about the nuances of how the place works and functions, its needs and the opportunities.
Mixed method research strategies\textsuperscript{11} or triangulation\textsuperscript{12} is one of the ways in which a planner can integrate photographs with non-visual data sets. The complimentarity\textsuperscript{13} dimension of photography as a research tool is to provide added interpretation to existing data sets. The usage of photographs in this particular research tries to capture the kind and quality of usage of the streets, sidewalks, storefronts, ledges and crossings, among other uses of space and provides a direction to the community and planners as to where the attention needs to be focused, in order to solve the growing need to revitalize the street as a social place, rather than serve as only a transportation route. Space, I argue requires a democratic “spatial praxis” (Gottdiener, 1985) in which the communities should have the ability to regain control of their everyday worlds, transforming them into genuinely social spaces. To avoid this “control” from becoming uncontrolled and chaotic, I further argue, that this requires that planners and architects amongst other professionals, pay keen attention to the dialectical ontological status of space and allow for required “open-ended design” strategies, which I believe would result in “ordered” appropriation. A classic example of this would be the Venice Board Walk, CA and Campo de-Fiori, Rome.

The exercise of authority in the production and appropriation of space by immigrants argues Rapoport, is not simply to resist the oppression of an unresolved environment, but also an explicit demand to be included in that environment as a participant rather than as a

\textsuperscript{11}Mixed-method research strategy is the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. There are five general purposes by which mixed method research designs can be accomplished: convergence, development, complimentarity, expansion, and initiation (Gabre and Gabre, 1997:99).

\textsuperscript{12}Triangulation confirms convergence by using several competing methods to analyze a single phenomenon, generating the same results, yielding a greater confidence in the overall research findings.

\textsuperscript{13}When a researcher combines methods to measure overlapping, as well as different, aspects of a situation in order to enrich the understanding of that situation. (Rossman and Wilson, 1985:639).
bystander or simply a consumer. In his discussion of the process by which people impart meanings to their environment, Rapoport refers repeatedly to two basic concepts – “the urge to territorialize and the need to personalize (Rapoport 1977:45).” In his own words:

“...unless people can change the environment, it remains alien......they need to feel they have had a hand in shaping their own environment...”

Rapoport (1977:45)

As class or racial identities shape the physical environment, they in turn can become reinforced as place-based identities, bringing social reproduction together with the production of urban space (Harvey 1992). Though this allows for the much desired “place based” identity, this identity should also guard against the divisive effects of the “model-minority” myth that potentially alienates South-Asians as a group rather than include them.
Chapter 4

Case Study: Devon Avenue, Chicago, IL

“.....In a society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practice, meanings and values, those that are dominant...that are organized and lived...It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society.”

R. Williams (1980, p.38)

Devon's Indian corridor is one of the best-known and largest communities of its kind in North America. It stretches between Damen Avenue and California Avenue. South Asian shops, restaurants and grocery stores abound along this strip, making it a popular tourist destination. Primarily a South Asian community, it is the house of hundreds of people from the Indian subcontinent, primarily of Indian and Pakistani origin. “Devon Street in Chicago doesn't quite give one a feeling of déjà vu, a transferred memory of the bustling bazaars of Old Delhi or Ranganathan Street in Madras, but it comes close.” Says Vivek Mukherjee a Journalist with Rediff News in ‘Down India Street’.

My first visit to Devon Avenue gave me the impression of being back in one of the villages in India not only because of its physical appearance but also because of its social structure. The smell and sound so familiar that I would not suspect being in another country was I to be brought here blindfolded. It allowed me to fashion the ‘city’ in my own image.

Devon’s characteristic spontaneity in adjusting and retaining its identity and strong social fabric in the face of pressures of gentrification has drawn the attention of groups interested in the study of what makes “successful places”. To enhance and revitalize urban
life it is important to offer “a variety of things to do in one spot – whose quality as a place then becomes more than the sum of its parts” (Project for Public Places).

Traditionally in the United States, spaces of mass consumptions and of mass contacts (like in malls and theatres) are privatized and controlled unlike on Devon Avenue where the experience is more public and uncontrolled in nature. Here the street can be looked upon as an extension of the living room where individuals appropriate space by their own norms and standards. The fact that the Indians have taken over the street has a political meaning in representing themselves in their own culture and shared experiences of social groups and in creating an environment foreign to the dominant culture without the mediation from external sources.

Though not well documented, Devon Avenues myriad intersection of social spaces and cultures, commands a great deal of attention in its tourists and commercial functions. It maintains thriving tourist businesses and is not subject to the same visual control as other non-ethnic neighborhoods are. This is because people enjoy the distinct experiences of contact with identities other than their own. Streets here reflect the life of the people that create them. Collective spaces become more debatable in terms of the identity they represent, since the people determine how they would want to be jointly recognized. By that I mean how they work to represent and regulate the appearance of space and appropriate it in due course of time.

