

The fail of Urban Design and the art of Relationship in the new Town of Ali Mendjli Constantine

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Abstract

Nowadays Algeria is experiencing rapid urbanization .where the city escapes to policy makers and planners revealing dysfunctions of the urban design fabric. Which is more than a collection of buildings and land use zones, buildings has frequently seen to be anonymous devoid of meanings without any aesthetic appeal. The main function of urban design must be to create heightened sensual experience for the individual in the city traveling through time and space. This may be assisted by understanding the meaning, feel and symbolism of places; by understanding the human responses to spaces, channels and artifacts; by establishing the physical permutations and combinations of built form most likely to stimulate a heightened intellectual and emotional awareness.

Key words: aesthetics, urban design, art of relationship, new town, perception, place. Medina

Introduction

The new town of ali mendjli Constantine is seen to be anonymous without meaning due to the reduction of sensory input, and as a result the urban environment become without user interest .there is no element which can enhance human mind such as surprise, novelty, variety, complexity and so on .obviously all the previous elements can really keep the mind occupied. In terms of aesthetics, the dialectic development of styles and creativity in architecture and arts in general will generate changes with bases in the historically perceived environment; the art of relationship will go on finding new links in the environment forms, spaces, colors, materials .Always in the dialectic framework seeking order and meaning in the urban environment and this

seems to be the role of the Architect and urban designer.

A town is a large enough artifact to embrace a host of opposites. It should be a place of security and peace as well as exiting technological, exploratory and problem solving drives .it is large enough to embrace diverse value systems. Altogether, it is the

visible expression of humanity in microcosm .mental satisfaction is maintained despite Habituation, if a place is multi dimensional in its mode of communication the satisfaction becomes more profound if the place is also turned into a primordial symbolic wave length» The best

example is the traditional medina of Constantine and its success which lies in the following.

1-there is a rich interaction between brain and visual criteria.

2-it also offers so much to the brain it is largely resilient to habituation.

3-from brain point of view it is an ordered space, coherent and elegant at the same time it stimulates the curiosity drive by discrete glimpse areas. The range of the aesthetic urban



environment has to offer is quite fantastic and it will touch our every emotional chord. There will be varied enclosed spaces in traditional buildings, a range of architectural styles which will keep us interested, symbolic spaces and buildings, variety impact will be varied according to the brain involved in the act of Perception .see fig 1,2,3,4

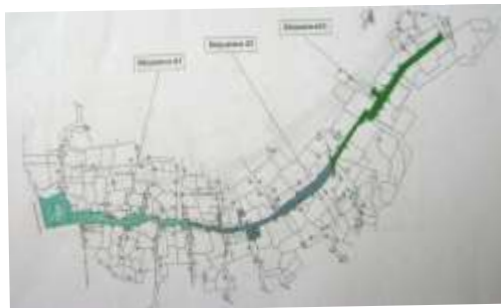


Fig1In the curved street change appeals to the mind organism

fig 2 the city is a complex



Fig 3: The notion of surprise we don't know what will be happen next fig4: the space is divided into here and

there

“The changes challenge the mind and Pleasure is derived from making sense of external environment, solving the problems of Relationship and surprise.” Gordon Cullen

The city is a dynamic, three dimensional experience bound up in association and symbolism .the aesthetic appreciation of which transcended the sum of its physical components. The city as a complex organism comprised of interlinked and regenerating holons, elements or Systems. It is therefore difficult and perhaps dangerous to try to isolate any one aspect. The three areas of importance are for urban design in moving towards a theory of aesthetics. These being:

- 1-The urban stimuli, both sensory and physical;
- 2-The individual's perception of the stimuli,
- 3-The philosophy and methodology are that may influence the creation, implementation or realization of the city fabric.

Perception of the city

The city is going to be perceived, through time, by all the senses at the command of an individual. It is therefore necessary to design for more than the physical satisfaction of the eye (i.e., sound levels should be optimized; climate should not be aggravated to any extreme, as the individual's

Sensory intake will be filtered through the associated experiences of memory (both Cognitive and subliminal) the reaction to any situation will be tempered by those acquired values. An advanced education may heighten the intellectual response to a classical piece of architecture. Philosophy or personal commitment will influence the way in which an experience is perceived and can create empathy between man and artifact Familiarity and tradition will give an urban set-piece added attraction or importance weighting for certain respondent groups .the individuals acquired values will further influence the plural interpretation of given situations. Through the vagaries of perception a plural interpretation of urban aesthetics is inevitable .this, however, is not an unhealthy situation assuming opinion is not violently divergent. *“by simultaneously activating the responses of the brain, a heightened visual awareness is produced which largely transcends conscious value filters .to produce this high contrast dialectic relationship, certain basic factors have to be related within the visual experience to satisfy the differing requirements of the brain systems .it is this factors in relationship, by producing the required heightened responses, which may be all important in providing the*

aesthetic Environment. "Peter f

Smith.

