

The dimensions of space in the urban environment: three methodological approaches for designers that encompass the dynamics of urban space

Ida Breed

Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria

E-mail: ida.breed@up.ac.za

This paper aims to broaden the debate on dynamics that influence urban space formation, as a means to a better understanding and as a reference for the South African context. The dynamics that determine the formation of space in the urban environment in recent western debates are investigated. Post modern approaches that engage with these dynamics are reviewed and analyzed to discover components that remain difficult to capture and resolve, thus causing possible epistemological conflicts and contradictions in the urban environment. Three post modern approaches are reviewed: First, the idea of the *urban project* will be discussed as being primarily occupied with power and political determination. Secondly, the theme of the representation of space versus that which is represented by it will be explored, engaging mainly with image, meaning and interpretation (or symbolic space). Thirdly, the theme of the socio-spatial dialectic will be taken up as an encompassing process of the socio-cultural uses and practices versus the influences and restrictions of space on them. The paper aims to explore the role and opportunity of designers to influence the public realm through the design and construction of space in the urban environment. It argues that the lack of understanding of and exposure to the dynamics involved in urban space formation have led to much frustration and many examples of inappropriate public space. It suggests that the different dimensions of space should be explored in greater depth by designers during their training and also during the actual implementation of projects in practice.

Key words: urban space, urban space formation, symbolic space, representation, socio spatial dialectic

Las dimensiones del espacio en el ambiente urbano: Tres acercamientos metodológicos para diseñadores que abarcan de las dinámicas del espacio urbano

El texto intenta ampliar el tema de las dinámicas que influyen en la formación del espacio urbano, para llegar a una comprensión y referencia más adecuada para el contexto sudafricano. Se investigan las dinámicas que determinan la formación del espacio en el ambiente urbano en discursos occidentales recientes. Se analizan los acercamientos posmodernos que presta atención a estos factores para descubrir los componentes que sean difíciles de capturar y de resolver, así causando conflictos y contradicciones epistemológicas en el ambiente urbano. Los acercamientos posmodernos que se repasan son tres: Primero la idea del proyecto urbano esta examinada que se enfoca en el poder y la determinación política. En segundo lugar el tema de la representación del espacio contra lo que es representada por medio de ella esta explorada, y los conflictos y las contradicciones epistemológicas posibles que pueden ser encontradas. En tercer lugar el tema de la dialéctica socio-espacial esta tomada como proceso que abarca de las aplicaciones y prácticas socio-culturales contra la influencia y las restricciones del espacio sobre lo mismo. El texto explora el papel y la oportunidad de los diseñadores para influir en el reino público a través del diseño y de la construcción del espacio en el ambiente urbano. Argumenta que la carencia de comprensión de y exposición a las dinámicas involucradas en la formación del espacio urbano, ha resultado en varios ejemplos de frustración y de espacio público inadecuado. Sugiere que las diversas dimensiones del espacio sean exploradas en mayor profundidad por los diseñadores durante su entrenamiento y también durante la implementación de proyectos en la práctica.

Palabras claves: espacio urbano, construcción del espacio urbano, espacio simbólico, representación, dialéctico socio-espacial

In South Africa there has been a tendency to view its cities purely as a product of the apartheid system, which led to a preoccupation with social justice, equity and efficiency in post-apartheid studies of urban space. More recently the flaws of spatial restructuring have been under the lens: polarization of the city, closed spaces and exclusive suburban enclaves. While valuable and required, most of these studies fall short in situating South African cities in relation to other kinds of urban phenomena, “underplay(ing) many aspects of city life and city forms” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2007: 30-1). The constant debate in the public realm about the design and construction of urban space influences the way cities are created, transformed and corroded. It is therefore necessary to expand this debate to include neglected aspects of urban space and city life. To broaden the perspective and understanding of local urban space development let us engage in recent approaches to the study of space.

Contemporary western approaches in the study of space have been poststructural or postmodern in nature, combining Marxist elements with a humanist vision (*human agency*¹). The concept of power plays a central part; urban space is produced by actors or parties who operate inside the social structures (*urban actors*) (Pooley 2000: 432). The ideas of city, civic and public life are thus directed by politics. This has led to greater public involvement in government projects, aiming to institutionalize civility.

