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Spaces and Flows: An International Journal of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies is
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Human Social Behavior in Public Urban Spaces: Towards Higher Quality Cities

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Abstract: Cities are like books; they can be read, and we have to understand their language. The street, the footpath, the square, and the parks are the grammar of the city; they provide the structure that enables cities to come to life, and to encourage and accommodate diverse activities. A humane city creates pleasure for visitors and passers-by, as well as for those who live, work, and play there every day. Everyone should have the right to easily access public open spaces; everyone should be able to see a tree from their window, or to sit on a bench close to their home with a play space for children, or to walk to a park within ten minutes. Well-designed cities inspire the people who live in them, whilst poorly designed ones brutalize their citizens. A city must increase the quantity and quality of well-planned beautiful public spaces that are human in scale, sustainable, healthy, safe, and lively. In this approach, this research studies the relation between the human social behavior as a valuable concept and the urban design theories that will help improve the lack of understanding of what people need for space and how urban designers can stimulate a better urban public place. It then goes on to emphasize the importance of urban qualities of these spaces for conveying human behavioral social activities in public spaces. Critically, this social function often conflicts with understandings of public spaces, which emphasize their place in promoting a city's image, consumer activity, and economic renewal. The research will be conducted over three parts: the human social behavior approach as a new dimension from definitions, models and personalization; public urban space design throughout time, place, and space configuration; and the linkage between the theory and practice of people in the conclusion of the research.

Keywords: Urban Design, Human Social Behavior Dimension, Public Urban Spaces, Quality Cities

Introduction

As the culture shifted, so did the tone and focus of the design and human behavior idea. Born from the same set of forces, the reductive science of the design and human behavior idea was subject to the same criticism as corporate culture and suburbia. According to its critics, design and human behavior research should not be used to establish invariable standards and to manipulate people into appropriately conforming behavior, but rather should be used to promote freedom, spontaneity, and expanded consciousness. Among architects and urban designers, flexible space, and user-built environment expressed- in tangible form- the ideal of spontaneity and freedom (Ben 2002, 42–48).

The design and human behavior idea is frequently understood as an aberration, a throwback to the activities of a few 1960s-inspired social scientists. Design and human behavior research and courses in schools of architecture are sometimes seen as the isolated interest of a few non-architect academic researchers looking for something to do. What has been more generally overlooked is how threads of the design and human behavior idea are woven though related areas of Culture.

Within the field of architecture, the idea of design and human behavior has always been contested. On the one hand, few teachers or practitioners would dispute that the environment affects people; a general humanism has long been in place. On the other hand, the efforts of psychologists, sociologists, and others to influence the field of architecture have been resisted continuously. The contest waged in journals and at conferences over the last fifty years frequently accused architects and designers of relying on "their own experience" instead of the

COMMON GROUND

loftier foundations of "pure science." This tended to suggest, that there are only two possible opposing points of view regarding the interaction of people and places.

What looks like an abandonment of the design and human behavior idea is little more than an abandonment of the trenches that designers of the built environment and social scientists have had to occupy the ground, however unwillingly, between the opposed categories of "artist" and "scientist" has probably been healthy for both disciplines. A review of present Design and Human Behavior courses in schools of architecture reveals a distinct change in approach, corresponding with the rise in postmodern theory. Courses seeking to address questions of human behavior fall into a range of categories: culture and gender studies, socially responsible design; phenomenology of architecture, cultural criticism, and architectural research methods. This research explores the possibilities of design to benefit human condition, which encompasses physical and mental well-being, environmental quality, and overall quality of life. It documents the state of the science linking urban design to the human condition, and highlights methods for architects, planners and citizens to improve the living environment.

Thus, a distinct change in approach between human behavior and architecture is revealed, human behavioral studies now fall in the social design phenomenology of architecture.

Conception and Significance of "Quality Cities"

The **lack of understanding** of what people need for space can be an obstacle for designers to create a better urban place, thus, quality cities are places where social life can be stimulated.
The aim of this research is to achieve a meaningful and practical understanding of how spaces can be shaped by the professionals in order to be more successful, provide quality for the psychological needs of people and do not conflict with people's natural responses.

