

# Urban resilience: Measuring place identity in sustainable communities

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**ABSTRACT:** During the last half-century, Marc Fried (1963) and generations of other researchers have found that place identity, place attachment and other people-place relationships are fundamental to the successful development of resilient communities. These complex socio-spatial frameworks are essential to welding a loose array of physical streets and blocks into a sense of community (Fried, 2000). Studies indicate that place identity is related to increased levels of stability, livability and resilience. Place identity is a multi-dimensional construct incorporating several aspects of people-place bonding and various mutually defining socio-psychological characteristics. Research suggests that social amenities, residential choices, demographics, local social networks, individual needs, and personality styles determine the strength of the connection to a place. Unfortunately for urban designers, most previous studies have lacked a focus on the relationship between measurable formal / spatial aspects of a neighborhood and a resident's level of place identity. Earlier research has focused instead on a resident's identification with a geographically defined group of people and not to the physical place itself or its features. As a result, connections between measurable physical characteristics and socio-psychological place identity metrics are vague at best, and the role of place identity in planning theory and design practice has been sorely neglected.

Using data derived from a broader research project, this study aims to understand and analyze a portion of Raleigh, NC in terms of its formal, spatial and social characteristics. The larger project, "Uncovering Southwest Raleigh," was focused on understanding current and future forces affecting change in order to develop strategies to enable the residents of the Southwest quadrant of Raleigh to enhance and promote a healthy, creative and economically sustainable future for the district. The primary goal in the current study is to discover the physical measurable characteristics in the built environment that relate to nurturing socio-psychological aspects, such as place identity, on a neighborhood level. The objective in this study is to broaden the understanding of the relationship between a neighborhood's physical and social characteristics. This study employed a well-tested socio-metric, the Urban Identity Scale (UIS) deployed in the form of an online survey instrument. The results of the UIS were then compared to various measurable physical characteristics of the included neighborhoods. The 758 survey responses derived through this exploration were then analyzed using a correlational approach and compared to data derived from multiple collection techniques, including robust socio-economic and demographic data, interviews, and extensive geographic Information System (GIS) map data.