

## 1.2

# First we shape the cities — then they shape us

city planning and patterns of use  
— a question of invitation

If we look at the history of cities, we can see clearly that urban structures and planning influence human behavior and the ways in which cities operate. The Roman Empire had its colony towns with their fixed and regimented layout of main streets, forums, public buildings and barracks, a formula that reinforced their military role. The compact structure of medieval cities with short walking distances, squares and marketplaces supported their function as centers of trade and craftsmanship. Haussman's strategic urban renewal of Paris in the years after 1852, the broad boulevards in particular, supported military control of the population, as well as providing the platform for a special "boulevard culture" that sprouted promenades and café life along the city's wide streets.

more roads — more traffic

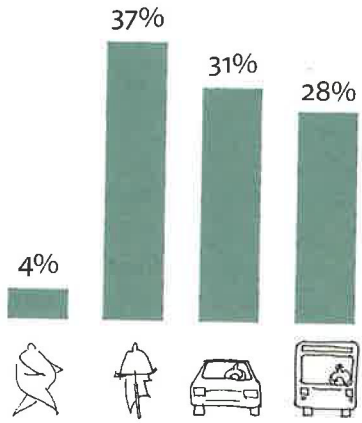
The connection between invitations and behavior came to a head for cities in the 20th century. In the efforts to cope with the rising tide of car traffic, all available city space was simply filled with moving and parked vehicles. Every city got precisely as much traffic as space would allow. In every case, attempts to relieve traffic pressure by building more roads and parking garages have generated more traffic and more congestion. The volume of car traffic almost everywhere is more or less arbitrary, depending on the available transportation infrastructure. Because we can always find new ways to increase our car use, building extra roads is a direct invitation to buy and drive more cars.

fewer roads — less traffic?

If more roads mean more traffic, what happens if fewer cars are invited rather than more? The 1989 earthquake in San Francisco caused so much damage to one of the vital arteries to the city center, the heavily trafficked Embarcadero freeway along the bay, that it had to be closed. Thus a significant traffic route to the city center was removed in one fell swoop, but before plans for reconstruction were off the drawing board, it was clear that the city was managing just fine without it. Users quickly adapted their traffic behavior to the new situation and instead of the damaged double-decker freeway, today there is a city boulevard with trolley cars, trees and wide sidewalks. San Francisco has continued to convert freeways to peaceful city streets in subsequent years. We can find similar examples in Portland, Oregon; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Seoul, Korea, where dismantling large road systems reduced capacity and the amount of traffic.

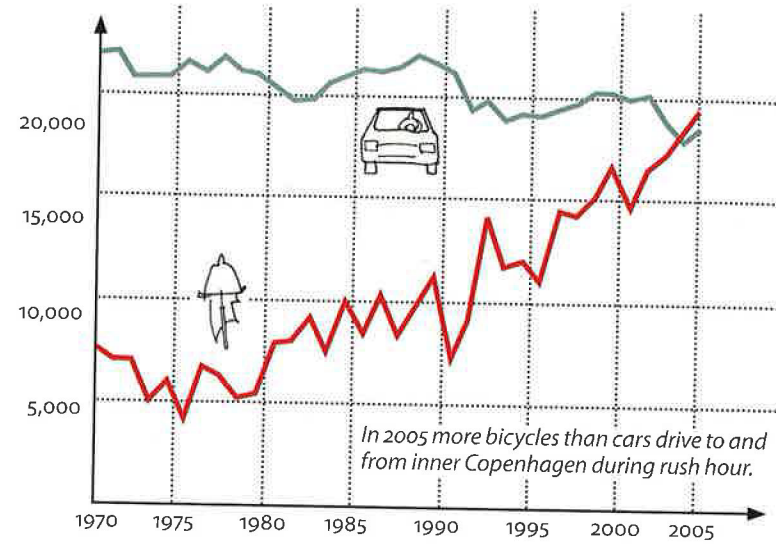
## inviting bicyclists: example Copenhagen

Below: going to and from work and education in Copenhagen (2008).



For many years Copenhagen has invited more bicycle traffic. Networks of good bicycle paths now support a safe and effective alternative transit system. By 2008, bicyclists account for 37% of commutes to and from work and education. The goal is 50%.<sup>6</sup>

The development of a distinct bicycle culture is a significant result of many years of work to invite people to bicycle in Copenhagen. Bicycling has become an important part of the daily activity pattern for all groups of society. More than 50% of Copenhageners bicycle every day.<sup>7</sup>



better conditions for cyclists  
— more cyclists

An extensive expansion of the opportunities to bicycle in New York began in 2007. Photos show 9th Avenue in Manhattan in April and November 2008 with the new "Copenhagen-style" bicycle path designed so that parked cars protect bicycle traffic. Bicycle traffic has doubled in New York in only two years.