> "We need to improve the design of public spaces and, as a consequence, the quality of our lives in cities." (Rogers 2010, vi)

Our urban design solutions of Public Urban spaces should prioritize life quality, health, safety and an inclusive environment for all. We regard the public realm as a place for all people, regardless of ethnic background, age, socio-economic class, disability, religion, or the like. Residents, visitors, students, workers, children, and the elderly are all invited to meet in the public realm.
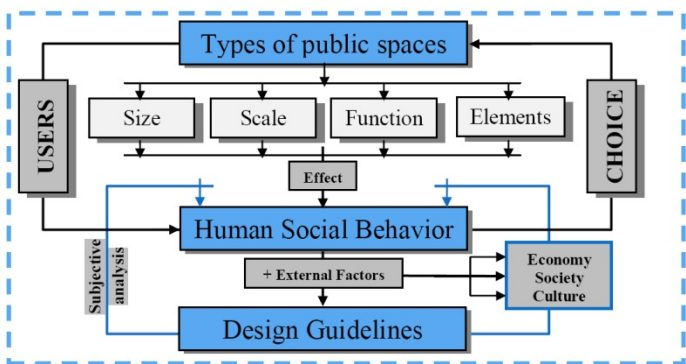

Figure 1: Research Detailed Scope (Source: The author, 2012)

This theoretical research is mainly focusing on the virtual relation between the factors affecting **Human social behavior** as a *"dimension"* of urban spaces design and the factors affecting the guidelines of the design of public urban spaces from the human social behavior point of view. However, the size, scale, functions and spatial elements of public spaces affect the behavior of users', based on their choices. External factors such as economy, society background and culture, etc… may have a direct effect as well on the design guidelines we have for our

public places as explained later in this research. *(See Section: Significance of public urban spaces.)*

Redefining Urban Design as Multi-dimensional Interdisciplinary Interface: A Quality Approach

Redefining the role of urban design and not the discipline is similar to using another one of our 'open-ended pictures' to signify Urban Design itself *(see Figure 2)*. Urban Design can thus retain its flexible definition, necessary for its fulfilling of the multidimensional role proposed.

There is no single definition of urban design. No Governments are to dictate what good urban design is. Urban design as an activity seemingly has a very loose definition, and means different things to different people. Traditionally, the most popular definition is that urban design is the interface between urban planning and architecture. In this sense it plays a meditative role between two major disciplines involved in the urban realm, but at different levels and scales.
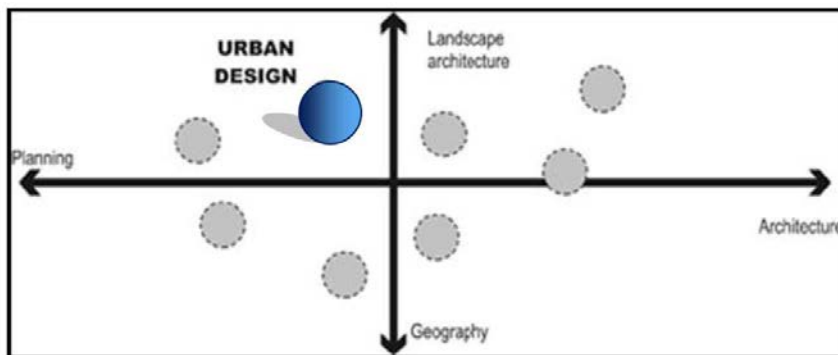

Figure 2: Urban Design as the Interface between Planning and Architecture. Source: (The Swedish Secretariat for Future Studies 2004) quoted in (Myers and Kitsue 2000).

This misconception of the importance of urban design is due to a lack of awareness at the public, the professional and even the educational levels, of the responsibility it can and should handle.

In order for urban design to fulfill the role of a real interdisciplinary interface, it should be thought of—and taught—as a multidimensional activity. Other than planning and architecture, it should be clear that other seemingly independent disciplines play equally crucial roles in the study and/or creation of cities. Landscape architecture, communication and transport engineering, but also the **'soft' disciplines—sociology, economy, group and individual psychology and behavioral studies, even art and the humanities**—are some of the poles that together shape the urban environment and give it its inherent subjective qualities.

