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4

URBAN DESIGN

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GOOD URBAN FORM

Many authors have written about various goals that urban planners, urban designers and architects should strive towards and promote for the achievement of good urban environments. These authors include urban theorists such as Kevin Lynch; Ian Bentley; Appleyard and Jacobs and Dewar and Uytendogaardt.

In their writings they discuss goals such as: vitality, sense, fit, access, control, liveability, identity and control, Authenticity and meaning, efficient use of resources, opportunity generation, convenience, choice, quality of place and sustainability.

4.1 _ GOALS

The following chapter is dedicated to briefly discuss these goals for good urban environments.

The author combined the various authors' goals and grouped them to form several goals that cover all the various goals set out by the urban theorists mentioned previously.

These groups of goals are:

Vitality/Liveability;

Choice/ opportunity generation/ Diversity;

Access/ permeability;

Sense/ Identity/ Legibility/Authenticity and meaning;

Scale/Fit and Sustainability.

4.1.1_Vitality/ Liveability

“The degree to which the form of the settlement supports the vital functions, the biological requirements and the

capability of human beings- above all, how it protects the survival of the species” (Lynch; 1984:118).

“A city should be a place where everyone can live in relative comfort” (Appleyard & Jacobs; 1987:495).

There are a number of performance dimensions for city form that group themselves under vitality (Lynch; 1984:121).

4.1.2_Opportunity generation/ Diversity/ Choice

“Settlements which perform well are multi-faceted places. They offer a diversity and thus choice, of places, lifestyles, activities and interaction opportunities” (Dewar, Uytendogaardt & Todeschini: 4).

People come to cities to experience economic, social, cultural and recreational opportunities and facilities that can be generated through the physical collection of large numbers of people. The places of greatest interaction in cities are the places of greatest opportunity (Dewar & Uytendogaardt 1991:17).

With great opportunity, variety is increased which increases choice (Bentley; 1995:27).

An important part of generation is allowing people sufficient freedom and choice to maneuver, in order to find opportunities to express their own ingenuity and creativity (Dewar & Uytendogaardt 1991:16). When people are offered rich choices and freedom to make those choices, true participation is promoted, therefore, urban environments should promote the maximum positive freedom for individuals to act, and in so doing creating a diverse and complex environment as stated in the next quote:

“Appropriately, the creation of urban structure should be so judged as to release the energies and talents of many people in the making of environments. Only in this way can truly stimulating, diverse and complex environments emerge” (Dewar & Uytendogaardt 1991:19).

People have a choice of living in intense, vibrant environments, or in quieter, more private areas. Places vary from person to person and over the life-cycle of households (Bentley; 1995:27).

On the one hand, positively performing settlements offer opportunities for human contact and interaction. They also provide opportunities where people can live on their own but not be alone. People also have the choice concerning the extent they want to engage in social activity (Dewar, Uytendogaardt & Todeschini: 4).

On the other hand people also want places that are private, mainly in the sense of knowing who lives in an area and who the strangers are (Dewar, Uytendogaardt & Todeschini: 4). Dewar, Uytendogaardt & Todeschini then states: “The challenge is to encourage environments that provide a diversity of choice, so that people don't have ‘either-or’ choices, but rather choices which relate to relative degrees of privacy or exposure”

The key in achieving this lies in the hierarchies of movement, public spaces and social institutions, and the design of living areas (Dewar, Uytendogaardt & Todeschini: 4).

In developing countries, where rates of urban growth are very quick and there are high levels of poverty and unemployment is the need to generate opportunities for small scale, self generated economic activity. The formal economy is incapable to absorb new entrants into the job market that leads to these people creating self-generated employment, usually in the informal sector. These people

have to find places to manufacture trade or provide services at no or very little overheads within the urban system in order to survive (Dewar & Uytendogaardt; 1991:16).

4.1.3_Access/ Permeability

The ideal city is imagined by some as being a great center where one has easy access to an enormous variety of goods, services and other people (Lynch; 1984:186). Dewar and Uytendogaardt (1991:16) states that all inhabitants should enjoy relatively easy and equitable access to urban opportunities. They also state that it is little use generating opportunities if access to these is limited to a very limited number of people. Bentley (1995) says that only places that people can access can offer them choice. Lynch (1984:1920) says that a good environment is a place that affords obvious and easy access to a moderate variety of people, goods, and settings.

Access may be classified according to the features to which access is given and to whom it is afforded.

