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Communication Channels, Spatial Stereotyping, and Urban Conflict: A Cross-Scale and Spatio-Temporal Perspective

Sorin A. Matei*, Sandra Ball-Rokeach** and Ștefan Ungurean***

Our work over the past ten years has focused on the communicative aspects of spatial and inter-group stereotyping and misperception.¹ We have studied how urban groups attribute “fear” quotients to each other (that is, the degree to which they are perceived as dangerous or threatening), especially in the context of past violent conflict and civil unrest. In this article we review selected findings from our present and past research, focusing on how and why spatial stereotyping shapes urban intergroup relationships. We focus particularly on the impact socio-spatial stereotyping has on civic wellbeing at a local (neighborhood) level.

Our research addresses how individuals exposed to various types of communication situations—from face-to-face to Internet environments—are more or less likely to react to urban locations with fear or to find them desirable. The present article summarizes what we have learned from a number of research projects about the effects of communication practices on spatial and ethnic stereotyping in conditions of violent urban conflict and will offer a number of recommendations for mitigating the negative effects of these processes.

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1. Sorin A. Matei, Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach & Jack Qiu, *Fear and Misperception of Los Angeles Urban Space: A Spatial-Statistical Study of Communication-Shaped Mental Maps*, 28 COMM. RES. 429 (2001); Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *A Theory of Media Power and a Theory of Media Use: Different Stories, Questions, and Ways of Thinking*, 1 MASS COMM. AND SOC'Y 5 (1998); Sorin Matei, Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Mary Wilson, Jennifer Gibbs & Elizabeth Gutierrez Hoyt, *Metamorphosis: A Field Research Methodology for Studying Communication Technology and Community*, ELECTRONIC J. COMM. (2001), available at <http://www.cios.org/www/ejc/v11n201.htm#Metamorphose>; Sorin A. Matei & Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *The Internet in the Communication Infrastructure of Ethnically-Marked Neighborhoods: Meso or Macro-Linkage?*, 53 J. OF COMM. 642 (2003); Sorin A. Matei, *The Impact of State-Level Social Capital on Emergence of Virtual Communities*, 48 J. OF BROADCASTING AND ELEC. MEDIA 23 (2004); Sorin A. Matei & Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles Riots and the Communicative Construction of the “Fear Epicenter” of Los Angeles*, 72 COMM. MONOGRAPHS 301 (2005) [hereinafter Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 1965 L.A. Riots]; Sorin A. Matei, “Good” and “Bad” Neighborhoods: Perception and Reality (2003) [hereinafter Matei, “Good” and “Bad”] (special report prepared for the Kettering Foundation 2003) (on file with author); Sorin A. Matei, *Cartografia Mentala Poate Indica Stereotipiile Urbane* (Mental Cartography Can Identify Urban Stereotypes), 25 REVISTA DE ADMINISTRATIE PUBLICA LOCALA 8-9 (2006) [hereinafter Matei, Mental Cartography].

I. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This research relies on a communication research paradigm, which proposes that intergroup relations and civic wellbeing in urban areas are the products of a specific "communication infrastructure."² This is a combination of communicative practices, channels, and perceptions that are spatially rooted.

A primary assumption is that residents of urban areas build social ties and construct social spaces under the influence of mental maps that emerge at the intersection of communication flows mediated by various communication/media channels.³ This research builds on a broader sociological and mass media effects tradition.⁴ The contribution of such research lies in viewing mass media effects through the lens of an ecological interplay between actors and their urban and communicative environments.⁵ This type of inquiry is subsumed under the broader concept of communication infrastructure.

II. THE COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE MODEL

The communication infrastructure concept⁶ builds on a number of communication traditions: cultivation,⁷ agenda setting,⁸ the two-step flow of communica-

2. Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Yong-Chan Kim & Sorin A. Matei, *Storytelling Neighborhood: Paths to Belonging in Diverse Urban Environments*, 28 COMM. RES. 392 (2001); Yong-Chan Kim & Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *Civic Engagement From a Communication Infrastructure Perspective*, 16 COMM. THEORY 173 (2006).

3. REGINALD G. GOLLEDGE & ROBERT J. STIMSON, SPATIAL BEHAVIOR: A GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE (1997); Matei, Ball-Rokeach & Qiu, *supra* note 1, at 434; KEVIN LYNCH, THE IMAGE OF THE CITY (1965).