Significance of Public Urban Spaces

The significance of public spaces has been widely recognized, mainly from the perspective of improving quality of life through comfortable environment and abundant public life; enhancing urban image through urban vitality; and impelling economic development through investment which is attracted by good image (Aghostin-Sangar 2007).

This importance of public space in building a pleasant environment for human beings to work, dwell, and relax in was stressed in **The Athens Charter in 1943.** However; **Cybriwsky (1999)** pointed that a city's most prominent public spaces are often emblematic of the city itself and reflect whether its citizens relate well to the city and to each other (Li 2003, 9–14).

Most people have a need and desire to maintain links with the rest of the world. Public spaces are significant because they are able to bridge that link. Public spaces are important because they provide avenues for movement, a place for communication, and a common ground for enjoyment and relaxation. The ability of public spaces to educate and offer knowledge is also

a significant aspect, particularly when those spaces play an important role in the history of the city and the social life of its citizens (Aghostin-Sangar 2007).

At the same time, the users of these spaces are also capable of influencing their form and feel, by introducing social characteristics and elements such as culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age. These elements, together with the physical and ambient (or non-physical) features of the public space, are capable of having a profound effect on the way that people behave, experience and interact in public spaces (Madanipour 2003) *(See Figure 1)*.

Perhaps the best evidence for the vital importance of public urban spaces is historical. From the times of the earliest cities, there is evidence of a basic human impulse to govern streets and open spaces, to make them more useful in the necessary and desired activities of the old city and to make them more beautiful and restorative to the citizens of the community.

Despite the changing nature of modern neighborhoods and communities, public spaces are still an essential part of life because they provide opportunities for different people—young, old, etc., retired from work, unemployed, students and government official workers etc… to experience a variety of human encounters.

Evolution of Public Spaces

The literature reveals that creating public open space has been used as a tool to improve the urban environment, to enhance urban images and to improve the quality of life of urban residents (Gehl and Gemzøe, Public Spaces, Public Life. 1996).

Public open space construction has become an indispensable part of many of the successful urban regeneration policies of many cities, yet there has been little research that has focused upon it. It should be noted that, changes within major **"city functions"** and illustrated **"*activities*"** are related to a society shift towards leisure and consumer oriented life styles. In many regions in the world; life in public spaces has not changed materially.

Seen in a long-term historical perspective, there has been a remarkable evolution in the city spaces functions. The main three **"vital"** functions of a city space are: **meeting, market place** and **connection space** (Gehl and Gemzøe, New City Spaces. 2001).

> As **meeting** place, the city was the scene of social information exchange.
> As **market** place, the city served as venues of goods and services exchange.
> As **connection** space, the city provided access to city functions

Within this shift of the city **functions**, the patterns of user's **activities** shifted too. According to **Gehl and Gemzøe (1996, 2001),** the activities within the main city spaces were specifically divided into three main categories of outdoor activities in the public spaces in a city, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment. Table 1 indicates the comparison between types of necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities.

Table 1: Activities Types Comparison according to Necessity Occurring (Source: the author 2012, after Gehl, Gemzøe, and Kirknæs et al. 2006).

Necessary activities	*Optional activities*	*Social activities*
Include those that are more or less compulsory, such as going to work, shopping, waiting for a bus or a person, running errands. Among other activities, this group includes the great majority of those related to walking. Because the activities in this group are necessary, their incidence is influenced only slightly by the physical framework. These activities will take place throughout the year, under nearly all conditions, and are more or less independent of the exterior environment. The participants have no choice.	That is, those pursuits that are participated in if there is a wish to do so and if time and place make it possible—are quite another matter. This category includes such activities as taking a walk to get a breath of fresh air, standing around enjoying life, or sitting and sunbathing. These activities take place only when exterior conditions are optimal—when weather and place invite them. This relationship is particularly important in connection with physical planning. In other words, these activities are especially dependent on exterior physical conditions.	Are all activities that depend on presence of others in public spaces. Social activities include children at play, greetings and conversations, communal activities of various kinds, and finally—as the most widespread social activity— passive contacts, that is, simply seeing and hearing other people. These activities could also be termed as *"resultant"* activities because social activities occur spontaneously, as a direct consequence of people moving about and being in the same spaces. This implies that social activities are indirectly supported whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public spaces.

