

October, 1956

Five field trips were made between August 16 and September 26. They were spent in asking directions to six destinations which are being studied in other ways by the orientation group. These destinations were: The Public Garden; Beacon Hill; Commonwealth Avenue; Washington Street; the John Hancock building; and Scollay Square. Directions were to be asked from four locations for each. (See accompanying tracing sheets) Two out of a total of twelve combinations were not covered at all: these were Washington Street from South Station and Beacon Hill from Blackstone Park. For all others from one to seven responses were obtained. (See accompanying yellow sheets).

Since this amount of material does not constitute any substantial evidence, only general observations are made below. The general procedure was to ask, "How do I get to....?" "What will it look like?" "How long will it take me?"

David Crane offered some general hypotheses upon which to hinge this project in orientation. I will comment on each of the four (See accompanying sheet):

(1) "it is more difficult to give directions, in detail, over long distances..." This seems borne out to the extent that directions to distant points were generally simple ones, directions "in the large" to which were added notable land marks. For example, one response from Salem Street near the Old North Church, giving directions to the Public Garden, mentions the main axis of approach to the center of town via Salem Street, noting the underpass along the way, using Scollay Square as an intermediate land mark, and assuming the greenery of the Common would give the last clue to the Garden beyond. The tendency seemed one of eliminating confusing detail if it were known, or of being aware of only notable land marks along the way. I would hesitate to

explain this tendency to simply ^{if} directions for long distances wholly in terms of the hypothesis. It seemed to me that several of my informants were trying to eliminate the confusion of highly detailed directions quite consciously. Others, to be sure, responded in a way which indicated that they themselves were hard-pressed to give detailed directions to a point far away.

In this connection I would add that for a line, a street like Commonwealth Avenue or Washington Street, the tendency seemed to be to pick the least complicated set of directions from the point of view of the respondent (who makes his decision on the basis of his own knowledge or familiarity). I am thinking of those who chose to direct me to different parts of Washington Street from Back Bay Station, for example, where one can go straight ahead to a residential part or back to Copley Square and down to the shopping and theater districts. Again, when asking for Commonwealth Avenue from Blackstone Park in the South End, I was directed to that part of Commonwealth between Dartmouth and Massachusetts Avenue which could be reached by walking directly perpendicular to Tremont Street.

(2) "It is more difficult to go across the width of Boston than it is to go along its length..." I would say, it is easier in giving directions to ask someone to follow major axes within a city than to maneuver them through short streets in large numbers. Except for a part of Massachusetts Avenue, ^{and Dartmouth St.} the main axes in downtown Boston run length-wise. When directions are given given across the width of Boston: Blackstone Park to Comm. Ave. or Post Office Square to Beacon Hill as examples, the main length-wise axes are utilized as corner landmarks. (As if, mentally, the respondent has tried to make a grid-pattern when in fact there is none in the strict sense.) With regard to this difficulty in spanning the width of Boston, and also with regard to the first hypothesis, I would point to the tendency, which I felt, to resist giving long,

complicated directions in an area which has what seems to be an intrinsically confusing street pattern. This was the case whenever I tried to get directions into the Beacon Hill area, even from residents (See Post Office Square to B.H.) and, as another illustration, in the use of the Common which for some people seemed to offer a direct short-cut in mid-city, while for others was but a maze of paths which did not assure any accuracy of gaging where one would come out.

(3) "it is more difficult to get in or out of such areas as the North End, the lower business district, or South End..." I am not quite sure what Dave had in mind here, but I can say that in the North End I did not find this so. I asked directions from both Hanover and Salem Streets and they happen to be the two main axes by which people offer easy departure to mid-city. Let me qualify slightly. Responses seemed to fall into two categories: either the people asked were so unfamiliar with the destination mentioned or with the city in general that they merely shook their heads, or they had a good feeling (or so it seemed to me) for the Hanover-Salem Street lines into the downtown area. I do wonder what kind of responses would be evoked by asking the directions both to T Wharf and to South Station from the North End area. I would be curious whether I would be directed along Washington Street or would be sent to Atlantic Avenue at some point where it curves around the North End. It seems to me now that such a question would show more clearly whether the person had any real mental image or sense of orientation of the North End in relation to another part of Boston.

As to the lower business district or the South End, I can say nothing because I did not station myself at the former, and was not long enough at the latter. (One observation about Blackstone Park, though, is that knowing very little myself of how it related to the rest of the city when I went there, the conversations I did have provided me fairly quickly with the feeling of being within easy access

of central Boston via several directions: Tremont Street, Columbus Avenue, and Huntington Avenue going east and Mass. Ave. and Dartmouth St. going north. This process of asking directions from any one area was interesting for the real feeling it gave me in a number of cases for the relationship of that area with the rest of the city. But that comes under the hypothesis below.)

(4) Actually not a hypothesis, this suggestions relates to being able to "demonstrate the presence or absence of relation of the destination element to the city as a whole." The destinations chosen for this study, being all within the downtown Boston area, seemed to all have a relation to the rest of the city (that I covered) if only because people tended to know how to get "downtown". How much this due to any ease by which each can be reached from other places I could not venture to say, but it might be noted that of the six destinations I found the John Hancock building, despite its tower and therefore general visibility, the most challenging destination for people to supply detailed directions for.

What I did find, on the other hand, as I began to mention above, was that in certain areas, as I asked directions out of that place, I came to feel quite aware of my own location in space - through other people's eyes, so to speak - and was made extremely aware of the grid pattern of streets in Back Bay which was utilized by people in Copley Square or near the John Hancock Building in giving their directions. Or, another time, I became very aware of the incline of the ground upward from Post Office Square or Filene's to Beacon Hill, by the constant mention of going "up" the street. In a similar way I was told to go "down" Hanover or Salem Streets "straight" into Scollay Square enough times to feel something of the relationship of the North End to downtown Boston.

The foregoing general observations are made with the knowledge that most of what I say is at most a kind of intuitive groping for something to say that will correspond to my actual experience in asking directions. Perhaps the information accompanying will be of some use to those studying these destinations from other points of view.

One addendum: Dave speaks of "forcing people to use visual descriptions instead of block number systems." The very fact that the people I met had to be coaxed into giving a few paltry verbal descriptions of the destinations I mentioned pointed up the fact that asking directions of people did not trigger any immediate descriptive responses. Directional lines, obvious land marks, and street names to be found on signs, were the three methods of giving directions. Only Commonwealth Avenue at times caused people to describe its unique street-qualities without prodding. It would be difficult to deduce that people do not notice the physical aspects of the city around them, for upon prodding some of these appear. In asking directions, the nature of the brief contact and the responses - which seem uniformly aimed at giving as simple and accurate clues as the knowledge of the respondent permits, create a situation which does not invite loquacious description of the city scene.

The time element, supplied in some cases and not in others, is one I have not looked into. I only note that it differs widely among people and would guess that it supplies an interesting clue to their personal orientation in the city.