

“SPACES FOR ALL” THE URBAN SPACES OF THE FUTURE

Doina Mira Dascalu

Faculty of Architecture “G. M. Cantacuzino”, Technical University of Iasi – Romania

Summary

Looking closely to some new urban planning approaches for the old and new residential tissue, we can observe that the tendency go on creating urban spaces for larger users groups. These proposals try to give back to the city population an important territorial feeling, urban identity and self respect, but also go on creating a new urban awareness.

Nowadays, the inhabitants of the cities give, more than ever, a big importance to the image of the city and to their urban or individual necessities. Therefore, the public space should be that one where people can meet, can socialize, can enjoy nature and can recharge with energy their bodies, minds and souls. As a result of a noticeable urban necessity of public spaces, our cities should be prepared to receive many changes, almost through the reduction of many environmental wastes.

In these new “spaces for all”, the mixing of the population with and without special needs, the mixing of the ages, of the different social-economical-cultural-ethnic-spiritual statutes, is the means to bring back in our cities the joy of tolerance and of inner-peace, to bring back the unmediated inter-communication. Also, the street became a new kind of common space created to be shared by pedestrians, bicyclists, and low-speed motor vehicles, able to ensure the safety to move, to stay and to enjoy.

The new urban virtues of these reanimated places will educate people and will restore all citizen identity, will restore their feeling of self-respect and also their responsibility towards the city and its aspects.

Keywords: urban spaces, urban rehabilitation, environmental waste, reanimated places, unmediated inter-communication.



D.M. Dascalu

1. INTRODUCTION

Looking closely to some new urban approaches for the layout of the old and new residential tissue, we can observe that the tendency go on creating urban spaces for larger users groups. These proposals try to give back to the city population an important territorial feeling, urban identity and self respect, but also go on creating a new urban awareness.

The statistics revealed from many years a noticeable fact, that, nowadays, the inhabitants of the cities give, more than ever, a big importance to the image of the city and to their urban or individual necessities. Visual perception of the city, of the urban spaces, varies from one person to another, from one culture to another and it is related to the significance that each individual assigns to physical and social environment. Every one of us needs a certain urban environment and a certain degree of urban comfort, his perception being related to his psycho-emotional personality and to the motivations of their activities in the urban environment dictate. More and more, they pay attention to some elements like shadow and shining, dark and light, warm and cold, damp and dry, plane and high, noise and silence, to the some other elements like ventilation, transparency, introspection, privacy, or to other subtle thing. In this context, a scientific survey can describe the elements through, everybody in their diversity, influence the urban life: thoughts, life-style, ethnic origin, physical and social conditions, age, different abilities and needs, etc. All these things become today motive of comfort or security, or instead, motive of strong inconvenience or fear.

Therefore town-planners and architects are becoming aware of the major inhabitants sensibilities towards the evaluation of the urban space, taking into account all the physical or psycho-emotional needs. The sites of the future urban transformation become "laboratories" where the different urban needs are integrated and compared.

2. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN "SPACES FOR ALL"?

As a consequence of the expansion period of the cities, we are confronted today with a high level of saturation of the constructed areas and, as a result, with a huge waste of public space. The public space should be that one where people can meet, can socialize, can enjoy nature and can recharge with energy their bodies, minds and souls. As a result of a noticeable urban necessity of public spaces, our cities should be prepared to receive many changes, almost through the reduction of many environmental wastes. In our towns the waste can be translate also as waste of spatial qualities, waste of urban comfort, waste of quality of urban life. Many kinds



"SPACES FOR ALL". THE URBAN SPACES OF THE FUTURE

of urban spaces have been degraded, their environment and their layout being almost entirely subordinated to the needs of traffic. They became mainly utilitarian spaces, often unfriendly and contaminated, losing the real contact with its inhabitants.

The new planning approaches start from the real fact of the attachment of the most part of the cities inhabitants to their residential streets and public places, with or without historical or architectural value. Some proposals try to rethink and change the aspect and also try to improve the urban environment, in order that many urban tissues became safety, accessible and ecological public areas for larger users groups. A judicious urban rehabilitation can transform them into special realms, without turning them into arid museums and also avoiding the mortification of the old urban tissue. A judicious rehabilitation and reorganisation process of existing urban and dwelling tissue can be finalised with a conversion and valorisation of the building stock.