In 2002 the City of London instituted road pricing for vehicles driving into the city center. The immediate effect of the new "congestion charge" was an 18% traffic reduction in the 24 km<sup>2</sup> (9.26 sq. miles) central city zone. A few years later traffic increased once again in the area, after which the fee was raised from 5£ to 8£, and traffic has lessened once more. The fee has made the invitation to drive to and from the city a guarded one. Traffic has been reduced, and fees are used to improve public transport systems that by now carry more passengers. The pattern of use has been changed.<sup>8</sup>

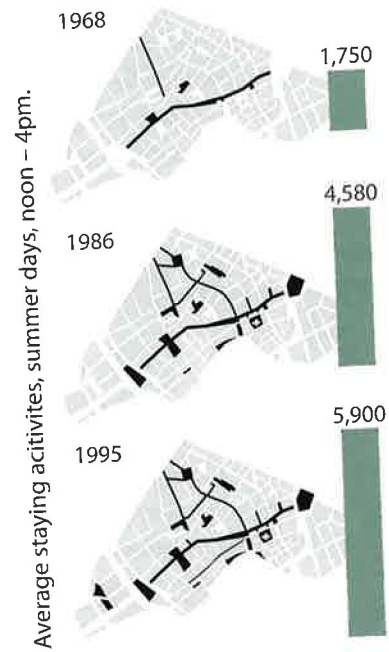
The City of Copenhagen has been restructuring its street network for several decades, removing driving lanes and parking places in a deliberate process to create better and safer conditions for bicycle traffic. Year by year the inhabitants of the city have been invited to bike more. The entire city is now served by an effective and convenient system of bike paths, separated by curbs from sidewalks and driving lanes. City intersections have bicycle crossings painted in blue and, together with special traffic lights for bicycles that turn green six seconds before cars are allowed to move forward, make it considerably safer to cycle around the city. In short a whole-hearted invitation has been extended to cyclists, and the results are reflected clearly in patterns of use.

Bicycle traffic doubled in the period from 1995 to 2005, and in 2008 statistics showed that 37% of personal transport to and from work and educational institutions was by bicycle. The goal is to increase this percentage considerably in the years to come.<sup>9</sup>

As conditions for bicyclists improve, a new bicycle culture is emerging. Children and seniors, business people and students, parents with young children, mayors and royalty ride bicycles. Bicycling in the city has become the way to get around. It is faster and cheaper than other transport options and also good for the environment and personal health.



better city space, more city life: example Copenhagen



A gradual process starting in 1962 has increased car-free areas in Copenhagen. Public spaces public life studies in 1968, 1986 and 1995 show that the extent of staying activities has increased by a factor of four in the period studied. The more space that is offered, the more life comes to the city.<sup>10</sup> Upper right: Strædet, a Copenhagen street before and after conversion to a pedestrian-priority street in 1992. Right: Nyhavn converted to a pedestrian street in 1980.



better conditions for city life  
— more city life

Not surprisingly, a direct connection between invitations and patterns of use can also be demonstrated for pedestrian traffic and city life.

Many old cities were established as pedestrian cities, and some continue to have that role where topography has made car traffic impossible, or where the economy and social networks are still based on foot traffic.

Venice enjoys an entirely special status among the old pedestrian cities. In its thousand years of history, Venice has functioned continuously as a pedestrian city.

Even today Venice is one of the few cities in the world that is still a pedestrian city because its narrow streets and many canal bridges have prevented cars from gaining access. In the Middle Ages, Venice was the largest and richest city in Europe. This, combined with the fact that for centuries the city was designed and adapted for pedestrian traffic, makes Venice of particular interest today as the model for working with the human dimension.

Copenhagen  
— better city space, more city life

Venice has everything: dense city structure, short walking distances, beautiful courses of space, high degree of mixed use, active ground floors, distinguished architecture and carefully designed details — and all on a human scale. For centuries Venice has offered a sophisticated framework for city life and continues to do so, issuing a whole-hearted invitation to walk.

Fortunately, we can now study the results of the invitation for increased pedestrianism and city life in cities formerly dominated by car traffic and years of neglect of the human dimension. In recent decades many such cities have made targeted efforts to give pedestrian traffic and city life better conditions.

Developments in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Melbourne, Australia, are of special interest here, because not only have these cities systematically improved the conditions for city life and pedestrian traffic, they have also recorded the development and can document changes and growth in city life in step with the improvements carried out.

After many years of pruning back pedestrian areas, Copenhagen was one of the first cities in Europe to grasp the nettle in the early 1960s and begin reducing car traffic and parking in the city center in order to create once again better space for city life.

Copenhagen's traditional main street, Strøget, was converted into a pedestrian promenade already in 1962. Skepticism abounded. Would a project like this really succeed so far north?