4. DAVID L. ALTHEIDE, CREATING FEAR: NEWS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CRISIS (2002); Darnell M. Hunt, *Fires on the Screen: Raced Ways of Seeing and Resistance* (1994) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA) (on file with author); Robert Entman, *Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism, and Cultural Change*, 69 JOURNALISM Q. 341 (1992); Herbert Blumer, *The Mass, the Public, and Public Opinion*, in READER IN PUBLIC OPINION AND COMMUNICATION (Bernard Berelson & Morris Janowitz eds., 1953); Lawrence Bobo & Camille L. Zubrinsky, *Attitudes on Residential Integration: Perceived Status Differences, Mere in-Group Preference, or Racial Prejudice?*, 74 SOC. FORCES 883 (1996); Leo Bogart & Frank E. Orenstein, *Mass Media and Community Identity in an Interurban Setting*, 42 JOURNALISM Q. 179 (1965); David M. Chavis & Abraham Wandersman, *Sense of Community in the Urban Environment: A Catalyst for Participation and Community Development*, 18 AM. J. COMMUNITY PSYCHOL. 55 (1990); CHARLES H. COOLEY, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: A STUDY OF THE LARGER MIND (1909); MELVIN DEFLEUR & SANDRA J. BALL-ROKEACH, THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION (1980); Lewis A. Friedland & Jack M. McLeod, *Community Integration and Mass Media: A Reconsideration*, in MASS MEDIA, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A MACROSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE (David Demers & K. Viswanath eds., 1999); MORRIS JANOWITZ, THE COMMUNITY PRESS IN AN URBAN SETTING: THE SOCIAL ELEMENTS OF URBANISM (2d ed. 1967); John D. Kasarda & Morris Janowitz, *Community Attachment in Mass Society*, 39 AM. SOC. REV. 328 (1974); ELIHU KATZ & PAUL F. LAZARSFELD, PERSONAL INFLUENCE; THE PART PLAYED BY PEOPLE IN THE FLOW OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS (1965); ELIHU KATZ & TAMAS SZECESKO, MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE (1981); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* 373 CURRENT 3-9 (1995); Eric W. Rothenbuhler et al., *Communication, Community Attachment and Involvement*, 73 JOURNALISM & MASS COMM. Q. 445 (1996); KEITH STAMM, NEWSPAPER USE AND COMMUNITY TIES: TOWARD A DYNAMIC THEORY (1985).

5. See Matei, Ball-Rokeach, Wilson, Gibbs & Hoyt, *supra* note 1.

6. Matei, Ball-Rokeach & Qiu, *supra* note 1, at 429; Ball-Rokeach, Kim & Matei, *supra* note 2, at 392; Yong-Chan Kim & Joo-Young Jung, *Geo-Ethnicity and Civic Engagement from a Communica-*

tion,⁹ and media system dependency theory.¹⁰ Of these, media system dependency (MSD) theory is the most influential. The cornerstone principle of MSD is that in everything people do, they depend on a number of specific communication channels.

A communication infrastructure includes two basic components: the communication action context and the multilevel storytelling system. The first element includes the physical, psychological, socio-cultural, economic, and technological dimensions of everyday social interactions. The psychological factors are believed to be of particular importance. They precipitate a level of comfort with people located in a given socio-geographic space and moderate people's likelihood of engaging one another in the co-construction of a community.

The second element of the communication infrastructure refers to the channels of communication themselves, from interpersonal to mass mediated. The channels are important for their ability to foster a process of group conversation (storytelling) as part of a continuous process of environmental surveillance. Surveillance, however, is not narrowly construed in functional-instrumental terms; rather, the mental maps that are created by it generate a habitable area—an affective-actional universe for urban residents.

Conceptually and methodologically, the surveillance role of mental maps is approached from the perspective of MSD theory, in which mental mapping is seen as an essential tool for social understanding.¹¹ Urban communities need to tell stories about themselves if they are to emerge as distinct social entities and to imagine themselves as communities. Stories told about an urban/residential area will be incorporated in the way in which people imagine themselves as a community and will become part of their communicative context. Simultaneously, perception of one's immediately surrounding residential environment is directly impacted by the communication infrastructure.

