

Urban Design and Lifestyle Changes. Creative Cities by Creative Citizens

Jose María Yagüe

(Jose María Yagüe, IE University, Sacramento 7, 3^oH 28005 Madrid, Spain, josem.yague@telefonica.net, www.josemariayague.com, PhD Architect and Urban Planner)

1 ABSTRACT

In relation to urban design, concepts can change. An abstract, cold design can disturb our idea of the city and, unfortunately, such design is very typical at the present time. The result of this is urban space design without citizens, the exclusion of a high quality lifestyle and natural sensations, and the production of spaces of little or no interest.

In the future we must change and this change should begin now with information and with new ideas. Citizen participation and involvement is very important because I think that in this context, sometimes architectural projects do not represent the interests of citizens. Citizens using the city on a daily basis often have different needs to those addressed in urban planning by local and national authorities and private planners. This paper develops this idea.

With regard to our feelings and new urban design tools, I want to show us a different view of the city, demonstrating contrasts in the urban landscape, a city full of life, the present situation and empty, open spaces. The city is the context of sensorial feelings, sounds and smells, while at the same time being the subject of iconic, representative and artistic elements. In this area we need to talk about the sustainability of our resources and also of our senses.

2 URBAN DESIGN AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

At the present time, in relation to mutating cities and to changes in the image of cities, we often do not perceive subtle changes. The appearance of the city is not perceptible in our daily life and, probably, we need to view the city with the benefit of hindsight.

In relation to urban design, concepts can change. An abstract, cold, sterile design can disturb our idea of the city and, unfortunately, such design is currently very typical. The result of this is urban space design without citizens, the exclusion of a high quality lifestyle, the loss of natural sensations, and the production of spaces of little or no interest. These spaces are normally dynamic and full of references in a physical sense but, in the end, are static spaces in our memory, in a sensorial sense.

Regarding lifestyle in the city, factors such as people, space, weather, different situations, facilities or a whole ensemble of these can create a special perception of the city. I believe we can work with the citizens that live in these spaces and design solutions that better match their interests. This prompts the following questions:

- What is the meaning of rehabilitation in terms of the green city?
- Where can we work with abandoned spaces and not only on buildings or in the old city centre?
- When must we apply these ideas?

Rehabilitation is not only about the rehabilitation of buildings; I like to think of it in a more complex way. I want to think of urban or city rehabilitation in accordance with the concept of a green city. In contrast to this approach, we often talk about recycling while sometimes neglecting buildings and the cityscape.

An appropriate approach to rehabilitation should involve transport, infrastructure, private and public buildings, and so on. In this sense, I want to talk about recycling and not only concerning buildings, but also considering urban elements.

As well as this idea, we can refer to the configuration of built forms in interstitial and empty urban space, thereby working in empty, open or abandoned areas. Rehabilitation carried out on a small scale in these kinds of spaces should follow a master plan.

We can consider these changes in a non-static sense and, therefore, consider the city centre as a living organism. In addition, we can work with the citizens that live in these spaces to design a solution, which suits their interests.

As a consequence, new city projects applied to urban spaces or urban elements can evoke some of the most interesting ideas about cities. I am referring principally to those ideas that have taken place in our memory. These evoked urban spaces or urban elements are normally peaceful and empty in a physical sense, but in our memory they are probably dynamic in a sensorial sense. This evocation of feelings is frequently absent in new city projects and, therefore, as urban designers we must provide other kinds of feelings, and reject an indifferent approach.

For example, time can be different in different cities and different situations. Time in each city can represent one of its most relevant characteristics. Sixty minutes is different in dynamic Jaipur, peaceful Vienna, suggestive London, tourist Venice or chaotic Cairo...

With regard to our feelings and new urban design tools, the city is the context of sensorial feelings, such as sounds and smells, while at the same time being the subject of iconic, representative and artistic elements. In this area we need to talk about the sustainability of our resources and also of our senses, and in relation to this, we can ask the following questions:

- What is the smell and feel of the city? And more specifically, what do you feel? Fear perhaps? Or happiness?
- What about time?
- What are your first visual impressions? And later, over time, do your impressions change? Can you identify the differences and try to find the true reason for such differences?

