

Livable Streets and Social Capital



In the late '60s, the American **Donald Appleyard** began researching the liveability of the streets and compared three residential streets in San Francisco. The three streets (Frankin, Gough, and Octavia Street) differed in nothing but the degree of car traffic there; otherwise adjacent streets, parallel, are the same size, with same size and age of their buildings. There were 2,000 cars a day on the first street, 8,000 on the second and 16,000 on the third...

A PILOT STUDY 21

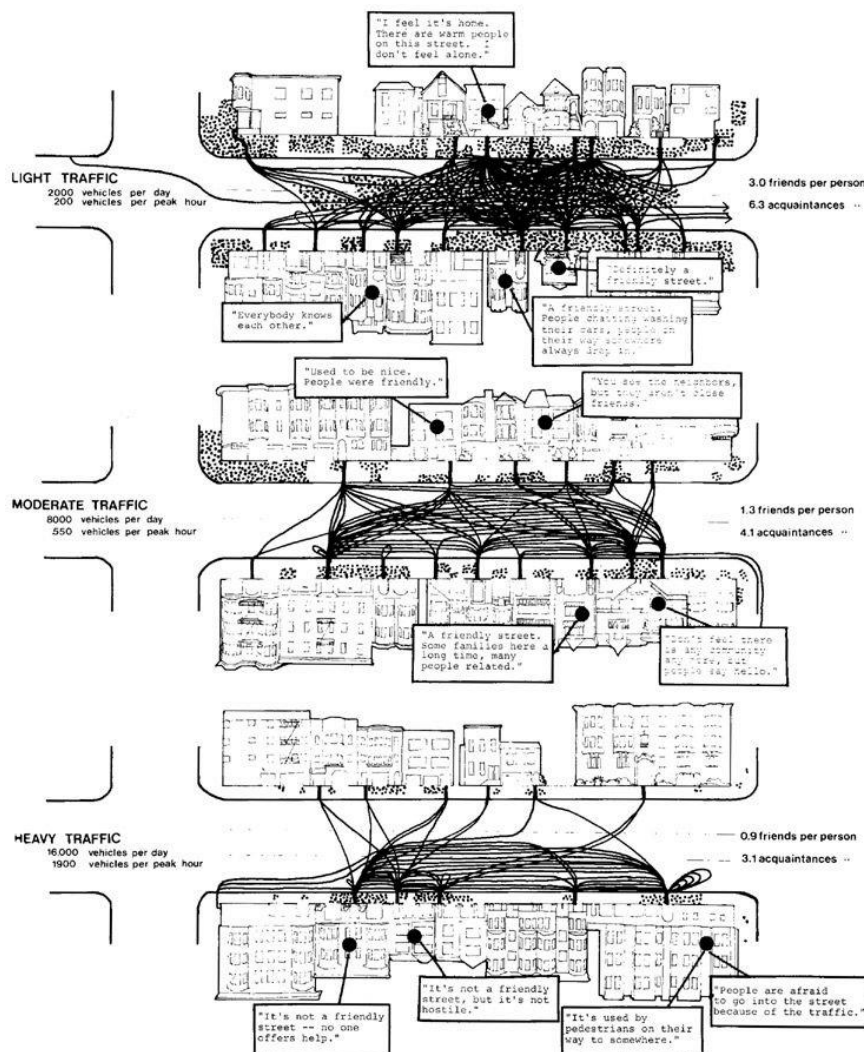
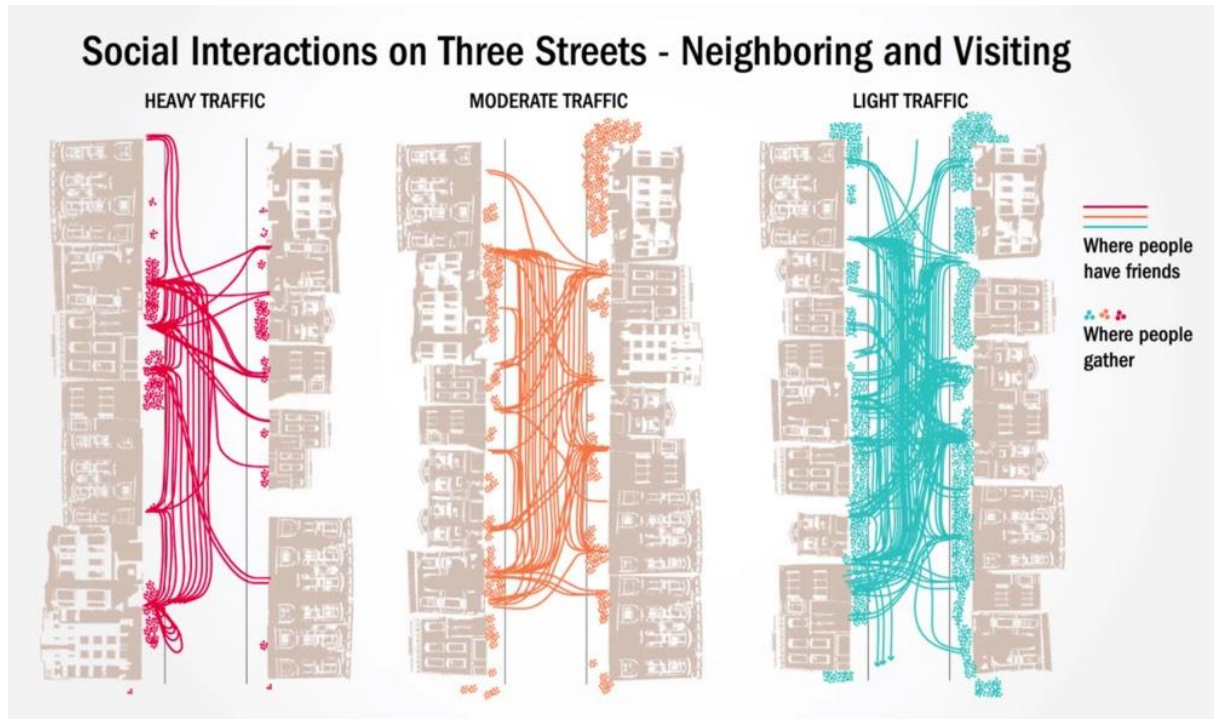


