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### **The Alley Rediscovered**

The traditional alleyway dates back to the layout of the medieval town (Hardy 186). However the word alley emerged later from the French word “allee”, which means “lined landscape pathways with trees to shield view into private gardens” (Hardy 185). The concept of the alley referred to the space in between the buildings. Buildings were built close to each other and often housed both living and working environments. As the Industrial Revolution in London came the intensity of the city grew and so did the need to seek refuge from the smog in the countryside. Spatial theories emerged to bring nature to the city, as represented in Le Corbusier ideas of Immeuble Villa, domestic dwellings that combined gardens and larger collective forms (Avermate et al. 129). At the same time more functionalist visions of the alley emerged as suburbanization trends began in the United States in the 1960s and the idea of the alley as a utility strengthened in the inner city and in a few suburban areas (Hardy 187).

However, conceptions of the alley continue to be reimagined through New Urbanist theories which push us to reinvest and rediscover the alley as a community landscape. At the same time, city initiatives challenge popular conceptions of the alley as a place to house and hide the grit of the city to one that has the potential to encourage social interaction and cohesion. In this analysis we attempt to understand what makes a space in between buildings an alley by developing a toolkit based off of relevant scholarly texts. The toolkit aims to evaluate spaces in between buildings for their spatial, visual and functional qualities to make this evaluation. In the end the toolkit allows us to understand what makes an alley an alley as well as what fosters community expression and social cohesion within these spaces.

## Literature Review

In the ‘Reappropriation of City Infrastructure: Alleyways’ Hardy points to the alley as it first emerged as a landscape pathway and developed as an area to provide service functions in many cities like Chicago. As the alley capital of the country with approximately 1900 miles of alleys, alleyways characterize an urban typology that is integral to the urban form of Chicago. The traditional alleyway in the case of Chicago came as a network of connected streets that follow Chicago’s orthogonal layout. Alleys emerged in relation to the front facing streets as a service area and a place to house the grit and dirtiness of the city (Hardy 187).

However, conceptions of the need and uses of alleyways continue to evolve and often revisit ideas of the alley as “landscape paths with trees to shield view into the private gardens” (Hardy 185). For example, recent discussions have emerged in Chicago about grid sustainability to activate the alley as a lively area filled with native landscaping, rain gardens and rain collection. Efforts to revitalize alley infrastructure aim to mitigate issues such as “storm management, heat reduction, material recycling, energy conservation and glare reduction” (Hardy 190).

New urbanism’s human scale centered design supports efforts to “return to the grid pattern of small streets, small lots, sidewalks and alleys” aligns with Chicago’s recent attempts to activate the alley (Ford 274). Additionally, New Urbanists criticize the street morphology typically found in suburban towns by arguing that suburban street design accentuates privacy, isolation and disconnection. As a result alleys are being rediscovered by New Urbanism as an “ideal place for informal activities that create a sense of community” (Ford 277).

On par with New Urbanism's rediscovery of the alley, scholars like Martin also push us to think beyond the alley as simply a utility space as he highlights an alley's functionality and contribution as a community landscape. In “Back-alley as Community Landscape” Martin first defines the alleyway by three basic characteristics: its functions in accommodating service vehicles such as garbage trucks, its role in granting access to back entrances of dwellings and as an edge landscape to residents' yards (Martin 149). To understand the components that give the alley its character, Martin delves into these three functionalities. Firstly along with accommodating service vehicles, alleyways also house poles that carry power up above and down below drainage holes to manage stormwater. In this way alley surfaces also act as an edge to the water, gas, electric and sewer lines that exist beneath the surface ( Martin 138). They also act as an edge between the interior and exterior of the home. As such as a landscape edge, alleyways are neither uniformly “wasteland nor a sanitized, aesthetically uniform courtyard.” (Martin 149).

Alleyways exist in a multitude of variations, often devoid of the same strict rules and regulations that govern how space is inhabited in the front facing landscape and the formal streetscape (Martin 149). For example, the variation exists to the degree to which the alleyway invites or reveals a residents yard and interior life. As he notes that alleyways as an edge landscape are “characterized by both hidden and revealing aspects of the resident yards” (Martin 149). Additionally, the back sidedness of the alley creates a split personality as a place of seclusion and inclusion. This split personality is marked by both what it reveals of residents' yards and the level of seclusion created by the alleys' enclosure as marked by walls, fences and plants (Martin 138).

As an edge it is both reacting to separation and creating separation between residents' yards and the alley itself. Similar to Martin, in "The Image of the City" Lynch describes an edge as the meeting point for two contrasting regions that are set in close juxtaposition to each other (Lynch 100). To make sense of the alley as an edge it is important to distinguish the observer from the outside and the inside, in this case the residents' yards and the back sidedness of the alley. However, as Lynch states an edge is not just simply a border but rather can also act as a seam melding two areas together. He noted "an edge may be more than simply a dominant barrier if some visual or motion penetration is allowed through it" (Lynch 10). The motion penetration that is commonplace in alleyways as Martin described is the coming and going of residents.