Despite this, the formation of the community and social interaction are still guided by the activities of designers, instructed by government or developers. Their visions of how the urban space should be structured are implemented without necessarily taking the needs and perceptions of the inhabitants into account. “The design of public urban space is also in the hands of a few with power and, as with much Victorian city-centre redevelopment, may symbolize the wealth and achievements of a small elite group.” (Pooley 2000: 435-36). In South Africa this phenomenon still results in cities created for private vehicles and an individualist society which is in many ways in contrast with the local cultural model of *Ubuntu*² as a pivotal component of collective city life.

The concept of power emphasizes the struggle between the interests of the citizens, the different *urban actors* involved, the rights of the citizens and the restrictions of the social system. The interests, needs and diverse contexts of the *urban actors* are decisive for appropriate decision making in the planning and construction of the urban environment. However a socio-spatial dialect is also engaged, where space influences the social practices exercised in it, while these practices transform the space through dynamic processes. On the cities’ streets, communities are formed, reformed and fragmented; new worlds fuse and interlink in intricate ways.

According to Lefebvre (in Merrifield 2000: 174) three different dimensions of space exist: mental, physical and social. These three dimensions have to create a unity in the production of the urban environment. The key elements are:

- The spatial practices: i.e. the way space is organized and used;
- The representation: conceived primarily by architects and other designers; and
- The symbolic space: this is the image and meaning of the environment associated with the perception of the user.³

The dimensions of space that Lefebvre refers to are essential in order to understand space and its proper context. These dimensions should be well-known to designers who play a key role in the construction of space. Yet designers are not always equipped to deal with the *human agency*. The three dimensions of space are also not equally implicit in the design process. While spatial practices and representation are physical objects that are easier to identify and relate to, what is left out of the equation more often than not is the notion of symbolic space and the important role that it plays in the *human agency*.

Three postmodern approaches that have been utilized in urban space analysis and construction will be reviewed to see how they have engaged with mental, physical and social space. First the idea of the *urban project* will be discussed as being primarily occupied with power and political determination. Secondly, the theme of the representation of space versus that which is represented by it, and the possible epistemological conflicts and contradictions that can be encountered will also be explored. Thirdly, the theme of the socio-spatial dialectic will be taken up as an encompassing process of the socio-cultural uses and practices versus the influence and restrictions of space on them. Although each approach addresses a specific dimension of urban space, they also overlap in certain aspects. By using these approaches to review phenomena in urban space creation we aim to come to a better understanding of the

challenges at hand in the South African context for the design profession. It will appear that the importance of each of the three dimensions of space (and often symbolic space) in the production of the urban environment, is frequently overlooked by designers.

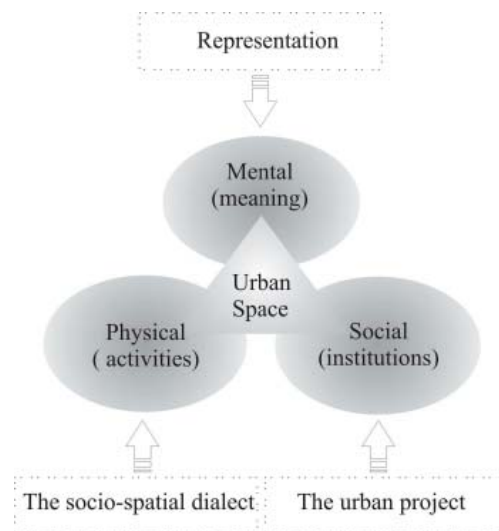


Figure 1
Three approaches for designers to a better understanding of the dimensions of urban space.