This perception is encapsulated in mental images and maps that tell residents what areas of the social space in which they live should be avoided or frequented. These maps and perceptions are the product of communicative exchanges, which develop within the storytelling communicative infrastructure. Mental maps refer to an inventory of subjective characteristics associated with specific areas of an urban area.

tion Infrastructure Perspective, 23 POL. COMM. 421 (2006); Kim & Ball-Rokeach, *supra* note 2, at 173.

7. James Shanahan & Victoria Jones, *Cultivation and Social Control*, in MASS MEDIA, SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL CHANGE 31-50 (David Demers & K. Viswanath eds., 1999).

8. SHANTO IYENGAR & DAVID KINDER, NEWS THAT MATTERS: TELEVISION AND AMERICAN OPINION (1987); Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw, *The Agenda-Setting Function of the Media*, 36 PUB. OPINION Q.176 (1972).

9. KATZ & LAZARSFELD, *supra* note 4; J. P. Robinson, *Interpersonal Influence in Elections Campaigns: The Two-Step Flow of Communication Hypothesis*, 40 PUB. OPINION Q. 304-19 (1976); R. O. Wyatt, Elihu Katz & Joo-Han Kim, *Bridging the Spheres: Political and Personal Conversation in Public and Private Spaces*, 50 J. OF COMM. 71 (2000).

10. Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *The Origins of Individual Media System Dependency: A Sociological Framework*, 12 COMM. RES. 485 (1985).

11. See Ball-Rokeach, *supra* note 1; Ball-Rokeach, *supra* note 10, at 486; Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *Media Systems and Mass Communication*, in THE FUTURE OF SOCIOLOGY (Edgar F. Borgatta & Karen S. Cook eds., 1988); Ball-Rokeach, Kim & Matei, *supra* note 2, at 396.

Perceptions of space are influenced by current or past conflicts as they are portrayed by communication channels. Due to their perceived “news value,” conflict and violence tend to attract media coverage and by implication public attention. All conflicts have winners and losers and the winners tend to rewrite or to remember the past in their own terms. This leads to stereotyping and stigmatization of the losing side, which takes place in the process of spatial remembrance of past conflicts.

To summarize, the authors propose that communication infrastructures generate spatial stories, and in doing so, they create mental maps of the surrounding urban reality. These mental maps absorb memories of conflict and shape social reality by ordering it along a number of spatial stereotypes. Social-spatial stereotypes create feelings of “desirability” and “avoidance” toward specific components of an urban area. These feelings can propel stigmatized regions into a vicious circle of public disinvestment, social degradation, and more stereotyping. What follows is a review of several studies that illustrate these processes.

III. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF OUR RESEARCH

Over the past ten years these authors have been conducting research in the United States (Los Angeles and Lexington, Kentucky) and more recently in Europe (Braşov, Romania) on the impact of the communication infrastructures on public life, spatial perception, and intergroup relations. Our methodology includes telephone surveys, mapping exercises, and focus groups. Samples of urban residents are interviewed about their communication and mental mapping practices. Mental mapping data is collected directly during phone interviews, through focus groups or in-person interviews. In one research scenario, employed in Lexington, Kentucky and in Braşov, respondents are asked to indicate which are the areas designated as zones surrounding cross-streets they avoid most often, or which they prefer. In another scenario, utilized in Los Angeles, respondents are asked to color in black and white maps of their urban areas. The colors they use, typically red, orange, green, and blue, are associated with feelings of avoidance/fear or desirability/comfort (red for degrees of fear, orange and green for degrees of comfort and blue for unknown areas). In both scenarios composite maps are constructed for groups of respondents utilizing Geographic Information Systems methodologies from which one can assess which urban areas are most desirable/comfortable versus which ones are most avoided/feared. Maps can also be combined selectively, based on specific respondent characteristics. This allows for determining how individuals that use specific channels of communication for social/spatial orientation and understanding construct their mental maps. Data about communicative practices and about the level of “belonging”¹² are also utilized as selection criteria in constructing group mental maps.