Most basic is access to other people: to kin, friends, and mates and to a variety of more casual acquaintances. Humans are social beings and regularly contact is essential to their well being.

Next in importance is access to certain human activities. The key activity for adults may be work, but other important services are financial, medical, recreational, educational and religious. These activities either represent opportunities for the person to do something or they supply a valued service.

Access is also acquired to certain material resources like food, water, energy and various other goods.

People also want access to places- to shelters, open

spaces, centers, symbolic places and natural environments (Lynch 1984:188).

4.1.4_Sense/ Identity/ Legibility/ Authenticity and meaning

Kevin Lynch (1984) describes the sense of place as the “clarity with which it can be perceived and identified, and the ease with which its elements can be linked with other events and places in a coherent mental representation of time and space and that representation can be connected with non spatial concepts and values”.

Sense depends on spatial form and quality, but also on culture, temperament, status, experience and current purpose of the observer. The sense of a place will vary for different observers (Lynch; 1984:131).

There are three elements of sense, Identity, Formal structure and those qualities which help us to connect settlement form with other features of our lives.

Identity: “Identity is the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places- as having a vivid, or unique, or at least a particular character of its own” (Lynch; 1984:131).

Formal structure: Which at a scale of a small places, the sense of how its parts fit together, and in a large settlement the sense of orientation (Lynch; 1984:134). The practical significance of orientation is clear enough: poor orientation means lost time and wasted effort. Good orientation also enhances access and so enlarges opportunity (Lynch; 1984:134).

next come the qualities that help to connect settlement

form with other features of people’s lives.

The first level is called congruence: the purely formal match of environment structure to non spatial structure.

Transparency is a component of sense. That is the “degree to which one can directly perceive the operation of the various technical functions, activities and social and natural processes that are occurring within the settlement” (Lynch; 1984:139).

Congruence, transparency and legibility are components of sense, which describe explicit connection of settlement form to non spatial concepts and values (Lynch; 1984:139).

Another component of sense is legibility. Legibility is the way people orientate and navigate themselves within a city (Carmona; 2003:88).

Before the twentieth century traditional cities worked well in terms of legibility. The places that looked important were in fact important and public spaces could easily be identified (Bentley; 1995:42).

The biggest open spaces were related to the most important public facilities. Figure illustrates this (Bentley; 1995:42).

The buildings with the greatest public relevance stood out from the rest, for example churches (Bentley; 1995:42).

The buildings that needed privacy and security allowed the passer-by to see the activities inside, for example the black smith in the picture below (Bentley; 1995:42).

The modern cities are also legible but only in a certain sense. In the modern city the biggest buildings are the big financial institutions and occupy the key centre position

of the city. These big buildings overwhelm the publicly-relevant places and facilities, confusing important activities and buildings (Bentley; 1995:42).

The confusion people experience is made worse because the important public buildings and publicly-relevant buildings often look the same (Bentley; 1995:42).

“People should be able to understand their city, its basic layout, public functions and institutions, they should be aware of their opportunities. An authentic city is one where the origins of things and places are clear” (Appleyard & Jacobs; 1987:496).

This above quote from Appleyard and Jacobs (1987) mean that an urban environment should reveal its important meaning, it should not be dominated by one type of group, and neither should the public places be hidden.

4.1.5_Scale/ Fit

“The fit of a settlement refers to how well its spatial and temporal pattern matches the customary behaviour of its inhabitants” (Lynch; 1984:151).

Fit is linked to characteristics of the human body and of physical systems in general. This perspective is general, but since fit is the match between place and whole patterns of behaviour, it is dependent on culture: on expectations, norms, and customary ways of doing things (Lynch; 1984:151).

Places are modified to fit ways of behaviour, and behaviour is changed to fit a given place (Lynch; 1984:151).

The term fit is loosely associated to such words as comfort, satisfaction and efficiency.

4.1.6_Sustainability

Sustainability has two main dimensions, the one relates to the built environment and the natural landscape and the other is the degree to which the settlement reflects, ‘timeless’ qualities (Uytenbogaardt et al;1997: 5).

Settlements that exist are depended on recourses drawn from a much larger area and adapted to fit the landscape it exists on. There are two central issues to achieve environmental sustainability. The first is to work with the natural landscape in such a way that the natural system is not broken down.

The second issue is to recycle wastes to the greatest extend (Uytenbogaardt et al;1997: 5).