A social activity takes place every time two people are together in the same space. To see and hear one other, to meet, is in itself a form of contact, a social interaction. The actual meeting, merely being present, is furthermore the seed for more comprehensive forms of social activity. This connection is important in relation to physical planning. Although the physical framework does not have a direct influence on the quality, content, and intensity of social contacts, architects and planners can affect the possibilities for meeting, seeing, and hearing people.

According to **Gehl** (Cities for people. **2010**), no matter what technical innovations are taking place, human beings have not changed. They still need the casual contact with other human beings that used to be built into daily life. Public spaces can afford opportunities for such casual encounters in the course of daily life that can bind people together and give their lives meaning and power. Public spaces do not only serve daily needs but also can be places to gather for special occasions, as well as, binding together the major city functions and the trends of the activities.

A century ago, activities were exclusively necessary, **forty years ago**, primary focus was shopping, while **recently** recreational activities, cultural events, parades and exhibitions are hosted in public spaces. *(See Figure 3)*
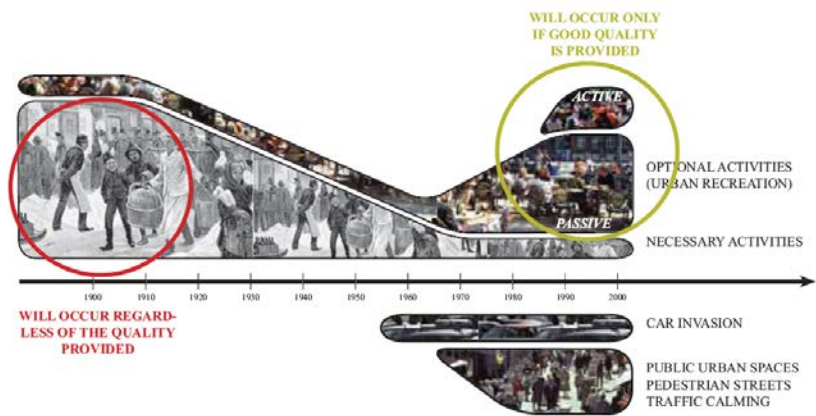
Figure 3: A Graphic Illustration for Development of Public Life from 1880 to 2005 from Necessary to Optional Activities
Source: (Gehl and Gemzøe, Public Spaces, Public Life. 1996) (Gehl, Gemzøe, and Kirknæs et al. 2006).

In General, within span of few decades, a work-oriented cityscape has become a city of leisure and enjoyment; mainly because of dramatic changes in living standards, working life and economy have also contributed in redefining new functions of city.

However, in previous decades, quality of spaces did not play a thoughtful role, transitioning to a situation in which quality is a meaningful parameter. **Previously,** people didn't regard using the space however it was its conditions, **currently;** the space **"quality"** is an option for some people. *(See Figure 4)*

Usually, this **"quality"** option is for privileged societies. The economic level defines the costumers taste and needs. In raising countries, there is a shift towards leisure. In developed countries, the Public spaces are still dominated by activities necessity.

Figure 4: Schematic Diagram for Quality of Physical Environment in Relation to Activities Types (Source: the author, after (Therakomen 2002), based on (Gehl and Gemzøe, Public Spaces, Public Life. 1996).

When the quality of outdoor environment is good, optional activities occur with increasing frequency. Furthermore, as level of optional activity rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially.

Users and the Urban Image of Public Spaces

The urban image is the way that a city is perceived, both by the citizens and by those outside. Not only is this image a mental picture held in common by a large number of persons, but it also is used as a way of communicating about the city. Since urban images are based on human perception, they are greatly influenced by sensory elements of the urban form, especially the visual elements (Wagner 1981).

