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## A new context for urban design: the role of drawing in the design process

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### Abstract

The composition of urban space today seems to be considered a less important issue in the practice of city development. The impoverishment process of the formal and compositional components of the urban spaces is more evident when the several and necessary knowledges in planning are contemplated and understood. These aspects imply a reflection on essential aspects of urban concerns which are mainly related to the formal composition, based on the experimentation and on the individual creativity of the designer.

This paper pretends an approach to the relevance of this subject for the urban planning, through its various phases from XV century until now, focusing on the role of the free drawing in the urban design process, concluding with its importance at several levels for the urban planning and cities development.

**Keywords:** Urban Design; Urban Space; Urban Process; City Development.

### 1. Introduction

The composition of urban space seems to be forgotten when we think in the practice of “doing” city. This feeling both in theory and in the practice results from a misunderstanding among the several agents who deal with the problematic of the city (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021) forgetting most of the time the main concerns of urban space and the role that draw should have, in order to give a major contribution to the richness of public space, which objectives have been neglected, in prol of political and economic interests, forgetting most of the times the real purposes of public space, which are the well-being of people.

It will be interesting to review in a summarize way the changes in urban design through the 20th century, in order to have an approach of the evolution of the formal composition of the city.

### 2. Materials and Methods

#### Evolution of the Formal Composition of the Cities

Medieval cities revel, besides its apparent chaotic “organization” a sense of composition, which reflects a kind of knowledge, based on experience, good sense and surviving.

It is during the Renaissance period that appear the first concerns, in a chirurgical approach, with formal composition. In fact, medieval composition suffered the effects of the coldness of the intellectualization process, which the Renaissance writers systematized and which, at the level of urban composition, will be operationalized during the centuries XVII and XVIII (Rainha, 2007).

The important thing in the theoretical contributions of the Renaissance and Late-Renaissance writers would have been the belief that human life could be rationalized, through mental labour and “logical-philosophical” schemes. These ideas, being fundamentally rationalist, would be the base for the proposals for new ways of drawing the city, more than considerations of a spatial nature or spatial relations and concepts.

The baroque space, the scene of the “sensual fury of life” (Mumford, 1982) that would characterize the city until the industrial revolution, is definitely buried and, with it, the design of the city, seen as a process of formal determination, developed within a corpus of poetics and linguistic traditions that history will mean.

We can then say that if the spatial tensions of the erudite mannerism of a Capitol are first diluted in the disarticulation of the compositional geometries, in turn they gave way in the 19th century, to a clear composition, free of apparent formal contradictions, of which the 19th century interventions have some referential examples.

It is the immensity of nineteenth-century principles that the space will incorporate, now translated into clear compositional logics. It is the new values that the society of the 1800s inaugurated, turned into new methods of production and exchange, which will be put into practice in the construction of the city, and the intended theoretical abstraction serves to destroy the design and the development of more intuitive schemes.

The urban structure, as a record of the conflicts that gave victory to the technological progress, violently changed its dimension, configuring itself as an open structure, in which it is utopic to try to find balance points. We are referring, of course, to the propagation of orthogonal solutions, which served as a model for the violent growth of the city, until now.

We can then say that urban design is “forgotten” when the city not only asked for, but felt the need of a quantitative systematization, and the industrial city (Tafari, 1982) began to apply logic rules to understand the urban development.

The construction of the city, seen as a place for the reproduction of a workforce, is now controlled by functionalist practices, based in a quantitative planning, which wants to be guaranteed on a scientific basis, a situation that will get worse in the 20th century, with the urgency of the European reconstruction after the Second World War.

In the 1950s, the regional and urban planning assumed a prominent position throughout this process. Rational attitudes and decision-making based on various disciplinary fields were emphasized, essentially in economics, sociology, and geography, in a global and rational systemic view. In this context, the macro vision of planning generally ignored the specificities of the urban, as a space with all its physical, socio-cultural, and even microeconomic problems.

The proposals were basically concerned with the location of resources and activities, based on statistical data, the so-called objectives, with urban space being a physical support for various disciplinary fields, ending up being omitted and ignored as a form (Rainha, 2007).

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### **Planning and Urban Design: the process**

Planning must be understood as a permanent activity and, for that very reason, it is, in itself, a process, an indispensable process for decision-making. Starting from political decisions regarding the social and economic objectives to be achieved, it is through planning that we establish the best ways and actions to achieve these objectives.

The planning process imposes a constant search for content in the project, always in an interactive, systematic process. There is no exact moment to “start thinking about Urban Design”.

Draw in Urban Design must be present in the administration of cities, generating a dynamic and constant interrelationship between plans and projects, between the general and the particular, between the formulation and the implementation, between the beginning and the end. In this way, one of the most common mistakes in the production process of our urban spaces can and will be avoided. Urban design can play, acting as an “interface”, a role between Plan, Project and Work, being the element that connects all the parts.

Only with an understanding of the theory internalized in the design process is it possible to achieve the intended quality standards.

The introduction of drawing as a research method in the field of urban design, introduces new compositional contents. It is important to mention that here the word drawing has a more dynamic character, that is not associated with the traditional meaning, of a more static character. Drawing here considered as a process of formal determination, many times confused with the act of projecting.