Nowadays we are facing a noticeable need of urban rehabilitation for the old and new spaces of our town, in order to correct many dysfunctions. In the historic centres or in the peripheral neighbourhoods, the urban areas most involved in social degradation, or in the phenomenon of "ghetto", become today object of corrective interventions, as well as of the social connection, or the new social service locations, or the integration with the other parts of the city.

The space-street versus the space-square is an important urban contemporary dialog: the social importance of the city squares, or of the city public places, is transferred, at local level, to the street. The aim is to turn to the best account the space of the streets and squares: to re-think and designed these urban spaces as safety areas for larger users groups. For all the inhabitants of our towns, we should find judicious ways to give back their residential streets and public spaces.

The application of the new concept of "streets for living-spaces for all" means find such a manner to give it back the lively, personal and picturesque touch that the streets and other public space once have. It means that the street became a common space created to be shared by pedestrians, bicyclists, and low-speed motor vehicles, able to ensure the safety to move, to stay and to enjoy. We should underline that only with the improvement of the urban mobility in these spaces we can transform them into a special realm, where the space can be shared by pedestrian and cars. That means a big reduction of the vehicles speed.

This kind of new urban space can bring also the end of the urban isolation. The mixing of the population with and without special needs, the mixing of the ages, is



D.M. Dascalu

the means to bring back in our cities the tolerance, the inner-peace, the unmediated inter-communication. The urban virtues of these reanimated places will educate people and will restore all citizen identity, whatever can be their degree of dependence, will restore their feeling of self-respect and also their responsibility towards the city and its aspects.

These special spaces can constitute the beginning to open the way towards a new urban Metamodern Consciousness of human beings. The existence of many “urban spaces for all” will help us to crystallize this new urban awareness of sharing these new kind of spaces without disturbances, with the desire of peace, tolerance and mutual support. This is the meaning of the Metamodern Consciousness.

Nowadays metropolitan areas, all over the world, are going to conclude their expansion period, which left fragmentary and disorderly urban settings mainly into the peripheral areas. Nevertheless we can find degraded areas not only in the peripheral zones but even in the historic centres, where there are islands of unique utilisations, areas with careless hygienic and social insecurity. It emerges the awareness of pursuing a major environmental quality through a new functional balancing and also an active protection of all the urban environments, thus of its historical and natural patrimony. It becomes evident an important need to regain the aesthetics and usability of our cities, not only in the historical areas of the urban tissue, but also in the recently built zones. The new urban wave tries to save the environment and to invest in new qualification of the existing cities: either the daily sphere related to the habitat and the traditional open spaces, the services system, the residential buildings, and related also to the specialised urban areas like shopping centres, cultural and sport facilities etc. This means to move from the operations limited to a single building to the housing programs and to different other programs regarding significant parts of the city, identifying essential parameters like: rehabilitation and conversion of existing buildings, plurality of functions, plurality of public and private in different sectors, plurality of funds, experimental aims like energy saving, quality of environmental life etc.

All the new proposals should be sustained by a remarkable technological development, as an important support to the urban changes, as a new approach among institutions and citizens, political power and social participation. The new urban proposals should apply the rules of environment accessibility. In some countries this is done through new integrated programs or new general town-planning schemes, with an environmental design compatible with universal and integrated design guidelines.



"SPACES FOR ALL". THE URBAN SPACES OF THE FUTURE

The social scenery of this new millennium will be characterised by new behavioural models. Nowadays behaviours are deeply connected with the fast changes in life and working rhythms, as a consequence of the substantial changes in the economic and social settlement and in the same working organisation – flexibility, mobility, and globalisation. People live in the city in its urban spaces according to their own agenda. Institutions try to adequate the services supply and their scheduling to these changes. New categories of urban design, related to the times of use of the built areas, are added to the traditional morphological and functional parameters. The aim of creating urban spaces open 24 hours a day for all kind of users is, in a certain way, the synthesis of today's new social demand. The accessibility of several areas of the city is a condition to allow most of the citizens to enjoy the services without difficulties and according to the times and access modalities, which they prefer. Further, the accessibility becomes one of the first tasks of the public administrations. Many new urban approaches accord a very big importance to this kind of strategy related to the so called timing and hour planning, using a time oriented design. The urban mobility and infrastructure system to get access and to connect the main services is essential to guarantee and efficient and active enjoyment of the city to larger groups of inhabitants.