Devon Avenue compensates for a lack of outstanding individual public spaces with its many off street-level attractions: Restaurants, grocery stores, ethnic commerce, cultural attractions, festivities on the street, passionate participation of residents, activists and local entrepreneurs; enlivened street corners (not always) and the energy and enthusiasm of its
people who play a huge role in defining their neighborhoods. Devon has maintained its social integrity by maintaining its flexibility to change and to provide a new experience every time you go back. Familiarity with others and the comfort and charisma, surpasses that of any other parts of the city. Devon echoes Wilmsens (1989) belief about cultural differences occurring in continuous, connected space, traversed by economic and political relations of inequality.

The streets here are random, unpredictable, and chaotic and cannot be completely controlled. It is the antithesis of the rational modern city where everything and everyone has its own particular place. Devon Avenue’s ability to function both as traffic route and the framework of public open space, an exterior living room in the city, attracts tourists from great distance to see, smell, look and experience. The chief quality of Devon is due mainly to the handling of volume of commerce, but it is the people on the streets who create the mood and character. It indeed represents a continuum of low-density ethnic commercial and residential development with a complete and unrestricted freedom of movement of people on foot and car alike. Here you find that communal ties are extensive and the social organization of village life quite well developed. The squares and the street corners are filled with men socializing there for hours. Women usually crowd the grocery stores and beauty parlors for their social interactions. The old people are found meeting at the local park and at the house of religion. The Indian restaurants display the famous Indian menus and aroma. The shops lining the streets have billboards in the native language, the shop windows brag about the lowest exchange rates, immediate passports and visas, posters of movie stars, religious texts, idols of the three million gods and goddesses, jewelry in gold, saris, the variety is unlimited.
The only language I heard around was Hindi. Portions of Devon are renamed in honor of Golda Meir, Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Sheikh Mujib Rehman.

**Image 4.1:** Portions of Devon named after Gandhi, Jinnah, Mujib and Meir.

Devon Avenue street life seems like a replica of the village social structure. People are constantly greeting one another, which gives the impression that everyone knows everyone else in the area and reveals an intricate network of social relations encompassing the entire neighborhood. It shattered my preconceived notion of urban anonymity and cold impersonal relations that I associate city life with. Otherwise rival countries; the Indians, Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis seem to be enjoying the bond of values, norms, beliefs, festivals, habits, food, language, clothes, complexion, and region to the fullest.

Conversational interviews with thirty-eight people (both shop owners, shoppers as well as residents) led me to conclude that people regard the area as a transplant of their old social structure, a cultural reminder, and a stepping-stone into the American civilization. Residence in these transplanted Indian (subcontinent) community, where the family occupies a predominant place can help mitigate the cultural shock of going from an Indian (subcontinent) type village to a modern industrialized one. Many of the people I met were there either for shopping, lunch/dinner or to meet friends and family who continued living there. The twofold function of the community is worthy of mention. It serves first as an arrival point, a transit hotel for the newly arrived immigrants, and second, once the immigrants moved out, it remains the center of their social life. The cultural bond that ties these men to their community surpasses the promises and rewards of total incorporation into the host/dominant culture. The family is as much a predominant institution in this community as I found it to be in the Indian subcontinent.
4.1. Democracy in Street Use and Design

“Street people are the index of the health of a place”
William H Whyte (1988:55)

Based on the work of Jacobs\textsuperscript{14}(1961), Lynch\textsuperscript{15}(1981), Appleyard (1977), and others, we can define democratic streets as ones that are well used and that invite direct participation, provide opportunities for discovery and adventure, and that are locally controlled and broadly accessible. Specific ingredients of street democracy that are useful for evaluating existing streets or for designing new ones:

4.2. Reinvention of an Ethnic Identity

“A city is a multi-purpose, shifting organization, a tent for many functions, raised by many hands and with relative speed. Complete specialization, final meshing, is improbable and undesirable. The form must be somewhat noncommittal, plastic to the purposes and perceptions of its citizens.”
Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City (p.91)

Studies have shown that in shaping public culture, streets and public spaces play an important role (Whyte, 1980; see also Appleyard, 1981). What is more important still is the democracy of use- the ‘adaptation’ of the new to mould into the “known” and vice-versa. These immigrant communities while being a happy melting pot of established order, social contact, inherently congenial spaces, and cultural co-existence, also offer dynamic encounter, exchange, and transformation.