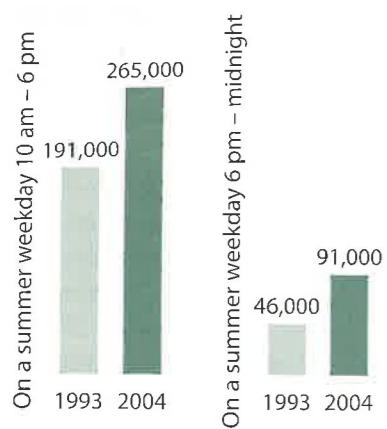
After only a short period it was clear that the project was enjoying greater success faster than anyone had anticipated. The number of pedestrians rose 35% in the first year alone. It was more comfortable to walk and there was space for more people. Since then, more streets have been converted for pedestrian traffic and city life, and one by one the parking places in the city center have been turned into squares that accommodate public life.

In the period from 1962 to 2005 the area devoted to pedestrians and city life grew by a factor of seven: from approximately 15,000 m<sup>2</sup> (161,500 sq. feet) to a good 100,000 m<sup>2</sup> (1,076,000 sq. feet).<sup>11</sup>

Researchers from the School of Architecture, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts monitored the development of city life throughout the period. Extensive analyses in 1968, 1986, 1995 and 2005 documented a significant change in city life. The many whole-hearted invitations to walk, stand and sit in the city's common space had resulted in a remarkable new urban pattern: many more people walk and stay in the city.<sup>12</sup>

The pattern in the city center is now being repeated in outlying districts where in recent years many streets and squares have been converted from traffic islands into people-friendly squares. The conclusion from Copenhagen is unequivocal: if people rather than cars are invited into the city, pedestrian traffic and city life increase correspondingly.

Pedestrian traffic in Melbourne



In the years from 1993 to 2004 Melbourne, Australia, carried out an extensive program to improve conditions for life in the city. A study conducted in 2005 showed an increase of pedestrians of 39% from 1993 and three times more people staying for a while in the city. Quality improvements have served as a direct invitation to increased activity in the city.<sup>13</sup>

Federation Square is one of Melbourne's new well-functioning city spaces, and many of the city's neglected lanes and arcades have been incorporated as staying space. All in all, Melbourne has made impressive efforts to invite city dwellers to use their city.



Melbourne — better streets, more squares, more life in the city

In about 1980 Melbourne's inner city was an indifferent collection of offices and high-rises, lifeless and useless. The city was nicknamed "the doughnut" because it was empty in the center. In 1985 an extensive urban renewal project was initiated to transform the city center into a lively and attractive hub for the region's more than three million inhabitants. From 1993 to 1994 the city center's problems were analyzed, the volume of city life documented and an ambitious program of urban improvements drawn up for the next decade.

An impressive number of urban improvements were implemented in the decade from 1994 to 2004. The number of housing units in the city grew by a factor of 10, and the number of inhabitants rose from 1,000 (1992) to almost 10,000 (2002). The number of student enrolments in or near the city center increased by 67%. New squares, including the architecturally significant Federation Square, were laid out, and small arcades, lanes and promenades along the Yarra River were opened up for pedestrian traffic and staying.<sup>15</sup>

The most remarkable factor was, however, the intention to invite people to walk in the city. Since its establishment, Melbourne has been a typical English colony town of broad streets and regular blocks. Early in the urban renewal process, it was decided to pull out the stops to invite people to walk in this city of streets. Sidewalks were expanded, new pavements were laid with local Bluestone, and a system of new city furniture in good materials was designed. The city's pedestrian-friendly profile was followed up by an extensive "green" strategy that included the annual planting of 500 new trees to safeguard the character of and provide shade for the sidewalks. A comprehensive art-in-the-city program and thoughtfully designed night lighting completes the picture of a city that has pursued a targeted policy to invite pedestrian traffic and staying. Two large public spaces public life surveys conducted in

After the conversion of New Road to a pedestrian-priority street in Brighton, England, pedestrian traffic increased by 62%, while the number of staying activities increased by 600%. Photos show New Road before and after conversion in 2006.<sup>14</sup>



better city space, more city life: example Århus river, Denmark



The river running through Denmark's second-largest city, Århus, had been covered and used as a major thoroughfare before being reopened in 1998. Since reopening, the recreational pedestrian area along Århus River has been the most popular space in the city. Real estate prices along the river are also among the highest in the city.



1994 and 2004 show that both pedestrian traffic and staying activities have increased markedly in step with the many urban improvements. On the whole, pedestrian traffic during the week in Melbourne's inner city has increased by 39% during the day, while pedestrian use of the city at night has doubled. It is interesting that increase is found not only on individual main streets, but in the city center as a whole. People are flocking to it. Staying activities in the city have also increased dramatically. The new squares, broad sidewalks and newly renovated passages offer many new and attractive staying possibilities, and the activity level has almost tripled on ordinary workdays.<sup>16</sup>

The surveys from Melbourne and Copenhagen are particularly interesting because regular city life surveys have documented that improving conditions for pedestrian traffic and city life lead specifically to new patterns of use and more life in city space. A precise connection between city space quality and the scope of city life has been clearly documented in both Melbourne and Copenhagen — on a city level.