It is this movement across temporality that shapes the alley as a permeable seam rather than a strict boundary between residents' yards and the outside world. The alley's permeability acts as a site of generative place making a "product of the collective" (Rossi 29). As Rossi, notes "the social content of the city is the basis for reading it; the study of social content must precede the description of the graphical artifacts that ultimately give the urban landscape its meaning" (Rossi 48). Martin employs his discussion of the alleyway as a socially activated space to describe an alley's permeability. He states "there is both a spectator and a participatory aspect to the alley that enriches it as a social space and an open-space linkage within the neighborhood" (Martin 143). In the "Reappropriation of City Infrastructure: Alleyways" Hardy describes alleys as a space between the public and private. She notes that the degree to which this space is porous determines the level of engagement and visibility between the public and private realms.

Additionally Martin argues that the extent to which the alley is activated as a social space is dependent on its degree of hiddenness, revealingness and utility. Martin compares two distinct

examples to reveal how the alley either prevents or activates these social interactions between neighbors. He compares Cameo Place at Laguna West in California and Ladd's Addition in Portland, Oregon. The alleys at Cameo Place provide little opportunity for interaction, as the landscape provides a strictly service function (Martin 149). While alleys in Ladd's Addition function as both service alleys as well as social sites of neighborhood interaction through the diversity of activities that are facilitated in the alley, such as arriving, leaving by car, basketball playing and gardening.

These activities generate a diversity of uses across various temporalities allowing for the alley to be a landscape that is alive (Martin 141). In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" discusses the activation of spaces across various temporalities through the degree to which a street is successful in activating both primary and secondary uses (Jacobs 168). While Jacobs does not directly refer to this in the context of the alley, this theoretical framework can be applied to understand how an alley's ability to spark both primary and secondary uses contributes to its ability to activate the space as both place to complete utilities and socialize. An alley primary's use exists from its ability to act as a service area and from there secondary uses emerge such as social contacts. Overall the effectiveness of the alley to fulfill these primary uses and secondary uses, allows it to act as both an area that provides services and amenities (Jacobs 154).

In "Life Between Buildings" Gehl defines social activities as activities that "depend on the presence of others in public spaces." (Gehl 12). Activities that occur in public spaces are referred to as "resultant" activities because as Gehl states "they develop in connection with the other activities because people are in the same space" (Gehl 12). The social activities that occur in the alley are generally superficial but as Gehl notes these superficial interactions have the potential to plant the seed to more "comprehensive forms of social activity" (Gehl 13). As such

although the physical space of the alley does not directly determine the “quality, content and intensity of social contacts” it exists as a community landscape that has the potential to house these interactions.

Although the alley is often a forgotten space, the theoretical frameworks that Martin and Gehl push us to notice “Life between buildings [as] not merely pedestrian traffic or recreational or social activities,” instead “Life in between building comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal space in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive” (Gehl 14). Places like the alleyway house what Gehl refers to as more relaxed low intensity contacts with the potential for these contacts to turn into high intensity contacts. Low intensity contacts refers to passive contacts and high intensity contacts refers to close friendships (Gehl 15). This points to the greater discussion of the alley as a seam rather than a strict boundary. Its permeability is made evident when these low intensity contacts develop into high high intensity contacts across time.

As a seam the alley also has the potential to act as a community landscape not only through the social contacts it has the ability to facilitate but also in the role it plays to reflect art and culture. Hardy presents the example of Phoenix, Arizona where larger murals in alleys reflect Mexican and Native American cultures. These alleys act as sites of both community and political expression. As Hardy states alley spaces act as a seam through their ability to “encourage differences to meet, to mutually expose themselves, and to create ground of mutual awareness” (Hardy 192). Overall these theorists push us to think beyond the alley as just a utility space to one that has the ability to act as a site of community and political expression.

## **Analysis**

As an often forgotten space, New Urbanism encourages us to revisit the alley and to think beyond the confines of an alley as a utility space. Additionally, it pushes us to rethink the way we typically conceive of an alley as a dark place that houses the grit and dirt of the city. New Urbanism critique of the suburban backyard and favor toward the alley, pushes up to reimagine the alley as a community landscape (Martin 166). This paper aims to add to the discussion, by utilizing the theories explored above to devise a toolkit to read the backside of streets and residences for the degree to which they exhibit alley-like qualities. Overall, New Urbanism reminds us of the origins of the alley as a space in between buildings with “lined landscape pathways of trees to shield view into private gardens”(Hardy 185).