\textsuperscript{14} Jane Jacobs made planners aware that the “eyes on the street”, were important in creating a sense of place and security in neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{15} Argues in “A Theory of Good City Form” that we have five basic public space rights: presence, use and action, appropriation, modification, and disposition. Simply stated, people should not only have access to a public space, but also freedom to use, change and even claim the space, as well as to transfer their rights of use and modification to other individuals.
The association of meaning and imageability/memorability (Lynch, 1960) mainly brings about the sense of local control and responsibility on these streets by the way of storefront designs, street signage, modes of expression, celebration etc. The width of the sidewalks being just 11', it is not often that a storekeeper would bring out their merchandise onto the sidewalk. Activity on the sidewalks are limited often to passive relaxation (sunning), looking at storefronts, street sweeping, observing events and people, chance meetings and spontaneous conversations and rarely vendors.

4.2.1. Use and User Diversity

“The index of enjoyablity- the number of street entertainers, food vendors, people in conversation, the number smiling...Good performers and good audiences. These are the stuff of a good street life.”
William H Whyte (1988:55)

Well known is the fact that streets are often designed for either vehicular or pedestrian traffic, but what gives character to the street is a balanced mixture of different users and activities. A variety of age groups and social classes are important in the life of the street without the fear of domination of one group over the other. Trends in planning (in the footsteps of Le Corbusier) have attempted to sanitize the street in order to separate vehicular traffic from pedestrian traffic by relegating the principle functions of the streets to underground concourses, skywalks, parks and malls.

Though the issue of user diversity (other than user age groups) on Devon is not of primary concern to the community (due in part for the cultural diversity), what is definitely of concern is the lack of diversity in use and action. The independence of the elderly and the children are limited, partly because of the erratic traffic (which is of major concern) and also
because of the lack of adequate facilities of seating and ‘safe’ play areas under watchful eyes.

It was rather interesting to find (which is a mere coincidence I would want to believe), that six of the ten grocery stores in the blocks under observation, had the locational advantage conducive to design changes that could bear responsibility to such a demand that the mothers expressed for auxiliary play areas, while they shopped. This involved analyzing literature, refreshing my own memory as a child, and the study of activities common on the residential streets around Devon. Children here like anywhere else exhibit the inherent capacity to appropriate and modify space given the slightest chance.

“Children see streets as play opportunities discovered in lampposts, curbstones, gutters, inspection chamber covers, over-head wires, parked cars, trees, piles of leaves, flights of steps, gates, bollards, hedges, retaining walls, driveways, building entrances, bus stops, mailboxes, street signs, and benches. Children measure the environment quality of streets by the presence or absence of these mundane objects, not by the ease of traffic flow and parking. Nonetheless, traffic has a critical effect on the street playability”.

Robin C. Moore in Public Streets for Public Use (1987:45)

4.2.2. The Pedestrians

There is a lot a pedestrian can do on Devon: meet friends at random while walking around the commercial strip, shop, window-shop or witness street scene as it reveals the richness and depth of its social life. Store owners stand outside their stores talking to friends and passersby’s. These activities encourage the regeneration of the physical, economic, as well as the socio-communicative agglomeration, against the natural trends of fragmentation.

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16 Mothers expressed a need for areas and adequate facilities that serve as ‘play grounds’ for children to play while they shopped for grocery and vegetables while still being able to keep an eye on them and not having to tag them along by disrupting play or leave them at home alone (which is illegal when the child is under the age of eleven, I was told).
It focuses attention to the democracy of the street in encouraging and embracing self-organization of public space by remaining totally unperturbed by the dominant culture.

On Devon, men and women actively engage in constructing an identity through the cultural systems in an attempt to extort control of power and space. Through the means of norms and tradition they establish new protocols of influence over their juxtaposed environment, to negotiate the inequities of power that would result if left to itself.

The bunching pattern maps revealed, that self congestion in the middle of the pedestrian flow was very common amongst men of all age groups while women were found to gravitate towards the unused foot or to the buffer space along the building walls and store fronts as compared to continuing conversation wherever they met if by doing so they were not obstructing pedestrian flow (See image 4.2 and 4.3) More often than not, the meetings were spontaneous, casual and of a short duration. The cultural and social hierarchy (unequal representation) of the Indian society could be one of the reasons for such an observation.

**Image 4.2:** Women were found to gravitate towards the unused foot or to the buffer space along the building walls and store fronts.

**Image 4.3:** Self-congestion in the middle of the sidewalk was common among men.

The physically weaker elderly persons depend on “places of activity” in their immediate surroundings and often compensate for their own inactivity by observing the action of the others. These places on Devon are mostly limited to the fixed benches provided at every intersection (see Image 4.4). Here, the drama of everyday life unfolds.

**Image 4.4:** The physically weaker elderly persons depend on ‘places of activity’ in their immediate surroundings and often compensate for their own inactivity by observing the action of the others.
That being said about the elderly, the younger found comfort in most any object that could be sat upon, from fire hydrants, chain connectors, bollards, window ledges, planters.

The young pedestrians on Devon are an aggressive lot (see Image 4.5). Due to the low vehicular carrying capacity of Devon, the decrease in traffic speed shifts the balance of power to the pedestrians. Pedestrian behavior is noticeably anarchic with little respect for the intersections or the red lights. Signaling of arms for cars to take note of the pedestrian is a common gesture on Devon.