Overall, the maps facilitate precise determinations of what communication channels or levels of social anchoring influence specific perceptions of space. Differences between maps constructed by individuals with different types of media connections are interpreted via a number of statistical procedures, which in-

12. As used herein, level of “belonging” refers to the number and strength of ties to other people who reside in the same urban space.

clude spatial (local spatial association or spatial clustering) and classical statistical procedures (regression). These procedures are facilitated by the fact that each map can also be characterized synthetically by a specific average value of fear/comfort. In the colored map scenario, each pixel (dot) on the map is assigned a value, between -2 and 2, according to its color.¹³ When maps are combined, each pixel in the resulting composite map is assigned the average value of that pixel-position for all the maps that are combined. Consequently, each combined map can be described synthetically by the arithmetic mean of its pixels.

The maps were constructed slightly differently in the scenario where the respondents are asked to indicate only what areas around a specific cross-street they fear or feel comfortable about. The discrete points of fear or comfort were connected into a contiguous map through a process called interpolation. Levels of spatial fear or comfort for zones not specifically mentioned by the respondents are derived through finding the average value of fear/comfort between the points bordering them and for which the researchers had measurements. The average values are derived by using the inverse distance weight technique. This creates a continuous perceptive map for a given social space. Once the interpolation procedure is completed, a unique value of fear or comfort for the entire city is derived. This is done, in a manner similar to the colored maps technique, via pixel averaging.¹⁴

Subsequent statistical analyses usually employ neighborhoods (census tracts or police districts) as cases, each geographic unit being assigned a specific level of comfort/fear, which is derived through the same averaging procedure described above. The only difference between the averaging described above, and this, is that here, averaging is limited to the pixels contained in each unit of geography. These sub-units are also assigned socio-demographic information, such as crime rate, ethnic composition, real estate value, etc. In a typical situation, using census tracts as cases, the authors predict comfort/fear values via spatial or ordinary least square regression, utilizing socio-demographic characteristics as predictor variables. The results indicate how much each predictor factor is associated with perceptions of fear/comfort. This allows for determining whether perceptions of fear/comfort match the ethnic, real estate value, or crime characteristics of a neighborhood.

Other analyses look at how clustering of violent incidents match fear clusters or compare the average values of fear derived from maps of groups of respondents who share the same type of media dependencies (e.g., newspaper versus television). The results indicate where in space respondents feel more or less comfortable or which media-inflected maps tend to have more or less fear in them.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following findings from past and current research illustrate why and how the communication infrastructure matters in shaping spatial stereotyping.¹⁵

13. Purple = -2, red = -1, blue = 0, orange = 1, and green = 2.

14. See Matei, "Good" and "Bad," *supra* note 1.

15. Due to space limitations, no descriptive or significance data, with the exception of those for Braşov, reported here for the very first time, will be included in this paper. Detailed quantitative results can be found in the articles cited in this section.

A. Los Angeles, California

The Los Angeles data analyses indicate that the most feared areas are those inhabited by African-American populations or by a combination of African-Americans and Latinos, both having been on the losing end of a number of violent interethnic conflicts.¹⁶ Surprisingly or not, the spatial distribution of fear did not match the distribution of crime; that is, areas perceived as most feared were those that were uniquely dominated by these two ethnicities, not those characterized by the highest level of crime.

Spatial analyses of how well mental maps matched the social reality of Los Angeles revealed the existence of color-coded ethnic stereotypes. Respondents associated fear with the presence and, especially, with the co-presence of Hispanic and Black populations. At the same time, respondents tended to perceive their own spatial community as more secure, regardless of its level of objective insecurity (measured as crime rate), and they projected fear onto the neighbor's "backyard," especially if the neighbor happens to be of a different ethnicity.

The truly paradoxical finding was that while most of our respondents seem to feel comfortable in many areas having large foreign-born populations, the areas inhabited by foreign born Hispanics, who constitute the bulk of Southern California immigrants, are the most feared. Fear is thus directed at a specific ethnicity—the Hispanic ethnicity. In addition, co-presence of Black and Hispanic populations increases fear above and beyond fear of either group separately. This result strengthens the supposition that fear is color-coded along racial and ethnic lines.

Another important finding was the connection between the communication infrastructure and fear. The mental maps of those who depend the most on a combination of storytelling environments—television and interpersonal communication—reflect the greatest fear of Black and Hispanic areas. The augmented effect of television on fear, only in the presence of interpersonal communication, suggests that it is not simple exposure to the medium that constructs the mental images, but the elaboration of stereotypical imagery through a web of interactions, of which face-to-face conversations are a vital, but only a partial, link.

