Creating Livable Public Spaces

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Abstract
The city and its public spaces should provide the desired setting for everyday urban life. The development of the city should foster the continuation of daily living for all social classes. Cities have continuously been losing its legacy embodied in its urban spaces and urban life, due to the lack of appreciation of the social part of sustainability in design and decision making. This research is a descriptive research that aims to retrieve the legacy of the city by understanding the logic of place-making, and generating various strategies that help in creating healthy, productive, and enjoyable spaces. First, it defines the types of public spaces; second, it explains the meaning of place-making; then, it analyses some case studies in the western and European countries, and finally, it provides practical strategies that help in creating livable spaces. This paper confirms that creating livable public spaces that suit all users is a critical issue when shaping the future of the sustainable cities.

Keywords: Public spaces, Livable spaces, Livable cities, Place-making.

Introduction

The Urban design is the art of creating public spaces; it draws together the many strands of place-making, environmental responsibility, social equity and economic viability. It is about creating a vision for an area and the deploying of the skills and resources to realise that vision (Lang 2005).

Public spaces are the common ground where people come as friends, neighbours, and citizens to meet, talk, sit, relax, and read. Places where people share together parks, streets, sidewalks, squares, markets, waterfronts, beaches, museums, gardens, and all primary sites for human action. Public spaces should support activities and provide opportunities for social interaction, cultural, enrichment and recreation. Accordingly, when designing the public spaces, urban designers should study the physical aspects as well as the social aspects to create livable places.

The MIT report highlights that "the relationship of places and their communities is not linear, but cyclical, and mutually influential. Places grow out of the needs and actions of their formational communities, and in turn, shape the way these communities behave and grow." (Places 2017). Accordingly, spaces become places after people act on them and those places are loved and owned by the people. These spaces are serving as self-motivating places to encourage communications and create a stage for public life. Thus, the livable places are spaces that promote human contact and social activities, safe areas, welcoming, accommodating for all users, visually attractive, encourage community involvement, reflect the local culture or history, and have unique or special characters. In addition, public spaces have an essential effect on the human well-being. These spaces are strengthening the social identity and humanising the urban environment by promoting life outside the buildings. They also bring economic benefits by drawing the customers for the nearby businesses, by making an attractive city to live, work and play.

Livable spaces are places that attract all strata and classes (rich and poor, educated and uneducated), suit all ages (children, youth, and elders), and encourage various activities. The livable spaces are affordable to all people, easily accessible and connected to the surrounding neighbourhoods. They are open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age, or gender. They present a democratic forum for citizens and society. They provide meeting places and foster social ties. Livable spaces shape the cultural identity of an area, and provide a place for local communities.

On the other hand, lifeless public spaces are spaces without activities, and without identity. Each lifeless place is a missed opportunity to challenge and delight or to inspire the people with a passion for the place. These spaces are spaces with Globalized Identity, without soul and character; therefore, they do not tell us a particular story and do not become part of our memory. Lifeless spaces are a missed opportunity to challenge and delight, and to inspire people with a passion for place that they might carry back to their own neighborhoods (Lang 2005). At the lifeless spaces, people who live and work in a given area are left without a place to interact in an informal, pleasant environment, and the people who pass through lose the possibility to experience the unique sense of place (Places 2017).

The types of public spaces

As cities worldwide grow, the role of parks is changing. Public spaces and parks are no longer seen as beautiful areas for a picnic, but rather as a necessary system within the city's overall fabric. Therefore, livable, sustainable cities must balance density with public space for the health of their inhabitants, their environments, and their prosperity (Silver 2017). The main types of public spaces are:

1- **Open squares**: an open square is a public space commonly found in the heart of a traditional town used for community gatherings. Gardens, sitting areas, children play areas are some elements of the public spaces. Other names are the civic centre; Market square, urban square, square, and plaza. Most town squares are hardscape suitable for open markets, music concert, political rallies, and other events. Squares are usually enclosed by small shops and stores, similar to al Hashemite square in Amman/Jordan (Figure 1). At the square centre, there is often a fountain, monument, or statue.

Figure 1: Al Hashemite square in Amman/Jordan

2- Enclosed or covered space: means inside the building or structure to which the public can access, including retail shops, indoor shopping malls (Figure 2), restaurants, bars, places of entertainment, casinos and billiard halls. Designated smoking rooms are also part of the enclosed spaces. Providing for court games, children's play, and sitting out area.