People's perception of their environment influences their social interaction within that environment. **Users** themselves are the intrinsic links to the space they will be living in. In other words, if they cannot have this link, they will simply either move on or destroy the place until it reflects if not their comfort at least their discomfort – and in both cases their state of being. People inherently discern their relationship with others in terms of distances, or spaces, between them. **Hall (1966)** defines four distinct distances at which interpersonal transactions normally take place. These are categorized as intimate, personal, social, and public. *(See Figure 5)*
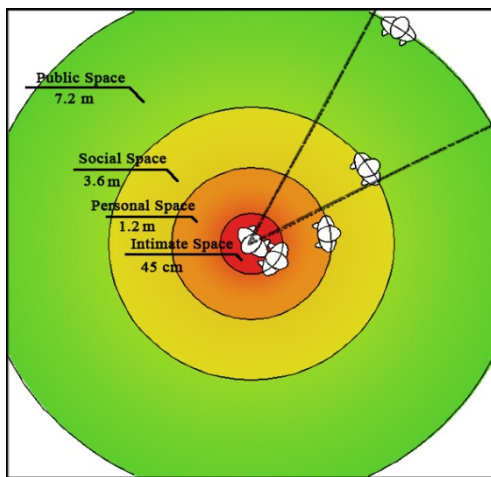
- **Intimate space** is the private area immediately surrounding the individual's body. It involves both physical and emotional interactions. **(45 cm)**
- **Personal space** is that area within which a person allows only select friends, or people with whom personal conversation is mandatory. (**1.2 m**)
- **Social space** is that area within which a person expects to make social contacts on temporary basis. **(3.6 m)**
- **Public space** is that area within which a person does not expect to have direct contact with others. **(7.2 m)**

Figure 5: User's Levels of Space: Intimate, Personal, Social, and Public (Source: the author based on (Hall 1966))

Users in Search for Quality Urban Spaces

Urban design qualities are different from qualities such as sense of comfort, sense of safety and level of interest that reflect how an individual reacts to a place—how they assess the conditions there, given their own attitudes and preferences. Perceptions are just that, may produce different reactions in different people. They can be assessed with a degree of objectivity by outside observers; individual reactions cannot. All of these factors—physical features, urban design qualities and individual reactions- *(See Figure 6)* may influence the way an individual feels about the environment as a place to walk, stay, enjoy, live and sit (Ewing and Handy 2009).
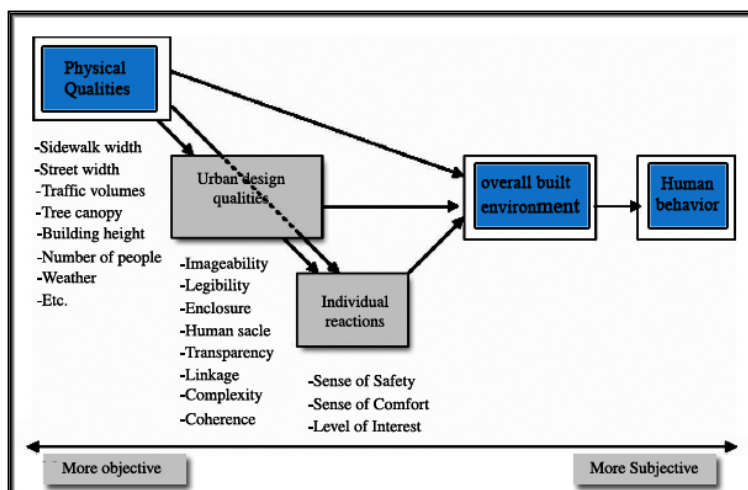
Figure 6: Schematic Diagram of Urban Design Qualities (Source: the author after (Ewing and Handy 2009)

Quality Urban Spaces

City people have developed new patterns of life with more active use of the city's many offerings and meeting places. City people place higher demands to the qualities of the cities and the architectural disposition of thoroughfares, city spaces and buildings have great impact on the type of activities that city can contain (Samson and Juul 2009).

City life is characterized by flows and movements. It is characterized by streams, networks, relations, interactions and connections—all of which are in a state of flux in relationship to each other. New experiences and unsuspected situations emerge all the time.