The urban project and political determination

Political determination by society plays an increasingly larger role in the process of democratization. Correspondingly, in South Africa since democracy, there has been great effort by national and local government to put social structures in place to allow for greater community involvement in development and planning exercises. The roots of this political approach can be linked to the *urban project* that surfaced in Europe in the seventies. The inability of isolated architecture to transform the city in a collective way, where the problem of urban identities and environmental devastation is encountered, gave rise to the *urban project*. It developed as a practice opposed to functionalist urbanism, especially in instances when it justifies bulldozer type rehabilitation and pushes out modest income families. It gave priority to the rehabilitation of old neighborhoods and abandoned industrial areas, as well as the reconstruction of great compounds of public housing. (Tomas 1996: 120) The focus of the *urban project* is on the context, the actors and the conflicts between them. It takes up the social reconstruction of the city and consequently assimilates and involves its inhabitants. It also entails the management of the way divergent choices are lived by different people, to integrate this in the discussion and reflections related to their habitat (Lopez Rangel 2001: 24-6).

In the meantime, projects that favor the interests of the land owners and the promoters and which at the same time modernize the city, have far from disappeared. Cities in South Africa have been undergoing comprehensive, rapid and previously unimagined changes since 1994. The challenge remains to ensure meaningful involvement of all people in the transformation process. The restrictions of the social system do not always allow for this possibility. Furthermore, there are often conflicts of interests, political favoritism and corruption that cause failure of attempts to engage different actors and democratize processes. In South Africa the spatial restructuring of cities influenced by increased privatization, barricading, polarization, abdication of independent planning and regulatory action by government as well as “the increasing power of property developers to structure the evolution of the city” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2007: 31) remains a great concern and challenge.

“Ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarratives of urbanization, modernization and crisis” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2007: 27). The origins of these can be found in nineteenth century urban reformism, by which society had to be constructed as a knowable and governable object. In this way the concept of *urban project* is still of great importance in questions relating to power “because it is the mechanism by which it becomes possible to get together a diversity of perspectives that permits the confrontation of political, technical and social standpoints” (Tamayo 1998: 14).⁴ The *urban project* was from its onset represented as an expression of political determination by society and not as a product of a ‘pseudo-scientific’ reflection allied with modernization. Its importance was that political powers, backed by science and experts, gave up trying to impose their models of order and agreed to take into account alternative proposals from the residents (Tomas 1996: 121).

As a designer one is but one more actor in the array of voices, yet it is one’s task to solve the conflicts between the needs and interests of the different urban actors in a creative way. The matters raised by the *urban project* continue to be of great importance, yet remain hard to capture and contain. Concepts like cultural identity, the image of the city and its public spaces are accompanied by their own set of questions: how to give personality to a space so that it is not dissolved in a banal anonymity; how to allow citizens to identify with a place, because they perceive it positively or because they respect it and how to encourage inhabitants to behave like responsible citizens (Tomas 1996: 121). Lamentably in South Africa it is the “immediate clash of class interests around the principal industry that does more to excite the passions of the citizenry than any supposedly primordial yearning for cultural expression or strivings for a more encompassing identity,” (van Onselen [specifically referring to Johannesburg] in Mbembe and Nuttall 2007: 28).

Yet we should not fall in with the tendency of historiography in South Africa to see the city as a capitalist transformation of social relations and consciousness, forgetting that it also operates as a site of hope, desire and imagination. Neither should the city be mapped as a mere social geography of needs, preoccupied with larger issues of social justice and social cohesion (Mbembe and Nuttall 2007: 29). These have become new accounts of functionalist urbanism that downplay many other realities of city life and form. The city is not merely the fusion of spatial practices and social needs but also relates to the image and meaning of space and form associated with the perceptions of all actors involved, especially those of the inhabitants. In this process there is an implicit link with the social sciences that include philosophy, epistemology, urban sociology and anthropology. It also demands knowledge of the history of the city to confront the modern construction without losing the inter-subjective relations, which make identity possible (Lopez Rangel 2000: 27-9). It is on this implicit link with the social sciences and a greater demand for knowledge that the attention of those involved in urban space formation should be focused.

The representation and the representatives of space: possible epistemological conflicts and contradictions

The first new public sphere that emerged since 1994 in South Africa contains symbolic buildings and public spaces “presencing occluded histories and mobilizing collective bodies” (Bremner 2007: 20). The way of representing the city is a testimony of what we consider the reality of the time. This aesthetic model transforms our reality because its image is an abstract concept, a form of constructed imagination (Boyer 1996: 32). Different aesthetic conventions represent the image of the city over time. We will look at examples to identify the conflicts and contradictions produced by representation.