Figure 2: Shopping malls are example for an enclosed space

3- Pockets park, and green spaces: pockets are small areas of open space that accommodate natural surfaces and shaded areas for play and passive recreation that sometimes have seating and playing equipment (Policy 2017) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Informal pocket parks in Amman/Jordan.

4- District parks are large areas of open spaces that provide a landscape setting with a mixture of natural features accommodating a broad range of activities including outdoor spans facilities and playing fields. These parks include playgrounds, walking paths, decorative landscaping, and unique features such as riding trails (Figure 4).

Figure 4: District parks with playing areas

5- Boulevard and linear open space: it is wide, multi-lane arterial thoroughfare, divided with a median down the centre, and with roadways along each side designed as slow travel and parking lanes and for bicycle and pedestrian usage. They are often characterised by attractive areas which are not completely accessible to the public but contribute to the enjoyment of the space (Policy 2017), such as the Abdali Boulevard in Jordan (Figure 5).
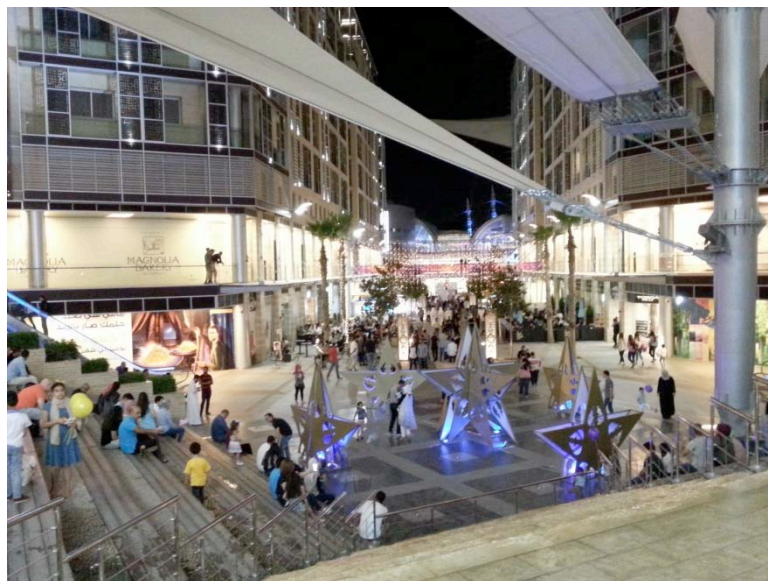

Figure 5: Abdali Boulevard in Amman/Jordan

The logic of place-making

To create livable spaces in the city, architect and planners should apply the art of place-making. In place-making, the best experts in the field are the people who live, work, and play in a place. One of the primary principles of the place-making is people attracting people (Community 2017). A management plan that comprehends and develops ways of keeping the public spaces protected and livable should be elaborated by the city council to guarantee that people will come back and revisit the place. The

council should manage, maintain, the space to increase its quality and to give the people a feeling of comfort and safety (Harvard 2017).

Place-making is the practice of designing, creating and programming public spaces around the needs and desires of the community of users. The research asserts that the place-making process provides many benefits for community empowerment as it does for creating public spaces themselves (Places 2017). As a result, the connection between people, professionals, and the places they share is strengthening, and space will be converted to a place that a person never wants to leave.

The place-making approach developed in response to the progressive trends of the 19th and 20th centuries when the public spaces were designed by industrialisation, auto-centered planning and urban regeneration projects. The term came into use by the landscape architect, architects, and urban planners in the 1970s to describe the process of creating open spaces that attract people. The landscape often plays an essential role in the design process, supported by other disciplines that involved in designing the built environment. Throughout the 1960s, the top-down planning eliminated the community voices during all design stages; consequently, broke the bond between communities and public places (Places 2017). As a result, writers like Jane Jacobs and William Whyte offered ground breaking ideas about creating cities for people, not just for vehicles and shopping malls. Both of them emphasised essential elements for creating a social life in public spaces (Community 2017; Places 2017). At that time, urban planners were razing finely-grained neighbourhoods and constructing lifeless housing developments and parking lots, surrounded by endless grey ribbons of the expressway. Streets and squares known as places for commerce and social interaction were lost, and the cities, decades later, are still struggling to recover (Places 2017).