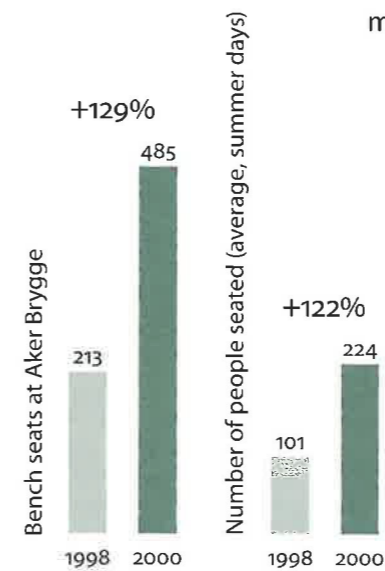
Not surprisingly, the close connection between people's use of city space, the quality of city space and degree of concern for the human dimension is a general pattern that can be shown at all scales. Just as cities can invite city life, there are many examples of how the renovation of a single space or even change in furniture and details can invite people to a totally new pattern of use.

The river in Århus, Denmark, which was filled in and converted into a street for vehicular traffic in the 1930s, was uncovered in 1996–98 and the spaces along the reopened waterway laid out as recreational pedestrian areas. Since then the areas along the Århus river have been the most commonly used external space in the city. The conversion has been so popular and economically successful — the value of the buildings along

documenting city life  
— an important instrument for  
city development

better city space, more city life  
— cities, city space and details

more benches, more people sitting: example Aker Brygge, Oslo



More modest invitations can also have a measurable effect. Doubling the number of places to sit in Aker Brygge in Oslo has doubled the number of people who are seated in the area.<sup>17</sup>

people in the city  
— a question of invitation



the river has more than doubled — that another large section of the river was opened in 2008. The new city space and new invitations have led to completely new patterns of use in the city.

Simple changes such as improvements in bench seating in the harbor of Aker Brygge in Oslo can significantly change the patterns of use. In 1998 the old benches were replaced by new ones that more than doubled the area's seating capacity (+129%). Surveys in 1998 and 2000 before and after the change show that the number of people who sit in the area has correspondingly doubled in response to the new options (+122%).<sup>18</sup>

The conclusion that if better city space is provided, use will increase is apparently valid in large city public spaces, and individual city spaces and all the way down to the single bench or chair. The conclusion is also generally valid in various cultures and parts of the world, in various climates and in different economies and social situations. Physical planning can greatly influence the pattern of use in individual regions and city areas. Whether people are enticed to walk around and stay in city space is very much a question of working carefully with the human dimension and issuing a tempting invitation.

Every summer the motorway along the Seine River in Paris is closed and converted to "Paris Plage," which is quickly stormed by thousands of Parisians who have been waiting all winter for this very invitation.



necessary, optional and social activities

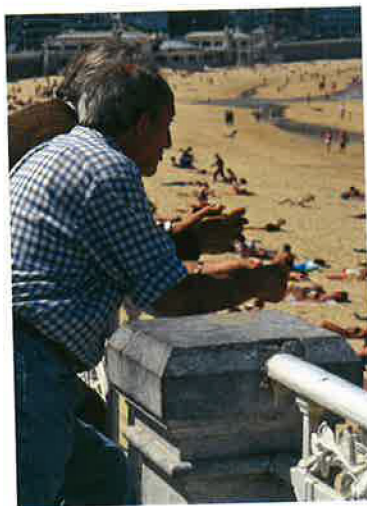
*Necessary activities are an integrated, non optional part of every day. Here we have no choice.*



*Optional activities are recreational and fun. City quality is a decisive prerequisite for this important group of activities.*



*Social activities include all types of contact between people and take place everywhere people go in city space.*



## 1.3 The city as meeting place

there is much more to walking than walking!

As a concept, "life between buildings" includes all of the very different activities people engage in when they use common city space: purposeful walks from place to place, promenades, short stops, longer stays, window shopping, conversations and meetings, exercise, dancing, recreation, street trade, children's play, begging and street entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

Walking is the beginning, the starting point. Man was created to walk, and all of life's events large and small develop when we walk among other people. Life in all its diversity unfolds before us when we are on foot.

In lively, safe, sustainable and healthy cities, the prerequisite for city life is good walking opportunities. However, the wider perspective is that a multitude of valuable social and recreational opportunities naturally emerge when you reinforce life on foot.

During the many years in which pedestrian traffic was primarily treated as a form of transport that belonged under the auspices of traffic planning, city life's bounty of nuances and opportunities was largely overlooked or ignored. The terms used were "walking traffic," "pedestrian streams," "sidewalk capacity," and "crossing the street safely."