For the study of urban structure understanding of the concepts that create *habitus*⁵ is necessary since they have spatial expression and meaning. The notion of representation and meaning is always guided by cultural influences and differences. During this process of representation, the activities of architects, designers and planners affect social interaction and community formation because they organize public space according to their own views, often without taking into account the needs and lifestyle of the residents (Pooley 2000: 434).

A very evident example is how the architects from the colonial period constructed housing schemes based on their own definitions of 'local architecture'. The effect on the design of series of government housing schemes was tightly packed proposals, composed of small, simple and repetitive units, interwoven with some irregularity. The presence of this residential pattern in new projects constructed for the native population, reinforced the socio-cultural duality that existed and was nurtured in the colonial cities (Celik 1998: 207). "This legacy, far from being swept aside in the kinds of grand gestures envisioned [...], still underpins the kinds of public lives and urban spaces being shaped in the city today, posing serious questions as to what this means for the future of urban life" (Bremner 2007: 20).

The belief in universal styles of design and planning, with the majority of ideas belonging frequently to western cultures, results in public housing (and cities for that matter) where the necessity of refuge is achieved but not that of spaces for social interaction and community formation (Gyuse 1993: 156). Another common flaw is the superfluous reproduction of construction materials where principles of spatial organization are not applied and that result in physical and social failure of the projects.⁶

Throughout history there have been certain tendencies in national identity formation that were subject to processes of political democratization and globalization (the state and the media). The traditional or native culture has regularly been perceived as negative.⁷ The question of identity contrasts the global with the local resulting in attacks against a rural lifestyle that is often particular to a traditional culture. After their independence, colonies usually returned to their native cultures. A natural rejection of the western culture occurred. Surprisingly in cases the continuity with the monumental colonial style remained attractive, this might seem contradictory⁸ (Celik 1998: 221).

In a search for authenticity, social reform established in the work of artisans and in construction with universal materials such as brick has proved successful.⁹ Behind the physical forms and projects there is a difference between the concerns about the origin or context and the implications that point towards the future (Celik 1998: 207). Due to globalization some argue authenticity has become a closed door¹⁰. We do not know whether people still want to continue living in adorned houses traditional to ethnic based culture, although in many rural areas people continue to live in self constructed and decorated houses (Masao Miyoshi in Celik 1998: 221). The relation between city and countryside has served in many contexts as a propeller that redefines cultural practices of rural inhabitants. Yet, many elements of rural life can coexist in the urban environment because they are based on language and family relations that survive geographic relocation (Withers, in Baigent 2002: 356).¹¹ According to Steyn (2007: 81), in Africa rural based knowledge systems often guide the creation of urban places and conventions of urban conduct, due to their ability to "span time, space and settlement size".

"Cultural assimilation and homogenization is only one type of cultural change caused by globalization" (Berry in Kim and Bhawuk 2008: 304). There is also a form of integration of traditional and new cultural elements, or resistance and revitalization of own cultural tradition. In many cases, the implication of urban life in the 'new world' permits people to choose their identity in a way that would be impossible in the 'old world'. The anonymity of urban life in the

'new world' and its materialistic nature orientate immigrants towards the consumerist nature of the new world society, giving the liberty to choose and change aspects of their lives. In the same way, this concept exists on a city-countryside level (Baigent 2002: 356).

In a globalized world the tendency to adapt modern architecture in its occidental manifestation has grown in many developing countries, owing to its technological advances and its symbolic meaning for contemporary society. This architecture contains cultural expressions dominated by corporate values and dictated by the market. Global concepts are adopted and placed in local circumstances without any mediation. "[...] but we cannot talk about a total world homogenization either. On the contrary, it appears that at local levels a great sensitivity towards differences and the search for own cultural identity is growing, confirming cultural differences more than denying them" (Hertzog in Tamayo and Wildner 2002: 3).