Drawing as an “expressive way, implies and presupposes a search and research, which leads to the definition of an abstract and confused idea before it happens. The research design, the studies, commonly known as “sketches”, are intended to identify a first form in the current cultural model.

We can say that the introduction of free drawing in the design process, in the process of urban production, may facilitate the recognition of space and its meanings.

Draw, in and for Urban Design, appears as a disciplinary field, a laboratory experience, that deals with the physical-environmental dimension of the city, as a set of physical and spatial systems which activities interact with the population, through their daily experiences, routines, perceptions and actions.

Urban design deals with urban morphology and that surely affect the formation process of the entire urban space, its functioning, its adaptation to the various forms of living and to the various social groups, which is why it is necessary a deep knowledge of the city and the territory, its structures, spaces, forms and its formation processes, in a multidisciplinary approach, where the whole is not merely the sum of the parts.

Several authors seek to define the concept of urban design. One definition given by Cutler and Cutler (1983) is “the discipline that deals with the process of giving form and function to sets of structures, entire neighborhoods, or the city in general”. We define it through some aspects of action, through:

- Spatial scale: the space between buildings, the neighborhood, places of daily activities.
- Temporal scale: transformations and evolution, environment as a process, programs and lines of action.
- Human/environment interactions: field where people and social groups are identifiable, with the consequent analysis of these realizations and transformations.
- Multi-professional: aspects that can be able of understanding the capacities and limits of other professions and, simultaneously, coordinating actions in relation to the physical-spatial dimension of the urban environment and its functions.

Monitoring and Guidance, as the ability to control urban development, and deal with the transformation process of an area or a city.

Lamas (1983) refers Kevin Lynch, who also seeks to contribute to the definition of the concept of urban design: “... the art of creating possibilities for the use, management and form of settlements or their significant parts”. For him, urban design deals with patterns, in time and in space, having justification in the daily human experiences of these patterns.

He (Lynch) doesn't work exclusively with large scales, but also with smaller ones - such as benches, trees, porticos or entrances - any aspects that affect the “performance” of the space. “City Design” is concerned with objects, human activities, institutions and with transformation processes”. Urban Design thus appears as a disciplinary field that deals with the physical-environmental dimension of the city, as a set of physical-spatial systems and systems of activities that interact with the population, through their daily experiences, perceptions and actions, seeking to deal with the production, appropriation and control of the built environment or to be built. Urban design encompasses issues that have to do with urban morphology and that affect the formation process of the entire urban space, its functioning, its adaptation to the various forms of living and to social groups, which is why a deep knowledge is necessary, of the city and the territory, its structures, spaces, forms and its formation processes.

And where are the aesthetics and the symbolic? If we make an analogy between urban design and a building - between designing an outdoor/urban space and designing a building, we must admit that the aesthetic aspects are decisive. It is about creating a permanent stage of a culture, in which the social drama can be played out in the most profitable, happiest and most harmonious way by the actors” (Mumford, 1952).

Both function and expression have a place in all spatial systems - in architecture, in the draw of a square or in the design of an entire city, unconsciously or on purpose, everything communicates with the observer, changing his behavior.

All visible functions contribute in some way to this expression: “If a square, a street, a building, an urban complex, does not delight our gaze in some way and does not instruct our mind and calm our spirit, then there is no technical audacity, right decision-making, correct predictions, nor multiknowledge that can save that absence of meaning”. (Del Rio, 1990).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present state of our civilization is not self-perpetuating. If man today does not re(conquer) his integrity and balance, does not regain creativity and freedom, he would be unable to contain the forms that may occur to deviate from what really matters.

The physical space plays a fundamental role in the unfolding of this act. Draw and Urban design may have definitions of morphological, environmental, structural, social, geographic, psychological and behavioral nature. It has the duty to ensure our physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, so that the ways of lives tend towards balance, where functionality dialogues with diversity, plurality and aesthetics.

I began these reflections saying, that today, the role of draw in urban design is “lost”, in the sense that it does not fulfill its true nature, considering the brutal chances that draw can have, in order to give back dignity to spaces and people, integrating instead of segregating, respecting interculturality, returning security, and yet with the beauty people deserves. Cities do not need to be the tremendous mass of concrete, in an economist logic, with the only objective of building. Cities do not need to be equal to the cities of the beginning of the century. Cities do not need to be small, cities can be big, very big, true metropolis, but what they cannot do is to lose an erudite character, they cannot lose the poetic and aesthetic side. Draw can do it, because even with their defaults, we must recognize the erudite gesture a Brasilia or a Chandigarh have, because with all the severe critics about Modernist urban design,

and even with everything that was written about them, they keep their proud; against everything and all, they keep in a way or another. Now we have the obligation to join functionality with proud and dignity, and adding the very conscience that cities are (must be) for people, not for cars, but to people, in a sustainable and fairy attitude, where people can contribute and collaborate, with their dreams and desires, their culture, investing in something they know that will be their heritage for their children and grandchildren.

As the Japanese writer Kenia Hara said, “emptiness is the possibility yet to be filled, a design element, the absolute void” (Hara, 2007).

We, as teachers, also have a role and a responsibility, which is to share all these kind of concerns with our students, stimulating research in a holistic way, seeing and doing architecture, and draw in urban space as a multidisciplinary approach (Rainha, 2022).

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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