FIGURE 3. San Francisco. Neighboring and visiting on three streets: lines show where people said they had friends; dots show where people are said to gather

Appleyard was one of the first to use *image mapping* as a research tool to study the viability of the streets. Residents of the streets surveyed were given a sketch of their street on which they could mark the answers. This allowed Appleyard to gauge residents' thoughts, feelings and emotions about their home and neighbourhood.



Social interactions on image mapping. Source: <https://www.centroidpm.com/creating-livable-city-streets-urban-projectization/>

Where only 2,000 cars a day went by, residents reported far more friends, and had twice as many acquaintances as those on high-traffic streets. When residents were asked to draw the street, people were happy to spend much more time drawing than the residents of the busy street. The details of the buildings were better known and considered more important - much more detailed, more interesting drawings were made, with the plants and even the canal cover, the fire hydrant, and other smaller details on them.

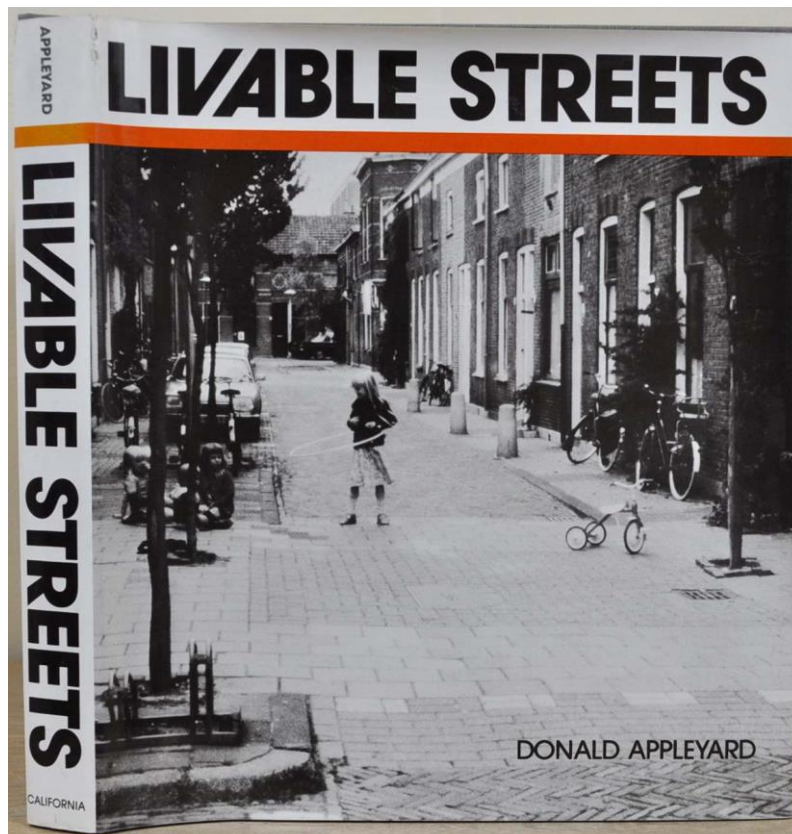
Strong community was obviously tangible on the first street. They often sat and talked on the stairs in front of the doors; children played on the sidewalks (e.g., played football) with standing adults around. This was especially true at the corner store.

Where 16,000 cars passed per day, the residents felt ownership only for their apartment, but often not even for that. Few friends and acquaintances have been reported. Many did not even start the drawing practice, but those who started usually spent little time, drew few details with only some lines. **People were reluctant to stop on the sidewalk** of the street, tried to simply pass by. There was no visible sign of any community formed here.

Appleyard has written about the various interest groups that are involved in some way in shaping public spaces, thus the development of cities. He wrote boldly that each interest group has very different powers, and he also wrote that decisions are too often made on the basis of short-term economic considerations.

He emphasized the importance of creating a truly democratic, **grassroots public space reforming process**. He demanded that everyone with any interest in the development of public space be able to participate in the decision-making process, and that the interests of weaker groups be properly represented. ""Good urban design must be for the poor as well as for the rich" – he stated.

Appleyard highlighted that in downtown streets (where power differences between interest groups are greatest) groups that require less space but promote community life and interactions — notably smallholders and **pedestrians** — should be strongly represented.



Donald Appleyard's book: Livable Streets was far ahead of its time, but its message and even methods have been frequently quoted by the profession ever since. Characteristically, at the time of its publication (1981), urban development was dominated by the transfer of public spaces to cars; for example, Nyugati tér car traffic overpass was built in Budapest in that year, which was intended to facilitate car traffic in the city centre.

Social capital and urban planning

Appleyard's work also highlighted the importance of **community planning**, but also underpinned aspects of sustainability that have not been addressed since then, namely the social aspects: relationship between **social capital** and urban planning. Following his work, a whole series of researches later proved that **people-centred urban planning and urban development directly contribute to the development of a network of social relations**. And this is closely related to the issue of social capital, the adaptability and resilience of society.

Sources:

- Donald Appleyard's son short film on livable streets:
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xg4xtx_revisiting-donald-appleyardys-livable-streets_news
- Livable streets: connecting people + places <https://www.livablestreets.info/>
- Livable Streets: creating safe and inviting streets and sidewalks
<https://www.sfmta.com/units/livable-streets>
- Walk 21: International Federation of Pedestrians <https://walk21.com/about-us/partners/international-federation-of-pedestrians/>
- Creating livable city-streets – urban projectization
<https://www.centroidpm.com/creating-livable-city-streets-urban-projectization/>
- Hungarian language description on the book:
<http://gyalogosoldal.5mp.eu/web.php?a=gyalogosoldal&o=gqE2FenwRJ>