The Los Angeles mental mapping exercise also revealed that the point of maximum fear can be found in the Watts area. This is known in local and American history as an area of intense interracial conflict, which culminated in the 1965 Watts riots. The analysis indicated that a connection can be traced between the 1965 incidents (or more precisely the memory of those events), communication dependencies, and social construction of fear.¹⁷ The statistical analysis ruled out the possibility that fear of Watts was the product of more recent events, such as the 1992 riots or everyday crime. These findings supplemented the authors' conclusions regarding the general tendency in Los Angeles to associate fear with Blacks and Hispanics, because Watts is an area of mixed ethnicity today.

16. Matei, Ball-Rokeach & Qiu, *supra* note 1, at 435.

17. Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 1965 L.A. Riots, *supra* note 1, at 320.

B. Lexington, Kentucky

In Lexington, Kentucky the authors found that television creates mental maps of “avoidance” and that such mental maps can create or hinder an environment of civic integration and belonging.¹⁸ Similar to the research methodology employed in Los Angeles, the study started with a telephone survey of 801 Lexington residents (Lexingtonians). The survey provided the raw material for building a number of mental maps of “avoidance” and “desirability” of Lexington neighborhoods. “Avoidance” and “desirability” refer to residents’ perceptions that the neighborhoods are bad or good locations for buying a home. These perceptions were derived from questions in the format: What neighborhood would you recommend a friend avoid buying a home in? Locations were specified as areas around major intersections.

The main findings of the study were as follows:

1. Neighborhood avoidance is best predicted by crime, and the medium most responsible for conveying bad news is television, whose local programs have most powerfully shaped Lexingtonians’ mental maps of avoidance. These findings are a partial departure from the Los Angeles study, because crime seems to impact perceptions of fear. Yet, this should not come as a great surprise. Lexington is a far smaller geographic unit, which can be crossed in a car in less than half an hour, and Lexingtonians have much better first-hand knowledge of their community. Yet—and this is the truly significant finding—even in this small space, avoidance is enhanced by television.

2. Neighborhood desirability is connected with objective neighborhood characteristics: low population density and a higher proportion of college educated residents. Preference for areas with college educated residents highlights the fact that neighborhood desirability has more to do with the people living there than with the value of the houses.

3. High civic potential neighborhoods, where “belonging”¹⁹ is higher, are more likely to be known for their bad characteristics through newspapers and for their good characteristics through word of mouth (interpersonal communication). This fine-grained analysis examined how neighborhoods that are high in belonging (social capital) are characterized by the interview respondents as “good” or “bad” and aimed to identify the media channels that contributed the most to this characterization. The main finding was that the neighborhoods with higher belonging do not live up to their full potential when it comes to desirability: they are less, not more likely to be “desirable.”²⁰ At the same time, when asked how they learned about the reputation of that area, the respondents indicated newspapers more often when they identified a neighborhood as “bad,” and interpersonal communication when they identified it as “good.”

18. See Matei, “Good” and “Bad,” *supra* note 1.

19. Belonging was measured as “number of neighbors known well enough to . . .” and as evaluation of neighborly spirit in the community. Eight questions were combined into one synthetic score of “neighborhood belonging.”

20. It is important to note that the findings indicate NOT an elevated level of avoidance, but a lower level of desirability. Desirability and avoidance are two independent measures, and scoring high on one does not necessarily mean a low score on the other.

C. Braşov, Romania

The Romanian (Braşov) research project replicates the Lexington study and reemphasizes the importance of television in structuring urban mental maps.²¹ Due to a lack of spatial data at the neighborhood level, the authors analyzed the data at the individual level. Respondents were asked to indicate what areas they consider desirable or to be avoided with respect to real estate purchases, the reasons why they consider these areas desirable, and how much they relied upon other people's opinions, newspapers, or television in formulating their opinions. Data were analyzed comparatively, combining the Braşov and Lexington samples, using categorical (loglinear) analysis to identify significant differences.