Often, cultural icons are developed as a strategy to gain global city status and in so doing, construct shared national and city identities. These efforts are not universally interpreted in the manner intended and at times cause protests because they are at odds with the project of nationhood. "These voices of caution are not unreasonable, reflecting the hitherto absent voices in the planning process, and serve to underscore the multivalent meanings of cultural icons" (Kong 2007: 401).¹²

The desires of people are not obvious. They are not always related to the past or traditional culture and are not easily predictable, while the influence of globalization is ever present. The environment does not determine behavior in a definite manner but surely restricts it and directs it in many ways. Some architects feel that flexibility would be the best response to multicultural questions and the expression of unpredictable private life, where others argue for greater public participation.¹³ Both of these are meaningful ways to come up with enhanced design solutions. Either way, it is unequivocal that the activities of designers and planners affect social interaction and community formation. Therefore the notions of image and meaning (or symbolic space) should be ones that designers are familiarized with during their training process, allowing them a greater understanding of the complexities and opportunities involved in the process of representation.

The socio-spatial dialectic

"Space is a major social force literally shaping the lives of those within the urban container. We make the city, but once created it remakes us. The buildings we occupy and the neighborhoods we reside in restrict our activities. The buildings and neighborhoods not only limit our social participation but also influence what we think and feel about others who share our city." (Pipkin and La Gory in Pooley: 429).

For this reason it is necessary to be conscious of the differences that exist in each neighborhood to include the particular lifestyle of the people in the planning, so that the spaces are appropriate to the activities and practices of the users (Schoonraad 1995: 29). In present day South Africa, there are "the less official, more everyday public lives made possible by apartheid's demise" (Bremner 2007: 21). However poverty stricken areas still remain a challenge worldwide. The selection of *lifestyle*¹⁴ is virtually a contradiction in terms of those with acute economic struggles. Furthermore, the occupation of public and government housing by people with minimum income levels has caused new forms of segregation from the rest of the population. Many ghettos which found their origins due to racial segregation still exist, but now serving as economical ghettos. This type of segregation does not happen voluntarily and is a disadvantage for the people that live there (Porteous 1977: 297).

The design of houses and public spaces in these areas has the opportunity to contribute significantly to the lifestyle of the people who live there. “Architecture, for being a physical frame for human activities... involving all people, constitutes an essential part of the human experience that express cultural values and is linked in material terms to every day life” (Celik 1998:195). Furthermore as seen in the discussion on representation, the urban fabric is also directly linked with cultural symbolism and meaning.¹⁵

Spatial organization can be structured to motivate public use, by means of social cohesion promoted by the development of activities that are identifiable and related to specific locations. The social order is promoted by the recognition of social interest in the urban space that is supervised by social usage. On the contrary, spaces can be designed to exclude and stop activities and people who are deemed undesirable. “These forms of spatial organization are the intentional result of programs and legislation, or the consequence of social and economic pressure” (Perring 1991: 279), in its physical manifestations.¹⁶

The decisions that people make are tied to their world perception and their ideals and for this reason, to the way they construct their environment. When spaces are designed in conflict with these it can lead to the rejection of public housing projects or protests about public buildings and spaces.¹⁷ Gyuse (1993: 155) argues that in the case of public housing, the relation between socio-cultural parameters of users and the form of the house needs to be carefully investigated and incorporated into planning to reach synthesis between the aspirations of the users and the physical form.¹⁸ This is also true on a city wide scale. National imagination can be successfully captured by cultural icons as a strategy to gain global city status, “either through familiarity with place through everyday use or through imageable architecture that awakens the connection with local culture” (Kong 2007: 401).

But what are these socio-cultural parameters that can facilitate connections between local culture and form? When looking at the socio-cultural factors, culture¹⁹ contains at least three: the ideas (world view, values and priorities), institutions (family structure, religion, rituals and group organization) and conventional activities (activities between people and typical ways of doing things) (Gyuse 1993: 159).

In contemporary South Africa, “intense experimentations with space have unfolded, producing a highly charged urban landscape of shifting signifiers and floating signifieds, constantly adjusting to fit increasingly complex realities” (Bremner 2007: 21). To generate an appropriate design, designers are required to familiarize themselves with socio-cultural factors. There is a general assumption that as humans we are similar and our social, mental and physical needs and perceptions should be easily grasped or homogenized to facilitate a global and fast changing world; however from the historical overview of these concepts it is clearly not a satisfactory solution. Designers in general are not equipped in their training with methods to gather this information that lies mainly in the field of social studies. A greater awareness and understanding of these socio-cultural factors should be pursued during the training and practice of the design professions.