Earlier *(see Figure 3) t*he fight for the city space concerned regaining of the city space from the cars and pushing the commercial interests forwards. Today the focus shifted on creating city spaces that enhance the humanistic dimension of experience. The city space should be mentally and socially stimulating to the users and should be able to contain the diversity of the city by creating spaces where the cities different cultures can meet and interact.

Since urban spaces do not only consist of buildings but also people's moods and relations, we look at urban spaces as parameters for change in relation to culture, life forms, gentrification, and as attractors for different segments of citizens. Urban design as a catalyst for change identifies how urban spaces can be seen as catalysts for the development of "the good city concept" – socially, culturally and architecturally.

By this, we aim at developing a strategic approach where what is valuable to various people is prioritized, thus not only anchoring the urban spaces in the realm of the city but also in the realm of society. We can only do this by unifying an architectural understanding of form with a psychological and sociological understanding of human behavior.

Review of Human Behavioral Dimension Idea and Urban Design

The review of literature on environmental psychology has shown that the discipline is concerned with the interactions and relationships between people and the physical and ambient features of the environment. The emphasis has been on how human behavior and feelings are affected by the environment through the theoretical approach.

Design and human behavior research and courses in schools of architecture are sometimes seen as the isolated interest of a few non-architect academic researchers. What has been more generally overlooked is how threads of the design and human behavior idea are woven though related areas of culture (Rorty 1999).

In both visions, architectural **"quality"** is synonymous with the realization or destruction of human potential. Rejecting the bad and embracing the good- the second vision- can come about, only through radical dedication to social progress. Changing the world for the better, holding on to social hope, is a matter of finding the architectural form that supports healthy human behavior.

Many people think that human behavior in public spaces is 'chaotic' or at least very irregular. This differs from User's behavior in complex situations to normal situations, where people apply an optimized behavioral strategy through these urban spaces (Stevens 2006). This means that urban design cannot be limited only to physical forms, but also includes people activities that play the important role in urban spaces. Hence, it supposed to be designed to meet people's needs and support their activities, while, they are trying to achieve their goals and get their destinations through those spaces. But unfortunately, there is a miss-match between their needs and spaces design in many urban spaces, which reflects on their behavior and leads them to act randomly in a very irregular way.

After all, public socialization of urban spaces is a much more complex and encompassing behavior. It is a multi-relational and embodied urban experience. In general, public realm behavior is a research area that remains rather unknown and unexplored.

Human behavior, experiences and social interactions in public spaces are believed to be the result of the processes of the mind that are influenced by the different features of these spaces. These features may be physical, social, cultural or sensory but what they share in common is the power to affect people's behavior in, and experience of the public realm. This section addresses the research question: It discusses the theories of human behavior and identified how people respond to the ambient and physical features of public spaces.

A Reconsideration of the "Human Behavioral Dimension" in Public Urban Spaces

Public spaces capture the vitality, tension and excitement of the city, acting as social and spatial integrators, not separators. The streets are public space and should be open to all.
People have a significant relationship with public spaces because they use and experience them on a daily basis. The urban ideologies suggest that the attention given to the form of public spaces has ultimately been driven by the desire to improve the quality of life.

Terms such as **'feel'** and **'experience'** convey the complexities of the human mind and emotions. In order to appreciate how the environment impacts how people 'feel' and how people *'experience'* the environment, it is necessary to understand people's physiological and psychological processes. Perhaps when built environment professionals and public authorities appreciate how the environment affects people's behavior, only then can a truly **'humanistic'** environment be seen.

Significance of "Quality City"

Why do we need Quality City? Different researchers have different points of views.
The main reasons are summarized as the following (Zhang, Yu, and Pinson 2011):

- *Quality City* comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive. How a city looks and feels and the attractions it offers both visitors and residents mark it as being different from all others—as a unique and desirable place to visit, work, live, and love. It's hard to imagine the unique characteristic of a city could sustain development without love in such a changing world.
- *Quality City* makes us imagine a world that is more beautiful than the one we actually inhabit, creates positive social relationships in the urban environment, and contributes to the richness of its residents' social lives, make people become real urban life participants.