It is thus important to use the toolkit to first define the characteristics that make an alley an alley. We do this by first employing Martin's analysis to understand the functionality of alley-like spaces. The toolkit will first measure a space's functionality based on its ability to accommodate service vehicles such as garbage trucks, its role in granting access to back entrances of dwellings and as an edge landscape to residents' yards (Martin 149).

The alley's role as a utility area includes its contribution in accommodating service vehicles, housing poles that carry power lines, and drainage holes to manage stormwater. On the other hand, its role in granting access to back entrances of dwelling points to the degree to which an alley space acts as a portal to residents' yard and interior life. This is the relationship this toolkit is particularly interested in understanding and bringing to light. The balance and visibility of this relationship highlights the alley as a place of both seclusion and inclusion. Seclusion in the way it hides the services it provides from view of the formal streetscape and residents' yards through the presence of walls, fences and plants (Martin 138). Inclusion in that

although the walls, fences and plants separate these distinct spaces they are permeable and reveal aspects of a residents yard.

The alley's split personality is made permeable through the movement of residents arriving and leaving by car. This movement is what enables the alley to be both an edge landscape in that it creates boundaries between the residents and the backside of streets and also a seam that binds these two areas together. As Lynch states, an edge is not just simply a border but rather can also act as a seam melding two areas together. The permeability and the seam like quality of the alley is defined by Martin as “both [the] spectator and participatory aspect [of the] alley enriches it as a social space and an open-space linkage within the neighborhood” (Martin 143). The toolkit aims to measure the degree to which an alley functions as a seam that facilitates social contacts. As Rossi states “ the social content of the city is the basis for reading it,” this is precisely why the toolkit aims to measure the permeability of alley spaces. We will use the scale of an alley's hiddenness, revealingness and utility that Martin devises in “Alley as a Community Landscape” to measure an alley's seclusion, inclusion and permeability.

To understand a city, you must understand both the physical form, functionality and how that space is used and inhabited. We can employ Gehl's discussion in “Life Between Buildings” to understand how the alley space is used and inhabited as a social space. Gehl notes that although the physical space of the alley itself does not determine the “quality, context and intensity of the social contacts,” it seam like qualities allows the space to act as a community landscape. When we employ the term community landscape in our discussion of the alley we are referring to its ability to house low intensity contacts of residents leaving and returning by car and through the other informal activities that may occur in the alley.

The toolkit utilizes Gehl's reading of the alley as a space between buildings that has the power to cultivate resultant activities from the primary utility based interactions that typically occur in the alley. When others are present in the alley conducting activities at the same times this is when low intensity interactions emerge between neighbors. These interactions are what gives way to the alley as a community landscape. We are particularly interested in the factors that lead the alley to be activated as a social space, again this can be measured using Martin's scale of hiddenness, revealingness and utility.

As such it is important to note that the alley as a community landscape can also be represented through the ways in which an alley acts as a site of community and political expression. Along with considering an alley's ability to foster social contacts we will also pay close attention to its contribution to the community landscape in the form of cultural and political expression. This is often evident by the presence of murals but not limited solely to this visual marker.

Overall the toolkit mentioned above will evaluate a space in between buildings for its functionality and visual markers. We will measure the space's degree of utility, hiddenness, revealingness to highlight how its valuation of this scale marks how permeable it is. Its level of permeability and porosity will inform whether or not an alley-like space acts as seam. This seam like quality is what allows the alley to foster a space for social contacts to flourish and act as a site of community cohesion. We are thus interested in determining whether a space in between buildings exhibits alley-like qualities and determining the alley-like qualities that allows it to act as a community landscape.

This toolkit will particularly be utilized to evaluate two apartment complex developments in Pilsen, a primarily Latinos neighborhood in the Lower Westside of Chicago. These two

apartment complex developments are similar in character and distinct from other developments in the way that the alleys were converted into enclosed garden spaces. These spaces are only open to residents but can be viewed by outsiders as well. We will also put these spaces in conversation with other alley spaces in Pilsen, many of which are filled with murals and other visual community expressions. Overall the toolkit will evaluate this particular apartment garden like space for its alley like qualities and put it in conversation with other alleys in the neighborhood.

## **Conclusion**

As a space in between buildings, alleys are made distinct for their functionality as neither a “wasteland nor a sanitized aesthetically uniform courtyard” (Martin 149). Its dual personality as both a place of seclusion and inclusion contributes to an alley's unique character. Its ability to act as an edge landscape and seam between residents' yards and the backside of streets allows this space to be a potential site of social cohesion. The toolkit developed will be employed to evaluate the specific site identified above for the degree to which it exhibits alley-like qualities. Additionally, the toolkit will enable us to put the site identified in conversation with other alleys in the neighborhood to get a better understanding of its contribution as a community landscape to the neighborhood at large.

## Sources

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