Recapturing

Designers often aim to make significant and meaningful changes in the urban environment but do not always achieve this goal. This is often due to an incomplete understanding of the dynamics involved in the creation of the urban environment. Designers have to be thoroughly aware of the different dimensions of space and approaches that can be embraced to combine these elements in an attempt to design meaningful and appropriate environments. If all dimensions of space

creation are not in unity the result will be incomplete – either not achieving its intended purpose or causing frustration to the users. The dynamics of power and the restrictions of the social system will always influence the equation. Physical form and activities go along with ideas and mental perceptions attached to them. As the cities are constantly changing (and cultural phenomena), this might seem an elusive aspiration, yet its importance can not be underplayed. There are examples of projects where this have been achieved, making it a reachable goal and a realistic challenge. It implies that suitable methods and methodologies should be applied when approaching design projects.

The production of urban space needs to be understood as having mental, physical and social dimensions which tie in with the socio-cultural factors in the form of ideas, conventional activities and institutions. Conventional activities and institutions often have physical expression which can be observed or researched and studied, while ideas containing world view, values and priorities, are captured in symbolic space i.e. the image and meaning associated with local perceptions. Here physical manifestation can be harder to pin down.

In the social sciences methods have been developed to capture and analyze physical, social and mental (or symbolic) space. Symbolic space has been frequently employed by the state and the market to influence public perceptions. Designers intermediate between the state, the media, and civic society and have the opportunity to influence social interactions and community formation. The understanding of symbolic space seems to be left to the emotional intelligence of designers and is not studied, captured or analyzed adequately within their training. This has resulted in functionalist urbanism, imposing of ideas and values, superfluous reproduction of construction materials, and ultimately rejection of many schemes by the public manifested in protests. Although in South Africa public participation is enforced by law in national and local government projects, it often remains a superfluous procedure where exploration of symbolic space and ideas are not considered unless it is a project directly related to the preservation of historic and cultural heritage. The fact that symbolic space is a dimension of the urban environment and influences the perception and use of space in the urban environment has to be acknowledged, captured, analyzed and better understood. This vital ingredient can ultimately result in public space that is easily appropriated and non restrictive, allowing for diversity and choice.

Notes

1. ‘Human agency’ – this concept of the public dynamic and vision that is related with the idea of the micro scale and specific details of the context that are underlined by postmodern approaches like in Foucault. (Pooley 2000: 432).
2. *Ubuntu* is a South African cultural concept that states a person is a person because of other people (Steyn 2007: 80).
3. Considering Pooley (2000: 329) the representation and meaning of space, residential or non-residential, is constructed among others by social classes, ethnicity and gender.
4. Original quote in Spanish translated by author: “porque es el mecanismo por el cual es posible hacer converger una diversidad de enfoques que a su vez permite la confrontación de puntos de vista políticos, técnicos y sociales” (Tamayo 1998: 14).
5. The concept of *habitus* is developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Pooley 2000, p.434) as the construction of meaning in the every day lives of people.
6. A case in point occurred in *Mamelodi* in the 1940’s. Designers went to *Bechuanaland* to see traditional houses constructed by *Tswanas* and adapted them into a new housing project in Mamelodi. The houses provoked conflict and were rejected by the community because they were very rustic and seen as symbols of discrimination. They were finally demolished two years later (Schoonraad 1997: 3).
7. An example is the case of Rio de Janeiro in its *belle époque*. The question of identity contrasted

