SAVORING PLACE: PROTECTING CHICAGO’S SENSE OF PLACE BY PRESERVING ITS LEGACY RESTAURANTS

Abstract
Humanist geographer Edward G. Relph in Place and Placelessness conceptualized a vision of place using a phenomenological approach based upon how humans experience place. Relph’s three main place components include Setting, Activity and Meaning, and considering resources in this manner can reframe preservation thought. Viewing place through Relph’s lens makes for a more holistic vision, that can shape what and how we preserve. A Relphian framework also provides a useful practice theory for preservationists to expand our notion of who performs preservation and how we evaluate sense of place. Small businesses are neighborhood anchors, and historic restaurants play a particularly social and experiential role. Tangible and intangible cultural heritage must be evaluated holistically when focusing preservation actions upon businesses such as historic restaurants. Legacy restaurants are place makers and visible markers of the layers of history within a place. They convey social history and foodways and act as expressions of the intangible cultural heritage that lends character to place. Change is a part of place; cuisine, the history of a place, and historic businesses do not remain static. Just as legacy business owners have had to be agile and adaptable to remain relevant and successful, historic preservation may work most effectively when it too is agile and adaptable in response to change. Using a Relphian view of place prompts a refocusing on the big picture an expansion of preservation, and a certain allowance for change. This view suggests that the human experience of place should be more at the forefront of preservation thought. By expanding how and what we preserve we will in turn preserve more sense of place.
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