In order to build, or to cure and transform into accessible and ecological the existent polluted urban spaces, we need a remarkable improvement of the urban mobility, with particular regard to the increasing number of people. Pedestrian routes become the primary elements of accessibility to move inside the city. They should be connected to the public transports through judicious linking junctions of urban circulation. All citizens have to enjoy the urban spaces and the creation of many kinds of pedestrian routes can guarantee their quality of life in the city. Further, new transport systems, more flexible than the current ones, should develop in alternative to the automobiles: such as smaller buses, electrical cars, car pooling systems, collective taxis, etc. The beginning its done in some cities, like in Palermo/Italy for example, where there are some successful experiments of using electric cars supplied by photovoltaic energy. This kind of new alternative transport will be able to guarantee the sustainability of the urban environments.

In Europe there are some experimental town-plans proposals for the urban accessibility, conceived as an occasion of new qualification and reorganisation of the connective urban tissue. These plans have the aim of making compatible the mobility systems, the location and functionality of the public services, the urban



D.M. Dascalu

equipments or fittings and their morphological settings, all connected with the open public spaces and the pedestrian routes. The priority aim is to facilitate and sustain the basic activities that people carry out. That means walking and enjoying a physical pleasure of safety, crossing and going through open and closed spaces, being able to join any wished places, getting into any buildings and urban spaces where collective activities take place, using any services and equipment in condition of comfort and security. In this context, we should pay attention at two noticeable levels: on the physical and functional characteristics of the urban tissue. Physical parameters, that means: the space system in the connective tissue areas formed by pedestrian roots, interchange junctions among pedestrian cart-road and cycle network; parking and relating connection systems with pedestrian network, garden and park areas; public and private buildings for collective interest, where specific services opened to citizens are located; special urban spaces and itineraries of tourist, cultural, historical or architectural interest. Functional parameters, that suppose: the mobility analysis of the area, related to the principal transfer flows and the utilisation of the private and public transport; the analysis of the functional distribution in the territory, in relation to the ways and times of its usability, by different groups of people (tourists and inhabitants, elderly and young's, etc.); the checking of morphological and functional elements concerning pedestrian routes, road crossings, bus stops, public parking, urban parks and gardens, entries of public buildings, accessibility of communal services.

The urban design should improve the existent pedestrian network, strengthening its structure, security and usability. In those areas selected to be rehabilitate, the transformation is done in order to obtain "streets for living – streets for all". The choices are: to allow residents to reach their dwellings, to park and to go out easily, to permit nonresidents to come into the area by public transport or private, to connect the parking areas and to utilize all services located in this area. Using the virtues of landscape architecture, the design should allow visitors to rich cultural and artistic spaces, or gardens zones without holding up the daily flows of the area, and without suffering the negative consequences of traffic like noise, pollution or disservice. The modifications of existing areas are possible through: enhancing existent services and equipments, the reorganization of the areas with an improvement of environmental conditions by increasing vegetation, shadow areas, putting in strategic areas plants, flowers, trees, by increasing the availability of the area, in order to stay and to move with complete safety. The design proposals should take care of the morphological characters of existing urban tissues, particularly in the choosing of adequate materials, typological and architectural design, judicious dimensions size and shape of the spaces. The safety should be guaranteed during day and night, therefore all kind of illumination pillars – small, tall or decorative ones - should exist in the areas.



"SPACES FOR ALL". THE URBAN SPACES OF THE FUTURE

3. CONCLUSIONS

Urban accessibility involves those strategies which can sustain the realisation of the "streets for living – spaces for all". In order to realise such flexible urban spaces, able to satisfy all the urban needs, we should have multifunctional tools. That means we can use the virtues of the universal design, which should pay attention to the needs of the people, with regard to their diversities, aims, potentialities, times of life, starting almost from the weaker shares of the population. We need to make more transparent the different articulations of the society, using them as a tool to enforce and enrich the urban image, and not as an occasion for exclusion, as it does still happen today. The flexible city should be accessible to all the inhabitants, workers and artists, elders and children, disabled persons and all other groups.

The accessibility constitutes today a border discipline which supports and connects different sectors and areas. In order to obtain flexible and accessible urban spaces, streets for living-spaces for all, the main guidelines should be:

- to conceive and design accessibility of urban and buildings rehabilitation through different programmes;
- to stimulate all the inhabitants, larger users groups, to use the existing and the new urban areas trough an adequate policy of judicious urban rehabilitation and public education, through new technological support;
- to assure morphological and functional elements that must guarantee the basic activities that people carry out – using, walking, crossing, getting into;
- to ensure adequate levels of urban comfort, suitability and safety in these new kind of streets and urban spaces for all.

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D.M. Dascalu

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