**Image 4.5:** Pedestrian behavior is noticeably anarchic with little respect for the intersections or the red lights.

While the weekend sees greater middle class shoppers from nearly all over the Midwest, the patrons of this market vary in socio economic standings and age from toddlers with their mothers to school children, teenagers and the elderly. Different age groups flock the area at different times of the day with small children, their mothers and the elderly seen in the earlier part, while the teenagers flock the market in the late afternoon to succumb to the pleasures of growing crowds and activity.

The community should encourage pedestrians through planning, investment, education and advocacy, and should aim to provide a safe and comfortable walking environment for all.

### 4.2.3. Store-owners and Store-fronts

The storeowners on this stretch are an entrepreneurial lot. Some store owners that I spoke to told me that they found putting merchandise out on the sidewalk, especially those that encourage touching cause people to slow down and increases the chance of their going
into the store, which is a good thing. They have successfully demonstrated that outdoor merchandise pulls. It encourages free-choice crowding and turns a looker into a buyer. The transitional area between street and the store here is only occasionally selling space. Most stores have neutral entrances that do little to attract the pedestrian into the store. Rules against the encroaching of sidewalks for sale of merchandise except during festive seasons when exceptions are made by the city were in effect till April 2007 when The Department of Business Affairs and Licensing administers the Use of the Public Way Program. Under this program, CDOT reviews all applications proposing to use the public way (sidewalk, parkway, street, alley) for exclusive private use, under a lease-type agreement. The applicant assumes all legal liability and maintenance responsibilities for any element erected under this program. Failure to secure proper insurance, or to maintain the site, will result in cancellation of the permit. Upon termination, the applicant has to remove the structures and restore the public way to current City standards. Surprisingly, after the adoption of the variance, even fewer stores display their items on the stoops due in part I was told was for the costs and responsibilities that are now involved in doing so.

Some food joints have shown significant interest in the possibility of having sidewalk cafés but the strict requirement for compliance with the boundary and landscaping requirements apart from obtaining aldermanic and city council approvals, have deterred

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18 At least 50% of the boundary must be covered with live plants and No portion of the plants shall extend over the permitted Sidewalk Cafe area (they shall be included within the limits of the permitted area) http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_ATTACH/sidewalkcafeapp0108_2.pdf (11/26/2008)
many a storekeepers. The sidewalk cafés are allowed to operate only between March and December and the permits only last for a year. The unpredictable Chicago winters especially in the past few years have restricted the possibility of sidewalk cafes to only the summer months. The requirement by the Department of Business Affairs that stores maintain a minimum of six feet of unobstructed\textsuperscript{19}, public sidewalk for pedestrian movement and that no portion of your Sidewalk Cafe can include neighboring business, residences, or empty lots allows only three stores on the stretch under study that have recessed entry have the luxury of space to be able to even apply for a sidewalk permit. Some storeowners have installed operable windows as a means of attracting customers in pleasant weather. Personally, I did not come across any such entrepreneurial innovation, but was told by multiple people both residents and shop owners.

What was definitely apparent though, was innovation and improvisation. One such instance was outside a international grocery store that successfully drew a crowd to a juice stall installed at the recessed entry (this installation required no formal permit nor did it require responsibility for maintenance) by reducing effective walkway by installing an umbrella opposite the store and constraining pedestrian traffic and in doing so, directing more people to the fresh juice vendor. What was more surprising was the number of people who would stand under the umbrella for no particular reason and some would moved on, others would buy a drink or two. In the fifteen minutes I stood there observing, more than twenty glasses of juice was sold. I suspect this effect could be a result of the outdoor

\textsuperscript{19} The sidewalk on Devon is just 11’ from the building line to the curb. This also includes parking meters and benches that reduce the effective sidewalk.
merchandise and the shill effect that it creates combined with the constrained pedestrian traffic (see image 4.5).

**Image 4.6:** Reducing effective walkway in order to constrain pedestrian traffic.

Storefronts have a plethora of information displayed on them, which tend to cover the doors and windows and allowing little room for interaction between the inside of the store and the sidewalk, not only making them visually remote but also hampering natural surveillance. Some pedestrians have complained that these sometimes feel like uninviting fortresses.

**Image 4.7:** The Everyday life of Devon embedded in human interactions from street side shopping to vendor carts to friendly policemen.

**Image 4.8:** From waiting at the bus stop to shopping to window-shopping to walking the whole family to just watching- you would find the whole variety on Devon.

**Image 4.9:** Pedestrians self-congest. “Part of what attracts people to the street is a measure of congestion the high standards would save them from” (Whyte, 1988:77)

**Image 4.10:** Celebrations are the soul of the avenue. Here people come out in great number to celebrate their identity, similarities and their differences.

