

## City as Text™ Strategies

The **strategies** you will use in your explorations include: **mapping, observing, listening,** and **reflecting.**

1. **Mapping**—You will want to shape a mental construction, during and after your explorations, of the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot or vehicle); sketching your own map might be helpful in this construction. You will want to look for patterns of building use (housing, offices, shops, parks, recreation, etc.), traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, why do they go there, and how do they get there?
2. **Observing**—You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice **details** of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising. Try to answer the following questions: Does everybody seem to belong? Do some people seem lost or out of place? Why? Who talks to whom? In what ways is social interaction encouraged or discouraged? What feeling do you get about people as you watch them? Are they stressed, purposeful, interesting, lonely? Try to identify why you get these feelings about people.
3. **Listening**—You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they enjoy, what bothers them, what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Imagine yourself as somebody looking for a job or a place to live (try to find a local newspaper), and ask about such matters as where to find a place to live, where to find a cheap meal (or an expensive one), what the politics of the neighborhood are (do people like their neighborhood organization? the mayor? do they like working or living here?), what the history of the neighborhood is, what the general population of the neighborhood is like (age, race, class, profession, etc.), what people do to have a good time. An important strategy is eavesdropping: How are people talking to each other? What language(s) are they using? What are they talking about? How are they connecting to (or disconnecting from) their surroundings as they converse?
4. **Reflecting**— Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation—everything that they are and do—are important components of the city environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do, what they see and how they see it. Like all good researchers, make sure that you are conscious of your own biases, the lenses through which you are seeing and judging, and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.