The new town of Ali mendjli Constantine

It tends to highlights the individual rather than the holistic appreciation of urban areas. If we compare it with the medina of Constantine which is really unique and, relevant for it is a city where

the pedestrian has always been supreme, and where

spaces are at his scale, accommodate his needs in general terms the environment provides tensions to keep us occupied, entertained and surprise to contribute to mental health and growth. See fig 5,6,7,8



Fig 5,6,7,8 Traditional town of Constantine (medina) planned and designed using the natural site

Creating wonderful perception the image is held together source: www.google.dz



The individual building, or building group, has frequently been seen to be anonymous, devoid of meaning and without any aesthetic appeal .the

latter point being particularly evident in the new town of ali mendjli Constantine where the reduced sensory input creates an environment bereft of

user interest .but even when considered a master piece the individual building is part of a larger set perceived and interpreted by the individual in a space /time continuum .adapted space and not architecture is the domineering force in urban

design and the creation of isolated works of genius may be secondary to the creation of a wider network of possibilities aimed at stimulating environmental awareness . Fig 9, 10, 11,



Fig 9, 10, The new town of Ali mendjli lack of stimuli Source: [www.google .dz](http://www.google.dz)



Fig 11, Without any visual focus urban environment becomes utterly dull Source: [www.google .dz](http://www.google.dz)

Then our goal as urban designers must be to provide pleasurable spaces for the activities a city encourages. Historically, this requirement was assumed, today it is usually overlooked, we should seek to recreate not the specifics of earlier

spaces, but the process and the human constants that generated them in their time . This is what is called by peter f smith the dynamic of urbanism as he defined it by saying that"*...in almost literal sense means applying a force to the mind .this*

force causes the mind to react positively to external stimuli Throughout an understanding of the mind or optimal solutions can be found,"

«The optimal perceptual rate can be found in complexity and ambiguity and such complexity can be seen in the geometry, shapes, texture, surface and so on.» Rapoport and Kantor

“organized complexity embraces the ideal of providing the variety and richness in human activity that also has aesthetic appeal .and to achieve this organized complexity a high contrast dialectic relationship in the mind function and contribution of stimuli must be considered .these are the elements of townscape which successfully if subjectively appreciated”

Jane Jacobs” mentioned that *related the human need for ambiguous open ended situations to many of the arts.”*

Amos Rapoport and Kantor say's that « ...one needs to roam back and forth ,either physically or with one's eye and mind ,not taking it all at a glance .if there is no ambiguity ,the eye is attracted only once and interest is lost «.

On one hand it seems rather difficult to give a successful list of elements which if applied can create a visual good environment. While in the other hand it seems quite easier to say that their overexposure may create a disordered environment.

Following are some of the urban stimuli which if

expanded could form a general townscape analysis and conceivable aesthetic guidelines to precise here that individually no one elements have the ability to create the aesthetic response .and still a main question in which one could say does their combination result in a desired environment ?.

Symbolism:

Urban phenomena with common perceptual definition is a fundamental guide and security to urban populations .operating from international signs or logos communicating superficial messages, to archetypal symbolism there is a high probability that urban configuration which has overtones of archetypal symbolism will generate a collective response .where a large section, if not all, of the community is perceiving environment on this level in the same way (in essence if not degree) this must contribute to the strengthening of social bonds through a communal and emotionally -charged attachment to place.

Place:

Has been eroded in significance in the new town of Ali mendjli Constantine through the advent of the internationalist philosophy based on mobility and speed of communication .the place is a fundamental psychological importance and that aesthetic values can be largely influenced by the social experience of an observer. Urban design should reinforce the meaning of place by respecting the 'genius loci'. Emphasizing the

individuality or 'oneness ' of built environments should ;maintain interest for the intra -inter urban traveller ;provide identity ;and hopefully ,by providing identifiable spaces in residential areas reinforce social contacts through common interest .Urbanism was created by and is dependent on the diversity of human activities. A rich mix of activities operating within an urban area provides a correspondingly high stimulus within the Human mind .this is most readily seen in the universal

attraction to the colour diversity. People in public, within the city, enjoy the Security of other people .they are therefore attracted to centers of activity which should be correspondingly rich in density and intensity of visual events and provide unique events, incidents and happenings. The environment should communicate the type of activity in a particular location and the relative importance of any area. See fig 12,



Fig 12, Place Ahmed bey in the medina Constantine source www.google .dz

Centres:

Should have a there, they should be unique rich in stimuli and should convey a terminal enclosure ;provide a sense of arrival by their depth of interest ,richness and scale ,or, by reason of their increased complexity ,should invite a reduction in travel speed to facilitate greater perceptual absorption and exploration .urban form should reinforce social experience .each town

should be unique -assertive of its super-image of community .at the tactical level this is not just a matter of architectural form ,but also of providing places for high -frequency and high intensity social interaction .Sense of place is reinforced by visual accents .sculpture and intensified architecture in terms of variety and frequency of visual events should mark nodal points in movement routes. See fig13, 14,



Fig 13, 14 city center of the medina Constantine source: www.google .dz

Space

Rather than architecture is the subject matter of urban design and such a brief précis leaves most unsaid .suffice to say then the fundamental satisfaction of space enclosure remains paramount to urban design .this ,however ,is not a static

concept ,

..Not only should linked spaces be created to provide curiosity and drive, urban spaces should be varied from formal proportions to near claustrophobic intimacy, with occasional glimpses of infinity (sky at ground level?) for relief or shock value .space should be conceived and designed with purpose and relationship in mind and not be the area left over which could not accommodate

buildings. Gordon Cullen

Scale, mass and form:

Of any development should be determined in relation to the existing urban medley (adjacent and city wide) with consideration given to what role the proposal is to contribute to the urban scene .In historic cities an urban crescendo is frequently achieved by central gigantism ,associated with ruling groups (mosque and policy) .this concept can still be sparingly adopted ,without authoritarian overtones ,in urban design ,particularly in relation to central places as the brain attaches irrational importance to size .similarly the strong impact of color could be used more liberally to the satisfaction of the brain ,assuming the pervasive propriety of the planner could be convinced .see fig 15,16



Fig 15, 16 mosque of Emir Abd-el-Kader Constantine

The detailing

Of urban scenes from the articulation of fenestration and relationship of artifacts, to flooring materials and street furniture are vital to sustain the interest of observers. A critical fault of contemporary architecture and design has been monotony (perhaps as a result of birds eye planning) which could be alleviated by the manipulation of details to provide greater complexity particularly at eye level .honesty , in

design philosophy ,can be boring : the urban environment needs mystery. The introduction of nature into the urban milieu has the potential to stimulate primordial resonance .water has a particularly deep rooted fascination and appeal which however, is little capitalized in cities .planting is becoming an increasingly accepted townscape element ,but should not be used as a single specimen for or as a means of infilling. See fig 17



Fig 17, the numbers of people adds further satisfying complexity source: www.google .dz

SPACE LEFT OVER AFTER PLANNING

(S. L. O .A .P.)

IT should be treated as an architectural element. Contributing complexity and arbitrariness to the order of built form thus

increasing the possibility of a high aesthetic response through the juxtaposition of bi-polar events topography and natural features should be capitalized upon to reinforce identity while the creation of adverse micro climate, as a result of building, should be guarded against. The counter point to the natural arbitrary sculpture of landscaping is serial order or rhythm .towns and cities project rhythms on any levels and these evoke mental response. the rhythm demand is a phenomenon known to psychologists and its

importance is becoming increasingly acknowledged .life is compound of multi-layered rhythms ,and mental needs display the same rhythmic pattern .the basic life -style is rhythmic and simple serial rhythms make a profound impact on the brain .more complex rhythms contributing to order and pattern have a more cerebral appeal .

Conclusion

Finally, as urban designers we must realise that this environment problem exists and what we have tried to exhibit throughout the paper is that a line of logical arguments exists and we think that the problem is one of psychology .investigations must then take account of fund of knowledge which is provided by this field and such investigations raise several important points which are likely to be the following:

1-Since people see the urban design in various different ways depending upon the information they abstract from the component .as it is known, information is the basis of all perception.

2-The more complex an environment becomes and the more ambiguous its element, the greater its capacity for interpretation by those perceiving it and consequently the perceiver's personality plays a greater part in its perception.

3-the most important factor for urban aesthetics however ,is the relationship of the afore - mentioned elements .The sensitive weaving

together of elements to produce a pleasantly heightened intellectual and emotional awareness or art of relationship is the way towards the aesthetic environment and the challenge of urban design .as an art form ,urban aesthetics are liable to deny infallible direction of an empirical body of knowledge .the production of guidelines on high probability stimuli combinations or townscape is perhaps as far as theory may go .this it seems will be increasingly supported by research into environmental psychology which further indicates that value filters will guarantee a pluristic perception of any situation .

The perception of urban environment is a process of constant exploration in search of new relationships. Thus to fulfil such requirements; many elements with many Relationships must be presented to the perceiver. The environment which allows this to happen has beneficial social and psychological effects, while the environment which does not allow this to happen consequently leads to a lack of interest.

The main purpose of environmental design becomes that of creating a highly complex organisation of possible visual as well as functional relationships and the creation of significant elements within this organisation.

Thus, the designer must inevitably deal with factors that touch deep and ancient human being concerns.

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