**Image 4.11:** The street at once becomes the ‘celebrated area’- with people, food, music, dance, color and beliefs.

Board games, especially chess was found to be the common favorite among the people on Devon particularly at the North Washtenaw Avenue, not so much amongst the Indians. This being said, I think it is important to then introduce temporary or even permanent boards of chess to attract the young and old alike. It was interesting to see young entrepreneurs in downtown Chicago (near 77 and Jefferson), who brought some movable furniture, a game of chess and set up a board challenging passerby’s to a board for as little as five dollars a game. What was more intriguing was the fact that so many people chose to take
up that challenge and did not mind losing the money irrespective of if they won or lost. This was a lesson. It takes very little to attract people.

**Image 4.12:** Men of all age groups enjoy chess, especially when played in the open. Public places call for more challenge, discussions and intellectual stimulation. Found in the pictures are individuals from different age groups, socio-economic background, age and ethnicity enjoying a board game.

**Image 4.13:** A temporary arrangement attracting passersby to a game of chess.

**Image 4.14:** The map shows the number of school aged children per square mile along Devon and the two blocks on the North and the South.

**Image 4.15:** The graph shows the drastic reduction in people aged 65 and above and a dramatic increase in children 18 and below 18, stressing on the need to pay attention to both the age groups.

### 4.2.4. Street Facilities and Furniture

Apart from the regular benches, trashcans, newspaper kiosk, phone kiosks and parking meters, the newest on Devon is the solar powered trash compactor. The permits for miscellaneous street furniture is regulated by the Department of Business Affairs and Licensing with a Use of the Public Way Permit (a grant of privilege) in the public way.²⁰

Other than serving their usual purpose, the newspaper kiosks, parking meters, trashcans etc act as barriers to preclude vehicular overhang intrusion into the pedestrian path and also as sittable and leanable objects.

**Image 4.16:** Street Facilities

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²⁰They should not be located so as to obstruct the sight triangle (12 feet on each side) of an adjacent driveway or mid-block crosswalk, and should be a minimum of 30 feet from an intersection on the near side approach, and 20 feet from the intersection on the far side. [http://www.ci.chi.il.us/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_EDITORIAL/StreetandSitePlanDesignStandards407.pdf](http://www.ci.chi.il.us/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_EDITORIAL/StreetandSitePlanDesignStandards407.pdf) p.36
4.2.5. Seating

Street seating to be successful requires thoughtful design and appropriate placement. Traditionally, street furniture (benches) has overlooked the need for people to socialize, while resting or enjoying the weather. Allowing people the choice of face-to-face conversation is evident in the community (and elsewhere). People from different age groups, gender, ethnicity, economic status and physical ability use the street as an extension of their living rooms. Though innovation in the form of storing plastic crates have been cited at the intersection of Fairfield and Devon, Devon

Image 4.17: Seen here are women who meet every evening at the street corner on Devon to ‘catch up’ and discuss the details of their everyday life.

Image 4.18: Colorful empty crates are stored under the street bench to allow for a bigger group and also face-to-face conversation.

Image 4.19: Seen in the pictures is the importance of face-to-face conversation amongst people of different age, gender, ethnicity and physical ability. (A) Women and children; (B) Men of different age group; (C) “Able” and handicap.

4.2.6. Street Vendors

“Vendors temporarily transform the urban landscape by adding a rhythmic activity to the street.”
James Rojas from Latino Urban Forum in Los Angeles Vendors under Scrutiny. (May 2005)

“Street vendors in (Latino LA) add an importance to the streets by bringing services to people. Their ephemeral nature bonds people and the place together.”
Unknown in Los Angeles Vendors under Scrutiny. (May 2005)

Street vendors add an all-new character to the streets. Devon does not traditionally allow ‘stray’ vendors (static or mobile) to sell their goods on the streets, since they apparently deface city sites, are dirty, chaotic, congestive and uncontrollable while also also
having competing interests. However none of these problems defy fixing. Street vendors do bring into the community a great economic potential and generate activity at the street level. “Vending has been a profession since time immemorial, with street vendors an integral part of our urban history and culture. “Shopping and marketing, in a traditional Indian sense, has primarily been informal. Social interaction is integral to Indian markets in contrast to the mechanized and sterile concept of shopping favored by modern market and super market structures.” (Singh, 2000) Vendors are common on Devon only (for the most part) during festive seasons and celebrations to give the pedestrian a quick bargain.

**Image 4.20:** Though not encouraged, Devon sees occasional street vendors especially during the festive seasons.

**Image 4.21:** Stoop Lines: Stores display and sell on the adjacent sidewalk and in turn attract customers into the store.