The answers to the questions could lead to humanistic urban planning.

This paper develops this idea in different workshops that have taken place in diverse countries and universities. In this way:

Firstly, I want to show us a different view of the city, showing contrasts in the urban landscape and a city full of life, plus the present situation and empty, open spaces. These images can look like illusions inside our previous idea of the city. I try to discover beauty where it appears there is none. Probably, our impressions could change and our idea of the city will be alter too.

Secondly, I hope to have the skill to shape our ideas and to influence our ways of interpreting our environment. I try to make my work have an ideological dimension, so that it is not simply a transparent record of the world and of the activities that occur in it.

In the future we must change and this change should begin now with information and with new ideas. Citizen participation and involvement is very important because I think that in this context, architectural projects sometimes do not represent the interests of the citizens. Citizens using the city on a daily basis often have different needs to those addressed in urban planning by local and national authorities and by private planners.

3 CREATIVE CITIES BY CREATIVE CITIZENS

I present a proposal in relation to the city in general and to urban landscapes in particular. I refer to an approach, which applies the concept of the creative city to urban revitalization.



I have been working on two projects for at least three years. I analyze the city in two different and complementary research projects:

One of them is about the urban development of historic city centres, in particular in relation to their public spaces (squares, streets, etc.). The focus is the analysis of the city in relation to design but with a complementary viewpoint looking at the financial and social aspects of architecture.

Another project is about the perception of the city in relation to its character (its outstanding characteristics), its atmosphere (a subjective condition), its past, and so on.

In this last Project I am trying to find and show different contrasts and associations in relation to urban elements. It is a more artistic way of working than the previous project.

I analyze the city in a sensorial way, in relation to sight, touch, sound, smell, etc. I also compare the city and its urban landscape with nature (the natural environment) in an artistic sense. In this way, I am researching the role of different public spaces and elements which are the most characteristic or specific of the city: its texture (walls and pavements), its creativity (life, colour and art); its movements (the flow people, the reflections of its most characteristic materials), its emptiness (the transparency, the light, the shadows, the sounds).



4 THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the workshop is to analyze cities from an artistic point of view. The cities have been selected strategically according to the possibilities they offer for the artistic expression of their most interesting urban spaces and characteristic elements. The idea is create synergies and new options in relation to perception of the city.

I want to work with the idea of having an impact on the perception of cities, one which is far different from the typical vision of the city as a postcard image. In this way I would like to consider a different idea of the city, with varied and unusual points of view and diverse approaches to our homogeneous environment. These ideas present several standpoints, which highlight aspects of the city that may be hidden or operating on a secondary level.

I examine the city to provide a complementary approach: in an economic, a social and an artistic way, while not forgetting the subjective and sensitive point of view.

Sometimes we look at an object but we don't really see it, it goes unnoticed. Normally we have too much information about the city and we need to pay more attention in order to adopt a sensitive approach. This option can provide alternative proposals regarding urbanism.

5 AN URBAN ANALYSIS FROM AN ARTISTIC POINT OF VIEW

Firstly, my photographic work tries to have a influence on landscape images, making them full of life while at the same time dealing with absence and wide, empty spaces. I present disturbing ideas and an insinuation of imaginary worlds in which I try to discover beauty where it appears there is none.

I want to show an alternative view of the city, discovering contrasts between different elements in its urban landscape and analysing the current situation to make it look like an illusion inside a predetermined idea of the city.

At the end of the day, my work seeks to represent daily life, but in an isolated and decontextualised way which, consequently, creates a document of the strange, marginal and peripheral city elements. In this way, when I work in typical genres I tend to adopt different perspectives and points of view, far from the usual approaches.

Secondly, my photographic work has its background in an artistic, ethical and ideological dimension. The conceptual system I employ reveals my reflections on the present human condition and displays relationships of alliance and symbiosis, in addition to contrasts between pairs: the environment and man, landscape and architecture, or nature and culture.

6 WORKSHOP DEVELOPMENT

I am very hopeful about the project and at the moment, I think that it is possible to work on a subject related to the city, focusing on its public spaces in relation to its historical memory and its design. This Project is being developed in different workshops with students. These students could belong to different universities in the cities where we obtain the photographic works. In this way, the work could link different countries and I could involve some university students.

