

# Measuring Place Attachment: Stabilizing Factors in Inner Ring Suburbs

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*Abstract: The patterns of stability or change in cities can be jarringly different between neighborhoods within the same urban area. Often it is the first-ring neighborhoods in cities that most reflect socioeconomic fluctuations. While some have experienced a downward spiral, other communities have been stable and persistent. What are the factors that have allowed some neighborhoods to thrive, while all around them are cycles of systemic change? This study examines how patterns and perceptions of built form are associated with the socio-psychological aspects of place identity and place attachment, and how this relates to stability or change in older neighborhoods. A case study approach is used to investigate two neighborhoods in Durham, and Charlotte, with similar histories, demographics, and downtown proximity, but differences in their patterns of change and fluctuation over years. Several methodologies are blended to delineate the spatial factors relating to differences in stability. Techniques include a survey instrument to measure place identity and place attachment, comparisons to measures of respondents' perception of their neighborhood, and measures of urban form and social attributes. Our goal in this study is to develop future guidelines for urban designers and place-makers to use in the development of more stable neighborhoods.*

*Keywords: Place Attachment, Stability, Walkability*

## INTRODUCTION

The divergent patterns of stability or change in cities can be jarringly different between neighborhoods, even within the same urban area. Where communities begin with similar socio-economic populations and homologous economic advantage at relatively equal distances from their downtowns, why do we often see such differences in stability?

What are the factors that allow some neighborhoods to thrive, while others exhibit cycles of systemic change? Within the myriad factors involved in these differences of stability, we focus on the relationship between a neighborhood's mosaic of built form and public space and its sense of attachment and identity, and how this relationship might contribute to neighborhood stability. Fried (2000, 197) asserted that spatial identity designates the geographic or physical dimension within which "houses, streets, even whole communities can bound, intensify, and provide a spatial locus for identification and community attachment linked to social group identity." Further, this complex socio-spatial framework is fundamental to "welding an array of physical streets into a loose sense of community."

This study examines how patterns of built form and public space are associated with the socio-psychological aspects of place identity and place attachment. Additionally, we explore how this relationship between place attachment and built form might contribute to varying levels of stability, particularly in older first-ring neighborhoods. Drawing data and findings from two larger on-going studies, we utilize a case study approach to investigate two neighborhoods in Durham and Charlotte, NC, with similar histories, economics, demographics, and