### 4.2.7. Pitchmen for Causes

The first amendment of the U.S Constitution reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for the redress of grievances.” The U.S Supreme court has ruled that the freedom of speech includes a broad range of expressive activity, on of which is soliciting for funds (*Heffron v. International Society of Krishna Consciousness Inc.*, 452 U.S. 640 [1981]). Commonly seen on Devon Avenue are pitchmen for causes most of whose cause revolves around God. The *bahurupis* earn a living by enacting the roles of mythological figures while the *Krishna* followers spread Krishna consciousness, primarily by singing the
Hare Krishna *mantra* in public places and by selling books and in the process soliciting funds.

**Image 4.22:** “Groups making pitches for religious causes range from the naïve to the fraudulent. Some, such as the Hare Krishna, are true believers in whatever they believe in. While their music and saffron robes make an odd sight, it has been a friendly one.” (Whyte, 1988:49)

**Image 4.23:** Commonly known as ‘Bahurupis’, they live a earning by enacting the roles of mythological figures.

### 4.2.8. Signage

Often overlooked and underestimated, street graphics are both visual aids and an important expression of a place’s culture. The signs\(^{21}\) on Devon are everything else but visual aids. Most signs on Devon defy City Code Section 13-20-650, 10-24-020 and 10-04-100.

William Ewald (1971), in his seminal book, *Street Graphics*, recounts a 1986 study of Baltimore County Drivers: “Under normal driving conditions, the occupants of a moving car can seldom handle more than ten items of information at a time.” Yet at thirty miles per hour both driver and the passenger are confronted with thousands of items of information – words, phrases, signs, symbols, diagrams, directions and admonitions. That is about four hundred words a minute, which is more than double the average persons reading speed.\(^{22}\) Such is also the case of Devon.

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\(^{21}\) All awning and business ID signs which project over the public way more than 12 inches shall clear such public way (sidewalk) by 9 feet and 16 feet in alleys. (13-20-650). Address numbers shall be posted prominently on the front of all canopies, awnings and wind screens placed over the business entrance, to ensure clarity for emergency responders, per City Code sections 10-24-020 and 10-04-100. [http://www.ci.chi.il.us/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_EDITORIAL/StreetandSitePlanDesignStandards407.pdf](http://www.ci.chi.il.us/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_EDITORIAL/StreetandSitePlanDesignStandards407.pdf)

\(^{22}\) The reading speed of an ‘average’ person is considered to be about 200-250 words per minute.
Though one possible method to ration roadside messages is by zoning, the other method could be by the systematic removal of redundant signs that create information overload. Symbolic use of design elements can significantly reduce the chaotic communicative confusion. Whatever the method used, signs should at once expressive, appropriate, legible, and compatible with the character of the place. Paying closer attention to street graphics can benefit business owners by eliminating the visual chaos that often drowns out their messages, and to drivers and pedestrians by making it easier to find what they are looking for.

**Image 4.24:** Street Signage on Devon: Territorial markings regulate social interactions primarily by preventing unwanted social encounters.

**Image 4.25:** Signs on stores, which do not exist anymore, others of varying nature have replaced them while others continue remaining empty.

**Image 4.26:** Some new, some old, some defunct and some that intend to come into business in the near future. The cacophonous, entropic and often redundant overload of information.

### 4.2.9. Street Parking

![Figure 4.1. Number of parking spots per block, between California and Western Avenue along Devon. Total parking of 362 cars over a one and a half mile stretch.](image)
Table 4.1. City of Chicago’s local street cross-section width standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Operation Type</th>
<th>Parking Lane</th>
<th>Travel Lane</th>
<th>Parking Lane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-Way Parking</td>
<td>7’</td>
<td>10’-10’</td>
<td>7’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sides</td>
<td>7’</td>
<td>10’-10’</td>
<td>7’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4.2. Devon street cross-section widths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Operation Type</th>
<th>Parking Lane</th>
<th>Travel Lane</th>
<th>Parking Lane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-Way Parking</td>
<td>7.5’</td>
<td>16’-16’</td>
<td>7.5’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sides</td>
<td>7.5’</td>
<td>16’-16’</td>
<td>7.5’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The community has been struggling for a while over the problem of parking on Devon and its neighboring areas. Common in the area, is metered street level parking on either side of the road creating poor pedestrian environments. Short term parking occupancy is about 85% during the peak shopping hours of 10am to 8pm. In the recent years, Devon has seen a significant loss in business due in part to the suburban competitors and also due to the lack in availability to parking. There have been endless debates about a mixed

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24 Parking Spaces. While all required accessory parking must be provided off-street in accordance with the provisions of the Zoning Code, on-street parking can play a role in serving visitors, and providing more convenient short-term parking by residents who may not wish to always pull into their off-street parking spaces. A parallel parking lane width of seven or eight feet may be used where there is no arterial traffic lane immediately adjacent. Stall lengths of 20 to 22 feet for interior spaces and 16 to 18 feet for end spaces can be assumed. The lengths of the parking stalls should be coordinated with breaks in the parkway planters, with gaps in the planters (and associated courtesy walk) provided every 50 feet at a minimum in residential areas, and with a maximum length of 35 feet for parkway planters in commercial areas. There is a recommended 10-foot
used parking structure proposed on Rockwell and Devon (one of the two projects funded by TIF \textsuperscript{25} (Tax Increment Financing) dollars in the history of Devon). The community has challenged the construction and doubt that the parking structure would solve the problem of

\textbf{Image 4.27:} Short term street parking on Devon, on either side of the road. The availability of on street parking on Devon has come under scrutiny in the recent years. Unavailability of parking spots is one of the greatest problems faced by the community that is affecting business in the area significantly.