The second element of sustainability is the level to which the settlement reflects, in its structure and form, ‘timeless’ qualities (Uytenbogaardt et al;1997: 5).

Sustainable settlements can handle growth and change well, and are in turn enriched by processes of change. These sustainable settlements have three primary characteristics, namely: they are scaled to the pedestrian, they reflect a structural order and they have a strongly spatial feel, with defined and generously made public spaces that are not made for the immediate development need, but made with the acknowledgment that public space is important in its own right (Uytenbogaardt et al;1997: 5).

4.2_HOW TO ACHIEVE GOALS FOR GOOD SETTLEMENTS

4.2.1_Public Space

Carmona (2003) defines public space as the “sites and settings of public life”. He also states that the public realm ideally functions as a forum for political action and

representation; as a neutral ground for social interaction, intermingling, and communication; and as a stage for social learning, personal development and information exchange (Carmona; 2003:109).

Many people have observed that the public realm, has declined, recognized in part to the reduced availability of public space and public life. They observed that the traditional public space have transferred to private realms for example leisure activities, entertainment, gaining information and consumption all are undertaken at home through television and the internet. Activities that traditionally could only be available in collective public forms have increasingly become available in private forms, while the use of public space has been challenged by lots of different developments, such as increased private mobility. Private cars facilitate an essential private control over public space. The decreases in public space are consequences of the trend towards privatisation. Some factors that lead to privatisation are: Social, political and economic factors (Carmona; 2003:110).

4.2.3_Qualities of good Urban Space

A good public space has got certain qualities to be successful. They are enclosed by buildings, are part of activity system, have expressed building facades, and the spaces themselves are well treated.

4.2.3.1_Space enclosed/ Defined by building

A good open space will be defined or enclosed. Buildings serve this function; they must be adjacent to one another and flush with the street or space. There facades form the walls of the open space, they convey the buildings

identity and character (Carmona; 2003:68).

4.2.3.2_Part of activity system

A good space must be part of the activity system, which means that it must be a place where people want to go to use it. If there were no activities then there wouldn't be any reason to visit that specific open space.

4.2.3.3_Building facades

As stated before the building facades form the walls of the open space which defines it and conveys the buildings identity and character.

4.2.3.4_Well treated space

Any good open space that people would want to visit will be well looked after. It will be neat, clean. The surface also makes a difference for example if an open space had grass or a paved floor.

4.3_THE ELEMENTS OF THE CITY

Mental maps of places are central to studies of environmental perception in urban design and the key work in the field is Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960) based on mental mapping techniques and interviews with people from Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles (Carmona ;2003:88).

He was originally interested in legibility and argued that "the ease with which we mentally organise the environment into a coherent pattern or 'image' relates to our ability to navigate through it" (Carmona; 2003:89). Through his

research, he found that the minor theme of orientation grew into the major theme of the city's mental image, and observation of cities with districts, landmarks and pathways that were easily identified led to the definition 'imageability', "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer" (Carmona; 2003: 89).

Through mental mapping exercises Lynch (in Carmona; 2003:89) aimed to identify aspects of the environment that left a strong image in the people's minds and from his research he derived five key physical elements, namely: Paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.

Paths: Paths are the channels along which the observer moves and were often the predominant elements in people's maps with other elements arranged around them. Paths can be important in images for a few reasons, including regular use, special uses, characteristic spatial qualities and visual proximity (Carmona; 2003:89).

Edges: Edges are linear elements that are not seen or used as paths and often form boundaries between areas. Shores, railroads, edges of development and walls are just some examples of edges. Edges can be barriers (that can be penetrable) that enclose regions and can act like an organising element because of its ability to hold areas together (Carmona; 2003:90).

Districts: "Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of', and which are recognisable as having some common, identifying character." (Lynch; 1960:47).

Districts may have definite boundaries or soft uncertain ones (Carmona; 2003:90).

Nodes: Nodes are points in the city the observer can physically enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from one is travelling. Nodes may be primarily junctions, places of a break in transportation, or a crossing of paths. Nodes can also be a concentration of certain places on street corners or a type of a public square. Nodal points are almost found in every image and are sometimes the dominant feature (Lynch; 1960:48).

Landmarks: Landmarks are point references that the observer cannot enter. They are usually simple defined physical objects like a building, sign or mountain. Some landmarks are distant ones seen from many angles and distances where other landmarks are primarily local, being only visible from certain approaches (Lynch; 1960:48).