The workshop begins with a stroll around the city, taking photographs that can help us to understand it better. After this walk, we will be able to analyse the images that have been obtained. This analysis is carried out in two stages, employing different methods of analysis.

- Our interest may relate to the city as an individual place, showing us its most relevant characteristics or, at least, some of them. The result could be relevant in relation to the city and could provide us with some images that stand out in our memory.
- In addition, our interest may be in relation to different cities and the relationships between them.

The students can work in different ways, for example:

- They can work with pairs of contrasting concepts or with associations between different concepts.
- They can also work with complementary questions:
 - What does your city mean for you?
 - What are the most interesting characteristics of its urban elements?
- Finally they will be able to show us a few of their photographs, illustrating the most expressive and subjective or objective visions of the city.

After the analysis, we will have a more specific knowledge of the city and we can analyse the different visions of the cities from the perspective of university students. In addition, we will be able to show some photographs of a few countries and of the people from these countries.



7 PRACTICAL URBAN APPLICATION IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT SCENE

I want to provide some practical urban applications in the built environment scene, relating to the ideas I have outlined above. At the moment, and with institutional support, I am working on different international workshops with different universities. The workshop methodology is as follows:

The first step is for the citizens to get to know their own cities better and to be able to identify the most relevant city characteristics in a coherent, suggestive and synthetic way. As result of this analysis and this newly acquired knowledge, a new concept of the city can emerge and may be examined from different points of view and with complementary city parameters. These city parameters are the starting point for the practical urban applications.

In the second step, the citizens can discover new possibilities to increase or create financial results originating from the city's "memory" and from the city's intangible assets. I believe citizens relate more to their cities than to their countries. This closer relationship can be reflected in active participation by citizens in city projects.

The question is: How can they do this? How can they incorporate the factors which emerged in the first step? (see above) I would like to suggest some examples and work ideas:

City image as an urban planning tool.

Citizens could work on a more attractive image in relation to a city or urban area and, as a consequence, they could manage this idea in order to develop a new approach to urban planning. This could provide us with an effective qualitative analysis tool.

A physical point of view of the rehabilitation of traditional urban areas in cities.

Headquarters, streets, squares and buildings are the physical reference points for the creativity of citizens. These actions provide urban planning with a strategic framework in order to obtain financial results and to add value originating from the background city parameters.

In relation to the city, citizens could create financial alternatives, such as tourist businesses based on city walks, history, art, and different discovered elements.

In relation to rehabilitation and revitalization, citizens could promote a specific building or groups of buildings, both in relation to an urban public space. These buildings could be focal points inside the neighbourhood or even in the city as a whole.

Building rehabilitation could create communication by connecting the public spaces. In addition, citizens could be involved in the rehabilitation process and could be renovated themselves - creating work, culture, art, communication, etc. Citizens could create wealth by introducing alternative uses for buildings and public spaces and by utilising newly formed network opportunities.

8 CONCLUSIONS

As a consequence of these approaches, I set up a game involving several mirrors, which suggests a triple vision: on one hand, an artistic and ethical approach and, on the other hand, disturbing ideas, empty spaces, and an insinuation of imaginary worlds. Finally, in the middle, we find the spectator with his / her own vision.

Personal and subjective visions are normally different because when we read or look at something, we are interpreting it. Two persons' experiences are never the same.

I hope to have the skills to shape our ideas and to influence our ways of interpreting our environment, rather than simply presenting a transparent record of the world and of the activities that occur in it.

We can identify the elements and characteristics of some cities and relate them to intangible values. In recent years, I think, some city values, are be unknown o not considerate and, therefore, we should facilitate theirs emergence.

These intangible values could help us to understand our cities and to involve citizens in their development in a creative way. We could translate these values into economic results that could help us to develop our cities and improve our quality of life. Citizen participation could be employed to revitalize their own neighbourhoods, squares, streets, and, also, their own buildings.

In the end, this approach could lead to the idea of creative citizens, as a parallel to the idea of creative cities. Creativity and the participation could flow from the citizens to the city and vice versa.

9 REFERENCES

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