\textbf{4.2.10. Zoning on Devon}

The City of Chicago adopted a new zoning ordinance in 2004, but allowed the individual Chicago communities to shape the specific zoning and mapping processes. The portion of Devon Avenue under study (between California and Western) is zoned B1 (Neighboring shopping district) and B3 (Community Shopping District) and PD (Planned Development) at Rockwell and Devon Avenue. Also, this stretch has been recently rezoned as a Pedestrian Street. The regulations governing Pedestrian Streets are intended to promote transit, economic vitality, and pedestrian safety and comfort.

\footnote{25-TIF is a public financing method which has been used for redevelopment and community improvement projects in the United States}
**Figure 4.2.** Zoning on Devon Avenue between North California Avenue and North Western Avenue.

**B1: Neighboring Shopping District:** Primary storefront style, small scale retail and service uses, intended on narrow, pedestrian friendly streets.

**B3: Community Shopping District:** Accommodates destinations, automobile oriented retail, and service uses such as shopping centers or larger buildings that are permitted in B1 and B2 districts. These districts often have primary access to major arterials.

**PD: Planned Development:** The planned development district is a special zoning designation designed for many religious, educational, municipal, and quasi-governmental projects. Additionally, it is commonly used for larger residential and commercial developments. The designation is intended to allow flexibility with the existing zoning requirements while maintaining building and urban design, density, use, environmental, and economic considerations which are compatible with the character of the existing community. Planned developments are scrutinized under additional design and development reviews by the City of Chicago. At Rockwell and Devon, this planned Development is for a parking structure that is one of the two projects funded by TIF funds, opposed greatly by the community. Also zoned PD is at the intersection of Western and Devon Avenue, also for a parking structure.
4.2.11. Images

**Image 4.1.** Portions of Devon named after Gandhi, Jinnah, Mujib and Meir.

**Image 4.2.** Women were found to gravitate towards the unused foot or to the buffer space along the building walls and store fronts.
Image 4.3. Self congestion in the middle of the sidewalk was common among men.
Image 4.4. The physically weaker elderly persons depend on ‘places of activity’ in their immediate surroundings and often compensate for their own inactivity by observing the action of the others.
Image 4.5. Pedestrian behavior is noticeably anarchic with little respect for the intersections or the red lights.

Image 4.6. Reducing effective walkway in order to constrain pedestrian traffic.
Image 4.7. The Everyday life of Devon embedded in human interactions from street side shopping to vendor carts to friendly policemen.
Image 4.8. From waiting at the bus stop to shopping to window shopping to walking the whole family to just watching- you would find the whole variety on Devon.
Image 4.9. Pedestrians self-congest. “Part of what attracts people to the street is a measure of congestion the high standards would save them from” (Whyte, 1988:77).
Image 4.10. Celebrations are the soul of the avenue. Here people come out in great number to celebrate their identity, similarities and their differences.
Image 4.11. The street at once becomes the ‘celebrated area’- with people, food, music, dance, color and beliefs.
Image 4.12. Men of all age groups enjoy chess, especially when played in the open. Public places call for more challenge, discussions and intellectual stimulation. Found in the pictures above are individuals from different age groups, socio-economic background, age and ethnicity enjoying a board game.
**Image 4.13.** A temporary arrangement attracting passerby’s to a game of chess.

**Image 4.14.** The map shows the number of school aged children per square mile along Devon and the two blocks on the North and the South.
Image 4.15. The graph shows the drastic reduction in people aged 65 and above and a dramatic increase in children 18 and below 18, stressing on the need to pay attention to both the age groups.

Image 4.16. Street Facilities
**Image 4.17.** Seen here are women who meet every evening at the street corner on Devon to ‘catch up’ and discuss the details of their everyday life.

**Source:** www.pps.org

**Image 4.18.** Colorful empty crates are stored under the street bench to allow for a bigger group and also face-to-face conversation. Seen below is one such instance.