- the global with the local, as was the case in most European colonies, Needell (1987) asserts. The attacks were against a rural and particular lifestyle and the Carnival, which was the most illustrative example of this traditional conflict. The newspapers gave the urban transformation a cultural flavor, symbolizing the rehabilitation of all Brazil and a civilized future.
8. In the case of India with the construction of the National Centre of Art, Indira Gandhi in New Delhi, the situation was contradictory. In this case the design of the North American Ralph Lerner was selected by the jury against that of Gautam Bhatia, who was an Indian national. It was not the modernity of the proposal that seemed attractive to the jury but rather its direct continuity with the monumental colonial style of Lutyen (Celik 1998: 221).
 9. Celik refers here to the Egyptian architect, Hassan Fathy. To Fathy the return to the rural ways was an act of resistance, which implied the possibility of a cultural image for contemporary Egypt, an identity manifested against the universal power of western technology. He believed that people had to construct their own houses in which the government should lend a hand to ensure that it could be done by the residents themselves and not by means of massive and anonymous housing projects (Celik 1998: 221).
 10. In a global world with different cultures and divergent ethnic groups the question is: "To which identity do we refer, to which culture, which is the adequate historic moment to freeze a neighborhood, to which its identity must be jealously protected and its future frozen? Which identity do we refer to as the true custodian of a culture?" (Rodolfo Santa María in Tamayo 1998b: 367).
 11. Withers suggests that for emigrants the process of cultural adaptation to their new houses and environments is infinitely complex (Withers in Baigent 2002: 356).

In the case of South Africa the townships (generated by the Apartheid system) are instruments by which traditional culture is generalized. The favorable acceptance of the high metropolitan culture also formed part of the resistance against the Apartheid government that did not always give people access to the services and means to modernize themselves. These two contradictory aspects created something unique. (Van Niekerk. in Schoonraad 1995: 15)
 12. In Hong Kong public outcry over the West Kowloon Cultural District project stopped the original project. The government was forced to open wider channels of public consultation and expression (Kong 2007: 401).
 13. The themes of *flexible design* and *public participation* are worth exploring in much greater depth, but they open many other doors of enquiry which cannot be explored fully in this paper without deviating substantially from the original objective. It can however be said that the hypothesis of this paper which is, the need for methodologies and approaches to the better understanding of urban space as a three dimensional arena for designers, also applies to them.
 14. According to Porteous the phenomenon of life style is a way of doing things, selected from a range of different ways to do them and this decision can change from one day to the other. However, luckily for designers, regularities in preference to life style are apparent. The most common styles which are theoretically discussed are centred in family, career, consumerism, localism and cosmopolitanism (1977: 298 and 302).
 15. Boden (in Schoonraad 1995: 11) "Because urban design focuses on the built environment, which constitutes the most expressive human artifact, and is layered in multiple meanings, it is directly concerned with symbolism and cultural meaning"
 16. In this way for example the change in urban structure - main streets and location and/ or presence of a forum, as well as the way of construction and activities that are practices in the forum - influenced the social life of old Roman cities (Perring 1991: 279).
 17. Reasons why public housing is rejected in the US include the destruction of friendships and family relations, a lack of sense and identity of place, politics of conduct, and architectonic design that demotivates territorial control of open space and promotes crime (Porteous 1977: 302).
 18. Gyuse (1993: 160) suggests socio-cultural needs to be: the satisfaction of the basic necessities, appropriated aesthetics, the maintenance of family structure, intimacy and territoriality the adequate continuation of social interaction.

Different societies have employed technology to satisfy socio-cultural needs. However the cost influences the construction greatly, above all in the case of economically restricted areas. An increase in income generally results in the use of better materials, the amplification of the structure and the personalization of lots (Pugh 2000: 325).

19. In the thinking of Durkheim (1974), two beings exist in each human, one that contains the mental state that consists of ourselves and the events of our private life, the other that consists of a system of ideas, feelings and practices that do not express our personality but that are of the group or groups of which we form part.

“Any man’s [sic] mind is so complex that his decisions are always unique. His reaction to

the things around him is his alone. If in your dealings with men you consider them as a mass and abstract and exploit the features they have in common, then you destroy the unique features of each. [...] To some degree the individual must be sacrificed to the mass, otherwise there can be no society and man dies of isolation. But all people should ask themselves how, in human personality, the common and the individual factors should be balanced” (Fathy 1973: 26 -7).