But in cities there is so much more to walking than walking! There is direct contact between people and the surrounding community, fresh air, time outdoors, the free pleasures of life, experiences and information. And at its core walking is a special form of communion between people who share public space as a platform and framework.

it is also — and most particularly about — the city as meeting place

If we take a closer look at the city life studies mentioned earlier, we can see that in city after city where conditions for life on foot are improved, the extent of walking activities increases significantly. We also see even more extensive growth in social and recreational activities.

As mentioned earlier, more roads invite more traffic. Better conditions for bicyclists invite more people to ride bikes, but by improving the conditions for pedestrians, we not only strengthen pedestrian traffic, we also — and most importantly — strengthen city life.

Thus we can elevate the discussion from traffic issues into a far broader, more wide-ranging and important discussion concerning living conditions and human options in the city.

multifaceted city life

A common characteristic of life in city space is the versatility and complexity of the activities, with much overlapping and frequent shifts be-



tween purposeful walking, stopping, resting, staying and conversing. Unpredictability and unplanned, spontaneous actions are very much part of what makes moving and staying in city space such a special attraction. We are on our way, watching people and events, inspired to stop to look more closely or even to stay or join in.

necessary activities  
— under all conditions

A clear core pattern emerges from the great diversity of activities in city space. One simple way to look at them is to put the most important categories on a scale according to their degree of necessity. At one end of the scale are the purposeful necessary activities, that is, activities that people generally have to undertake: going to work or school, waiting for the bus, bringing goods to customers. These activities take place under all conditions.

optional activities  
— under good conditions

At the other end of this scale are the largely recreational, optional activities that people might like: walking down the promenade, standing up to get a good look at the city, sitting down to enjoy the view or the good weather.

The great majority of the most attractive and popular city activities belong to this group of optional activities, for which good city quality is a prerequisite.

If outdoor conditions make walking and recreating impossible, such as during a snowstorm, just about nothing happens. If conditions are tolerable, the extent of necessary activities grows. If conditions for being outdoors are good, people engage in many necessary activities and also an increasing number of optional ones. Walkers are tempted to stop to enjoy the weather, places and life in the city, or people emerge from their buildings to stay in city space. Chairs are dragged out in front of houses, and children come out to play.

versatile city life depends largely on invitation

diverse city life – as an old tradition and contemporary city policy

interplay between city life and the quality of city space.  
Example: New York

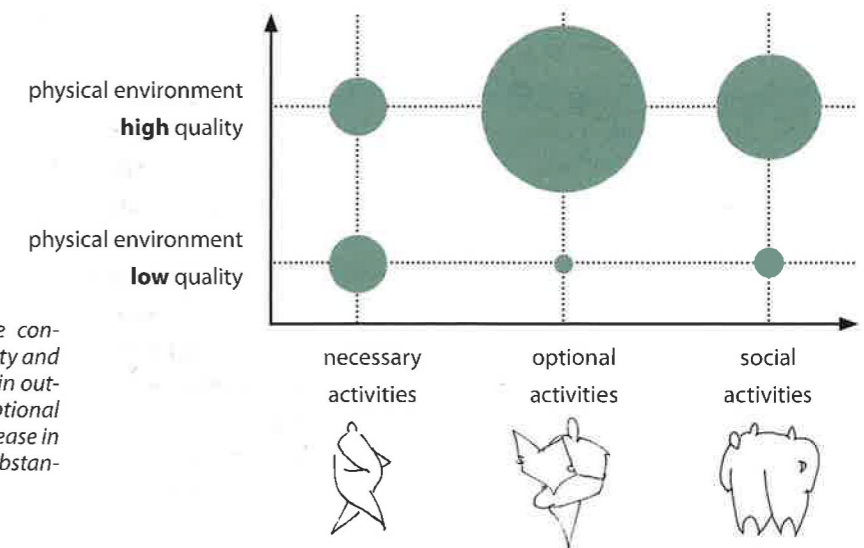
For good reason, climate is mentioned as an important factor for the extent and character of outdoor activities. If it is too cold, too hot or too wet, outdoor activities are reduced or rendered impossible.

Another very important factor is the physical quality of city space. Planning and design can be used to influence the extent and character of outdoor activities. Invitations to do something outdoors other than just walking should include protection, security, reasonable space, furniture and visual quality.

The city life studies mentioned also document the great opportunities for actively inviting people not only to walk but to participate in a versatile and varied city life.

Cities and urban areas can set the stage for specific activities. In the inner city streets of Tokyo, London, Sydney and New York people walk: there isn't room for anything else. In vacation and tourist areas, where passing the time, consumption and pleasure are top priorities, people are invited to stroll and stay a while. In traditional cities such as Venice, people are invited to a versatile and complex city life where there are good conditions for both pedestrian traffic and staying. Corresponding patterns of activity can be found in Copenhagen, Lyon, Melbourne and in other cities, large and small, that have significantly improved conditions for life in city space in recent decades. Pedestrian traffic has grown, and the number of recreational, optional activities has swelled.