- *Quality City* could meet different needs for contact. Opportunities for meetings and daily activities in the public spaces of a city or residential area enable one to be among, to see, to hear, and to experience other people functioning in various situations.

Basically, Quality City offers an opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and undemanding way. One can take occasional walks, perhaps make a detour along a main street or side street on the way home, or pause at an inviting bench near a front door to be among people for a short while. One can even do daily shopping if they chose. There would be a plethora of options at their disposal.

Quality Cities Wanted: Lively, Safe, Sustainable, and Health

With the start of the 21st century, the importance of the targeted concern for the "human dimension" was more underscored. Cities were -generally and urgently-desired: lively, safe, sustainable and healthy as visionary objectives (Van Kamp et al. 2003). Those four key objectives can be strengthened by increasing the concern for pedestrians, cyclists and city life in general.

A unified citywide intervention is to be ensured that the residents are invited to walk and bike as much as possible in connection to their daily activities as a strong reinforcement to objectives (Smith, Nelischer, and Perkins 1997).

A Lively City

The potential for a lively city is strengthened when more people are invited to walk, bike and stay in city spaces. The importance of city public spaces is particularly shown in the social and cultural attractions and opportunities associated with a lively city. There are more eyes along the streets and a greater incentive to follow the events going on in the city from surrounding housing and buildings.

A Safe City

The potential of a safe city is strengthened generally when more people move to live in city space. As an invitation for people to walk around providing short walking distances, attractive public spaces and variations of urban spaces functions. These elements increase activity and the feeling of security in and around city spaces.

A Sustainable City

The sustainable city is strengthened by the concept of the "green mobility" transportation system taking place whether by foot, bike or public means of transport. These forms of transport provide marked benefits to the economy and the environment, reduce resource consumption, limit emissions and decrease noise levels. Another important sustainable aspect is that attractiveness of public transport systems is boosted if users feel safe and comfortable walking, cycling and moving from buses, light rail and trains. Good public spaces and good public transport system are simply two sides of the same coin.

A Healthy City

The desire for a healthy city is strengthened dramatically if walking or biking can be natural part of the pattern daily activities (Jackson 2003). A whole hearted invitation to walk and bike as a natural and integrated element of daily routines must be a nonnegotiable part of unified health policy.

Figure 7: A Visionary for Quality Cities Status
Source: the author after (Gehl Architects 2011)

Conclusion

A successful urban space is not only a usable space but also a lovable one. Not only is it congruent with users' behavior, but also lets users have the right to get public control through participation and modification and by attaching meaning to the space.

There are new challenges for the practice and theory of urban design (Aelbrecht 2010). The need to rethink and adapt urban design practices to an increasing changing public life is probably the most important. That is to say, urban design needs to be much more sensitive to all locations and the favorable spatial, experiential and social conditions people make use of and which can provoke positive interactions. It is in those locations and with those elements that public life is being made, negotiated and contested.

To summarize, increased concern for the **"human behavioral dimension"** of city planning reflects a distinct and strong demand for better **"urban quality".** There are direct connections between improvements for people in the city space and visions for achieving lively, safe, sustainable and healthy cities.

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Arch. Eng. Israa Hanafi ElSayed Hanafi: is a highly creative and multitalented Architectural Engineer with extensive experience in Urban Designing. In 2010, she obtained her B.Sc. of Architectural Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Alexandria University, Egypt in the Urban Design Major division, with 1st grade over the department and an accumulative score of Very Good. She has been a Teaching Assistant in the Architectural Engineering department at Alexandria University since 2010. Israa has worked in many distinguished Architectural offices; she is a licensed architect with 3-years work experience and has two established works of her own design with the aid of the Executive Engineering center of Alexandria University campus. Passionate about the sociology and psychology of urban design; where she persuaded her Master's degree in 2012, she currently focuses in her studies on socio-psychological factors involving in of quality cities public spaces urban design. She worked as ambassador for her own country for the ONE YOUNG WORLD conference in 2011.

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