Works cited

- Baigent, E., 2002. Making and remaking urban culture: geography and identity in the early modern British towns. In *Journal of Urban History*, 28(3): 352-9.
- Bremner, L., 2007. Making life public in contemporary Johannesburg. In T. Casartelli, ed. *Johannesburg: Emerging/ Diverging Metropolis*. Mendrisio: Mendrisio Academy Press.
- Boyer, M. C., 1996. City images and representational forms. In *The City of Collective Memory. Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Chicago: MIT.
- Celik, Z., 1998. Intersecciones culturales: reorientando la arquitectura y la ciudad en el siglo XX. In R. Koshalek, and E. A. T. Smith, eds. *A Fin del Siglo, Cien Años de Arquitectura*. México: Los Ángeles: Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Durkheim, E., 1974. *Educación y Sociología*. Buenos Aires: Schapira.
- Fathy, H., 1973. *Architecture for the Poor*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Gyuse, T. T., 1993. Socio-cultural dimensions of public housing. In R. W. Taylor, ed. *Urban Development in Nigeria – Planning, housing and land policy*. Brookfield: Avebury.
- Kim, Y.Y. and Bhawuk, P.S B., 2008. Globalization and diversity: contributions from intercultural research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32: 301-4.
- Kong, L., 2007. Cultural icons and urban development in Asia: economic imperative, national identity, and global city status. *Political Geography*, 26 (4): 383-404.
- López Rangel, R., 2001. *Proyecto Urbano y Desarrollo Sustentable. El caso de la Delegación Azcapotzalco*. Ph.D. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. Mexico: Unpublished.
- Mbembe, A. and Nuttall, S., 2007. The elusive city. Writing the world from an African metropolis. In T. Casartelli, ed. *Johannesburg: Emerging/ Diverging Metropolis*. Mendrisio: Mendrisio Academy Press.
- Needell, D. J., 1987. *A Tropical Belle Epoque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (Spanish translation).
- Perring, D., 1991. Spatial organization and social change in roman towns. In J. Rich and A. Wallace-Hadrill, eds. *The City and the Country in the Ancient World*. London: Routledge.
- Pooley, G. C., 2000. Patterns on the ground: urban form, residential structures and the social construction of space, In M. Daunton, ed. *Urban History of Britain Vol. III, 1840 – 1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Porteous, D. J., 1977. *Environment and Behavior – planning and everyday urban life*. Ontario: Addison – Westley.
- Pugh, C. 2000. Squatter settlements: Their sustainability, architectural contributions and socio-economic roles. *Cities*, 17(5): 325-37.

- Merrifield, A., 2000. Henri Lefebvre: a socialist in space. In M. Crang, and N. Thrift, eds. 2000. *Thinking Space*. Routledge: London.
- Schoonraad, M. D., 1995. *Mamelodi: A Cultural Based Analysis of the Perception and Usage of Space by Township Dwellers*. Masters. University of the Witwatersrand. Johannesburg: Unpublished.
- Schoonraad, M. D., 1997. *Culture and Design*. Unpublished.
- Steyn, G., 2007. Are illegal squatters ruralising the urban edge? *South African Journal of Art History*, 22 (3): 70-82.
- Tamayo, S. ed., 1998. *Sistemas Urbanos, Actores y Ciudadanías*. México: UAM – Azcapotzalco.
- Tamayo, S., 1998b. Identidad y Cultura Urbana. *Anuario de Espacios Urbanos*. México: UAM – Azcapotzalco.
- Tamayo, S. and Wildner K., 2002. Orte der Globalisierung. Eine architektonische und ethnologische Bestandsaufnahme der Stadt Mexiko. In *Asien Afrika Lateinamerika*, 30: 1-18. (Spanish translation).
- Tomas, F., 1996. Del proyecto urbano al proyecto de ciudad. In *Anuario de Espacios Urbanos*. México: UAM Azcapotzalco.

Ida Breed is a registered professional landscape architect (SACLAP). She obtained a masters in design, urban studies from the Autonomous Metropolitan University in Mexico City (2003). Her master's thesis was on Mamelodi township, viewing alternative methods and methodologies to design and urban planning to enable more appropriate projects that focus on public involvement and appropriation of public open space. Her research includes design methodology and urban space development with focus on cultural identity. Her professional experience include landscape design and implementation, strategic and open space frameworks, master planning, environmental planning, scoping and rehabilitation and project management. In January 2008 she joined the University of Pretoria as a full time lecturer at the Department of Architecture. Ida has travelled broadly and speaks three languages.