Although pedestrian traffic has traditionally dominated the streets of Manhattan in New York City, in 2007 an extensive program was launched to encourage greater versatility in city life.<sup>20</sup> The idea was to provide better options for recreation and leisure as a supplement to the extensive purposeful pedestrian traffic. For example, on Broadway expanded



Graphic representation of the connection between outdoor quality and outdoor activities. An increase in outdoor quality gives a boost to optional activities in particular. The increase in activity level then invites a substantial increase in social activities.



In 2009 Broadway in New York City was closed to traffic at Times Square and Herald Square, which brought quiet, dignity and 7,000 more square meters/75,000 square feet to city life. The activity level in the new spaces has been impressive from day one.<sup>21</sup> Left: Times Square before and right after the redesign.



sidewalks have provided room for café chairs and places to stay, while a number of new car-free areas with many opportunities to stay have been established at Madison Square, Herald Square and Times Square. In all these cases the new opportunities were adopted at once. Almost day-by-day the new invitations have enriched city life and made it far more multifaceted. Even in New York City there is obviously a need for city space and great interest in participating more in city life now that there are more opportunities and solid invitations.

necessary and optional activities as prerequisite for social city activities

That both the character and the extent of city life are influenced dramatically by the quality of city space is in itself an important connection. The connection becomes even more interesting if we look at the relationships between necessary, optional and the important group of social activities. If city life is reinforced, it creates the preconditions for strengthening all forms of social activity in city space.

social activities — the city as meeting place

Social activities include all types of communication between people in city space and require the presence of other people. If there is life and activity in city space, there are also many social exchanges. If city space is desolate and empty, nothing happens.

Social activities include a wide spectrum of diverse activities. There are many passive see and hear contacts: watching people and what is happening. This modest, unpretentious form of contact is the most widespread social city activity anywhere.

There are more active contacts. People exchange greetings and talk to acquaintances they meet. There are chance meetings and small talk at market booths, on benches and wherever people wait. People ask for directions and exchange brief remarks about the weather or when the next bus is due. More extensive contact can sometimes grow from these short

much to look at and important information

“man is man’s greatest joy”

greetings. New topics and common interests can be discussed. Acquaintanceships can sprout. Unpredictability and spontaneity are key words. Among the more extensive contacts are children’s play or the young people who “hang out” and use city space as a meeting place.

Finally, there is a large group of more or less planned common activities: markets, street parties, meetings, parades and demonstrations.

As mentioned earlier, see and hear activities are the largest category of social contact. This is also the form of contact that can most directly be influenced by urban planning. Invitations largely determine whether city spaces have the life that gives people the opportunity to meet. The issue is important because these passive see and hear contacts provide the background and springboard for the other forms of contact. By watching, listening and experiencing others, we gather information about people and the society around us. It is a start.

Experiencing life in the city is also diverting and stimulating entertainment. The scene changes by the minute. There is much to see: behavior, faces, colors and feelings. And these experiences are related to one of the most important themes in human life: people.

The statement that “man is man’s greatest joy” comes from Hávamál, a more than 1,000-year-old Icelandic Eddic poem, which succinctly describes human delight and interest in other people. Nothing is more important or more compelling.<sup>22</sup>

Even from their cradles babies strain to see as much as possible, and later they crawl all over their homes to follow the action. Older children bring their toys into the living room or kitchen to be where the action is. Outside play takes place not necessarily on playgrounds or in traffic-free areas, but more often on the street, in parking lots or in front of entrance doors, where the grown-ups are. Young people hang out by entrances and on street corners to follow along with — and perhaps join in — events.



All over the world, guests at sidewalk cafés turn toward the number one city attraction: city life (Strasbourg, France).



"man is man's greatest joy"



the city's greatest attraction:  
people



delight in life in the city  
— in perspective drawings



the city as meeting place  
— in an historic perspective

under pressure from the car  
invasion and modernistic  
planning ideology

Girls look at boys and vice versa — throughout their lives. Older people follow the life and activities of the neighborhood from their windows, balconies and benches.

Throughout life we have a constant need for new information about people, about life as it unfolds and about the surrounding society. New information is gathered wherever people are and therefore very much in common city space.

Studies from cities all over the world illuminate the importance of life and activity as an urban attraction. People gather where things are happening and spontaneously seek the presence of other people.

Faced with the choice walking down a deserted or a lively street, most people would choose the street with life and activity. The walk will be more interesting and feel safer. Studies from inner-city shopping streets in Copenhagen show how happenings, events and building sites where we can watch people perform, play music or build houses attract far more people to linger and watch than shops along building façades. Studies of benches and chairs in city space show correspondingly that the seats with the best view of city life are used far more frequently than those that do not offer a view of other people.<sup>23</sup>

The placement and use of café chairs tells a similar story. The most important attraction of a sidewalk café has always been the sidewalk and thus the view of life in the city, and the majority of café chairs are placed accordingly.