As a general trend, Lexingtonians are more likely to fear areas due to safety concerns than Romanians, while Romanians tend to like specific neighborhoods due to their perceived qualities (urban architecture, resources, etc.) more than Americans. On the other hand, Romanians indicate that, overall, they fear neighborhoods for ethnic or cultural or social reasons to a far greater extent than the Americans, who are far more likely to prefer specific areas due to the quality of their people (i.e., more educated, wealthier, etc.).

The most significant finding was that both the Romanian and the American respondents derive their avoidance decisions on information they gleaned from television, although the Romanian respondents tended to have a stronger association with this medium.²² This finding is interpreted in view of the fact that the Romanian communist experience, which isolated individuals through state surveillance, led to interpersonal alienation, and as a consequence, greater electronic media dependency. This is also highlighted by the fact that Romanians depend far less than Lexingtonians on other people in forming their opinions about the various areas of their city.

21. See Matei, *Mental Cartography*, *supra* note 1.

22. See *infra* Table 1.

*Neighborhood Perceptions and Media Dependency*²³

	<i>Overall Per- cent</i>		<i>Television</i>		<i>Newspapers</i>		<i>Other People</i>	
	<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Prefer</i>	<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Prefer</i>	<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Prefer</i>	<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Prefer</i>
<i>Safety related</i>								
Braşov	45	3	31	22	25	17	43	27
Lexington	64	6	31	2	39	16	54	49
<i>Perceived place qualities</i>								
Braşov	15	69	13	11	14	10	40	33
Lexington	19	53	11	5	19	8	45	39
<i>Instrumental rea- sons</i>								
Braşov	30	27	15	10	17	12	33	29
Lexington	13	25	12	4	15	7	37	37
<i>People related</i>								
Braşov	10	1	23	25	20	0	53	50
Lexington	3	15	11	4	17	8	44	43

Table 1

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of these findings, the authors recommend the following:

First, continuous effort should be made by media outlets at all levels to address frontally racial and ethnic spatial stereotypes and should avoid spatial generalizations. Perceptual “red-lining” due to spatial labeling should be avoided. Media outlets, especially television stations, should make a conscious and sustained effort, when appropriate and rooted in fact, to reduce stereotypical images. In Los Angeles, for example, Watts should be presented not as an area of divergence, but as one of convergence, as its population is so much more diverse today than in 1965, and it is not as unsafe as the public has been led to believe.

Second, throughout the areas studied (Los Angeles, Lexington, and Braşov), television seems to be actively involved in spatial stereotyping. To mitigate the psychological effects of stereotyping, local television stations should be made aware of the unique role they play in identifying the areas to be avoided. Station managers and editorial personnel should be sensitized to the deleterious impact stereotypes, even when seemingly justified, can have on the public.

23. Note: Figures refer to percent of the respondents that indicated that they used each of the three channels of communication “a lot” in deciding if an area is to be avoided or preferred. For example, 31% of the Romanians indicated television as a medium they’ve used “a lot” when they formed their opinion about an area that is to be avoided, while 22% used it for forming their opinion about the areas they prefer. Similarly, 31% of the Americans used television a lot for forming an opinion about the areas to be avoided, while only 2% used it for forming an opinion about the desirable neighborhoods. Row groups refer to the reasons the respondents indicated for their avoidance or preference.

Third, in small-scale urban areas such as Lexington, good neighborhoods tend to be the hidden gems. Their prestige is discrete and mainly based on interpersonal communication. Good neighborhoods need to be made known to the city inhabitants through more than word of mouth. Their muted fame should be enhanced through all local mass media's voices. At the same time, social-spatial desirability should not be defined along only one dimension, such as traditional reputation, real estate value, or architectural setting. Media outlets should engage in a constant work of journalistic investigation, which should reveal the positive events or potential developments in all areas of a town.

The final recommendation is that more needs to be done by media activists, academics, and media practitioners to learn from each other and to work together toward improving the role local media play in shaping the "good" and "bad" reputations of urban neighborhoods. Media, especially local, are critical storytellers of spaces, and their stories matter when it comes to fear/comfort and avoidance/desirability perception. Analyzing and highlighting their unique contribution to shaping spatial perceptions and intergroup relationships, especially in a context of conflict and violence, is one of the great priorities of modern mass media research. The results of this type of research are yet to be directly and constantly used in shaping the media policy of the public and private actors that activate in urban contexts. It is the hope of these authors that their research would ultimately make a positive contribution toward accomplishing this goal.