**Source:** www.pps.org
Image 4.19. Seen in the pictures is the importance of face-to-face conversation amongst people of different age, gender, ethnicity and physical ability. (A) Women and children; (B) Men of different age group; (C) “Able” and handicap.
Image 4.20. Though not encouraged, Devon sees occasional street vendors especially during the festive seasons.
**Image 4.21.** Stoop Lines: Stores display and sell on the adjacent sidewalk and in turn attract customers into the store.
Image 4.22. “Groups making pitches for religious causes range from the naïve to the fraudulent. Some, such as the Hare Krishna, are true believers in whatever they believe in. While their music and saffron robes make an odd sight, it has been a friendly one.” (Whyte, 1988: 49).

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Image 4.27. Short term street parking on Devon, on either side of the road. The availability of on street parking on Devon has come under scrutiny in the recent years. Unavailability of parking spots is one of the greatest problems faced by the community that is affecting business in the area significantly.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

The stretch of Devon Avenue between North California Avenue and North Western Avenue is civically vital and attracts people from all over the Midwest. If the number of pedestrians were to be taken as the index to measure the health of the street, Devon would be socially rich. Here people self congest and exhibit a great degree of co-operative motility\(^1\) and civic inattention\(^2\). These self-congestions were often found to gravitate to the intersection of streets where there was a greater amount of space to accommodate such congestion without inhibiting movement. The street corners were often the most vital. The benches on the street corners also attract the physically weaker elderly persons who depend on ‘places of activity’ in their immediate surroundings and often compensate for their own inactivity by observing the actions of others. This place also becomes the stage for audience role prominence\(^3\). Every actor plays his role out well.

Due to the low vehicular carrying capacity of Devon, the decrease in traffic speed shifts the balance of power to the pedestrians. Pedestrian behavior is noticeably anarchic with little or no respect for red lights or crosswalks. People have the tendency to jay walk given the slightest chances. This is more so due in part to the need of having to go to a store that is right across the street, rather than having to walk up to the intersection. None of the people

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\(^1\) The complex set of cooperative behavior between pedestrians, bicyclists and vendors that choreograph their fluid movement.

\(^2\) Civic Inattention acknowledges the right for others to be present without attempting to bring them into one’s orbit of friendship or target (Childs, 2004)

\(^3\) Sometimes we act as audiences and at others become the actors.
who were interviewed ever mentioned being issued a ticket or even a warning for an act of
jay walking even when asked specifically, but they did admit refraining from jaywalking in
other parts of the city where some of them were warned on more than one instance.

Devon (possibly like most other places) is evidence that any object that can be sat
upon would become a seat. This is the case with most of what the street has to offer in the
form of fire hydrants, planters, bollards even cars bumpers. Same is the case with any object
that can be leaned upon- parking meters, lampposts and walls being the best example. People
exhibit a tendency of leaning if there is a possibility of doing so.

Reducing effective walkways by constraining pedestrian traffic is one of the many
methods employed to enhance commercial vitality of the street. Other methods include
displaying merchandise on the sidewalks. Strict requirements for compliance with the
boundary and landscaping requirements apart from obtaining aldermanic and city council
approvals as compared to the feasible monetary benefits have deterred many a storekeepers
from stoop lines and sidewalk cafés. Some continue to encourage (against the law) the much
noted free choice crowding that often turns a looker into a buyer when merchandise is
displayed outside the store. It sells the store.

Honking on the city streets did seem to be higher than found in other parts of the City,
but the City does have signs posted at every alternate intersection warning a $350 fine for
honking. I am not aware of this is because of erratic traffic or a habitual flaw, but the honking
continues in spite of such signs.

The City of Chicago adopted a new zoning ordinance in 2004, but allowed the
individual Chicago communities to shape the specific zoning and mapping processes. The
portion of Devon Avenue under study (between California and Western) is zoned B1
(Neighboring shopping district) and B3 (Community Shopping District) and PD (Planned Development) at Rockwell and Devon Avenue. Also, this stretch has been recently rezoned as a Pedestrian Street. The regulations governing Pedestrian Streets are intended to promote transit, economic vitality, and pedestrian safety and comfort.

“Planners have a special ethical, moral, and political responsibility to advocate for the preservation of the cultural resources when systematic inequalities have weakened the power of particular groups to defend their own tangible heritage”(Sandercock, 1998:66) It is important for planning practitioners and policy-makers to realize that it is not enough to simply gather “the facts” regarding these characteristics. They must also realize that the effort to truly understand does not stop with detached observation but with understanding how one’s own value, attitudes, and customs affect the observers’ opinions and preconceived notions. Furthermore, the attributes observed must be evaluated within an historical context to probe the question of whether they are based in the customs of the community are a result of the application of previous public policy actions.

“[T]he center (street) is the place for news and gossip, for the creation of ideas, for starting parades...[T]his human congress is the genius of the place, its reason for being, its great marginal edge. This is the engine, the city’s true export. Whatever makes this congress easier, more spontaneous, more enjoyable, is not at all a frill.”
- Whyte(1988:341)
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