Nothing speaks greater volumes about "life between buildings" as an attraction than the architect's perspective drawings. Regardless of whether the human dimension is carefully treated or totally neglected in the projects, the drawings are full of cheerful, happy people. The many people depicted in the drawings give projects an aura of happiness and attractiveness, sending the signal that good human qualities are in abundance, whether or not this is the case. That people are people's greatest delight is obvious — at least in the drawings!

Throughout history city space has functioned as a meeting place on many levels for city dwellers. People met, exchanged news, made deals, arranged marriages — street artists entertained and goods were offered for sale. People attended city events large and small. Processions were held, power was manifested, parties and punishments held publicly — everything was carried out in full public view. The city was the meeting place.

City space continued to function as an important social meeting place in the 20th century, until the planning ideals of modernism prevailed and coincided with the car invasion. The discussion of "death and life" in cities, raised defiantly by Jane Jacob's book in 1961, dealt in large part with

the gradual breakdown of the opportunities of city space to function as a meeting place.<sup>24</sup> Even though the discussion has continued since then, city life has in many places continued to be squeezed out of city space.

Dominant planning ideologies have rejected city space and city life as untimely and unnecessary. Planning has been heavily dedicated to the ideal of developing a rational and streamlined setting for necessary activities. Increasing car traffic has swept city life off the stage or made travel by foot totally impossible. Trade and service functions have largely been concentrated in large indoor shopping malls.

the neglected cities  
— and city life cancelled!

We can see the results of these trends in many cities, particularly in the southern USA. In many cases people have abandoned cities and it is largely impossible to get to the various facilities in the city without a car. Pedestrianism, city life and the city as meeting place have all been cancelled.

the city as meeting place  
— in the 21st century

Access to indirect information and contacts has grown explosively in recent years. The TV, internet, e-mail and mobile telephone give us extensive and easily accessible contact to people all over the world. From time to time the question arises: can the function of city space as meeting place now be taken over by the host of electronic options?

The development of life in cities in recent years suggests a completely different picture. Here the indirect contacts and stream of images depicting what others have experienced in other places does not out compete life in public spaces, but rather stimulates people to join in and play an active personal role. Opportunities to be there in person, face-to-face meetings and the surprising and unpredictable character of experiences are qualities tied to city space as meeting place.



Towns devoid of people are a widespread phenomenon in the southern United States. Pedestrians and city life have given up and everything must be done by car (Clarksdale, Mississippi).



New indirect forms of communication are on the march. They can supplement but not replace direct meetings between people.



It is interesting to note that in these very same decades in which city life has undergone a remarkable renaissance, electronic means of contact have been introduced. We need both options.

Many social changes, particularly in the wealthiest parts of the world, can explain the increased interest in getting about and staying in the city's common space. Longevity, plentiful free time and better economy in general have left more time and more resources for recreation and pleasure.

By 2009, half of Copenhagen's households were inhabited by only one person.<sup>25</sup> Shrinking households increase the need for social contacts outside the home. As a result of the numerous changes in the way society and the economy are organized, many people now live an in-



Walking in the city invites direct experiences for all senses as well as attractive extra opportunities to exchange smiles and glances (Robson Street, Vancouver, Canada).



Public space has significant social importance as a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.



creasingly more privatized life with private residence, private car, private household machines and private offices. In this situation we see steadily growing interest in strengthening contacts to the civil society at large.

These new opportunities and needs can largely explain the dramatic increase in the use of the city's common space that is evident in all the cities that have worked in recent years with reviving invitations to city life.

To a far greater extent than private commercial arenas, public democratically managed city space provides access and opportunities for all groups of society to express themselves and latitude for non-mainstream activities.

The spectrum of activities and actors demonstrates the opportunities for public city space generally to strengthen social sustainability. It is a significant quality that all groups of society, regardless of age, income, status, religion or ethnic background, can meet face to face in city space as they go about their daily business. This is a good way to provide general information to everyone about the composition and universality of society. It also makes people feel more secure and confident about experiencing the common human values played out in many different contexts.

Newspapers and TV represent the opposite of this obvious opportunity for people to experience firsthand the daily life of the city. The information these media communicate focuses mainly on reports of accidents and attacks, and presents a distorted picture of what actually goes on in society. Fear and gross generalizations abound in this kind of atmosphere.

It is interesting to note that crime prevention strategies emphasize strengthening common space so that meeting people from various groups of society is a routine part of everyday life. We can think of close-

city as meeting place  
— in a societal perspective

the democratic dimension

ness, trust and mutual consideration as the direct opposites of walls, gates and more police presence on the street.

Public interests determine the playing rules in the common space of the city and thus help to ensure people's opportunities to exchange personal, cultural and political messages.

The importance of city space is underlined in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which sets out freedom of speech and the right of assembly for its citizens. This importance is also underscored by the frequent bans on assembly in city space decreed by totalitarian regimes.