Recent research reveals that in the half-century since that movement started, the making of a place has become as necessary as the place itself. Throughout the public participation, residents are shaping public spaces, contacting each other, forging relationships, building social capital and engaging with different people, institutions and organisations. Places in the Making report highlights that the importance of people in establishing the place is a crucial aspect that is always forgotten by experts and planners (Places 2017).

The place-making approach based on a belief that it is not enough to merely plan and elaborate design ideas and elements to revitalise a public space. A public involvement to process that responds to space is one of the most important factors in designing a successful open space. Place-making is how people collectively shape their public realm to maximise their shared value. Furthermore, place-making involves the planning, design, management and programming of public spaces. It facilitates creative patterns of activities and connections (cultural, economic, social, and ecological) that define a place and support ongoing evolution. Consequently, the success of a particular public space is not solely in the hands of the designers; it also relies on people adopting, using and managing the space.

Case studies

This section discusses two case studies one of them is an unsuccessful open space that can be considered as a lifeless space in Los Angeles, and the other is a successful open space that can be recognised as a livable space in London. The analyses of these case studies highlight the major characteristics that define the public spaces.

1 Unsuccessful example: Pershing Square, Los Angeles, California, USA.

Pershing Square -Figure 6- has a long history dating back to 1866. It has gone through many redesigns by various architects, landscape architects and gardeners: Fred Eaton's (in the 1890s), John Parkinson's (1911), Frank Shearer's (1928), Stiles Clements' (1950), and finally, Ricardo Legoretta and Laurie Olinin in 1994 (Lang 2005).

Figure 6: Pershing Square, Los Angeles, California, USA.

In 1994, the city decided to reclaim the park from young drug users by redeveloping the site with $US14.5 million. The implemented design by Ricardo Legoretta and Laurie Olin aims to create a *zócalo*, the heart of many Mexican cities. The designers used an orange grove at the centre of the square as a reminder of the importance of orange cultivation in Los Angeles County (Lang 2005). The square contains a sculpted court with a fountain, a 'Mayan' style amphitheatre, seats in which representations of Los Angeles embedded and traditional arts represented (Hinkle 1999).

Despite these various components and the enormous amount of money that was spent on design and construction, the park is still a lifeless place. Jon Lang (2005) states that it is hard to see the connection among the design elements; moreover, the location of the underground garage is a continuing concern; constructing a plaza above the surrounding ground level weakens the accessibility to the park. Furthermore, the neighbouring services do not encourage people to be the square users. Only poor and homeless are there, as the benches in Pershing Square provide a place for them to gather and sleep.

2 Successful example: Trafalgar Square in London, England.

Since the 13th century, London's Trafalgar Square (Figure 7) has been used for gatherings and political demonstrations, and campaigns against climate change. The streets surrounding the square were dominated by vehicles for decades. In the mid of the 1990s, the town added new pedestrian-only areas to its centre to convert it into a pedestrian-friendly zone (McCarren 1999).

The square becomes a hub of tourism surrounded by the major attractions for people, and the people themselves become a major attraction for each other. In addition to the public benches, the edge of the central fountain is used for seating. The redesigned square is regarded as great artistic successes that enhance the quality of the public realm. This transformation changed the behaviour of both drivers and pedestrians thus enhance the logic of livable spaces.

Figure 7: Trafalgar Square in London, England

Conclusion

This research describes the meaning of public spaces and highlights the main strategies that should be implemented to convert the lifeless spaces into livable ones. The main strategy is that people attract people, which means that the architect should design spaces that encourage people to come and initiate various activities all around the years, these attractive spaces should be safe, accessible, and affordable for all. The mentioned case studies of the Pershing Square in Los Angeles and the Trafalgar Square in London are just examples to presents the way public space can transform the lives of residents towards negative or positive ends.

In the 21st century, under the power of capitalism and where urbanisation is extremely increased, it becomes difficult to focus on the human needs and create spaces with Soul. Cities are struggling to create livable spaces that fulfil the locals' needs and respect their desires, spaces that inspired people, suits their needs, and that they simply find stunning.

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