As an open and accessible interface between people, city space provides an important arena for large political meetings, demonstrations and protests, as well as for more modest activities such as collecting signatures, handing out flyers or staging happenings or protests.

the city as meeting place  
— small events and large perspectives

Social sustainability, security, confidence, democracy and freedom of speech are key concepts for describing societal perspectives tied to the city as meeting place.

Life in city space is all-encompassing: from momentary glances to minor events to the largest collective manifestations. Walking through common city space can be a goal in itself – but also a beginning.

cities by people and for people

Unlike the city space of Venice, the reconquered city space in Copenhagen, Melbourne and New York does not represent a nostalgic traditional idyll. These are contemporary cities with solid economies, large populations and versatile city functions. What is remarkable about them is that they reflect a growing understanding that cities must be designed to invite pedestrian traffic and city life. These cities recognize the importance of pedestrian traffic and bicyclists for sustainability and health in society, and they acknowledge the importance of city life as an attractive, informal and democratic meeting place for their residents in the 21st century.

After almost 50 years of neglect of the human dimension, here at the beginning of the 21st century we have an urgent need and growing willingness to once again create cities for people.

cities for staying have richly detailed façades



Niches and openings in city walls are particularly popular for staying (examples from Spain, Portugal, Mexico and Canada).

#### sitting

People needing to stay for any length of time in city space find it tiring to stand and will look about for somewhere to sit. The longer the envisaged stay, the more carefully the individual will choose the place to sit. The best places almost always combine many advantages and few disadvantages.

#### where is the attractive seating?

A four-point scale was developed to assess seating quality in conjunction with a 1990 study of city quality in the center of Stockholm.<sup>9</sup> In short, general requirements for a good place to sit are a pleasant microclimate, good placement preferably at the edge of the space with your back covered, a good view, an appropriately low noise level to allow conversation, and no pollution. And of course: the view. If the place offers special attractions such as water, trees, flowers, fine space, good architecture and art works, the individual wants a good view of them. At the same time, the individual wants a good view of the life and people at the site.

Architecture students also like to stay along irregular façades (Aberdeen, Scotland).



Naturally, attractive views are dependent on the opportunities at the site, but the view of city life and people has special status as main attraction. When local climate, placement, protection and view join forces, the seating place provides the best of all worlds. The individual thinks "This is a good place to be, and I can be here for a long time."

Not unexpectedly, the Stockholm studies showed a clear connection between the quality of the city's seating and the use of the individual locations. Seating with little to offer was seldom used, 7 – 12% occupied, while benches with many qualities were used often and claimed an occupation percentage from 61 – 72%. The study, which was conducted on summer days with good weather also showed that city benches are rarely occupied.

There are almost always a certain number of vacant seats in public bench landscapes, because someone has just moved away, people are rather spread out or because an arm's length distance is being maintained for certain individuals or groups.

For the most popular "bench with a view" at Sergelstorget in Stockholm, the waiting time around noon between vacant seating was 22 seconds. However, despite the demand for the good seats, they only had a 70% occupancy rate. Vacant seats enhance the impression of physical and psychological comfort on the benches. People want to sit near other people, but not too close.<sup>10</sup>

#### primary and secondary seating

The comfort of seating influences the choice of seating and length of stay. A sufficient and varied selection of seating in the city can be established with a combination of primary and secondary seating. Primary seating consists of actual furniture with backs and arms: city benches, freestanding chairs and café chairs. In all cases the backs and arms of the seating will only contribute to comfort if people want to stay for a while or for the senior citizens who need support while seated and when sit-

## good and bad places to sit

*Trees, benches and litter bins evenly distributed through the square offer neither comfortable places to stay nor a pleasant visual environment (Cordoba, Spain).*



ting and getting up again. The seating design also impacts on comfort, of course, as do the materials, insulation and water-repellent properties of the seats.

In addition to comfortable, well-situated primary seating, many secondary seating options are often needed, places where people can more informally and spontaneously sit to rest or look around. A great variety of objects can be used to sit on: pedestals, steps, stones, bollards, monuments, fountains or the city floor itself. On days when seating is in high demand, secondary seating can make a valuable contribution to the city's total seating selection. Secondary seating options have the advantage of being steps, flower pots pedestals and so on every day of the year but can be used as seating when necessary.

In the past it was common for buildings and urban furniture to be designed to be beautiful elements in the pedestrian landscape as well as providing sitting opportunities. Venice has few benches but a wealth of

*Left: the location and design of seating is important to the quality of the invitations to stay. The steel tubes present a more problematic solution (Japan).*

*Right: this good bench in the shaft of sunlight along the house gable invites people to stay (Spain).*



who sits where?

straight backs and cold bottoms

*Good city space should offer primary seating in the form of benches and chairs, as well as many secondary seating options: stairs, bases of statues, monuments, etc. (sitable sculpture in Copenhagen, lie-sit furniture in HafenCity, Hamburg and seating landscape in front of the Sydney Opera House).*

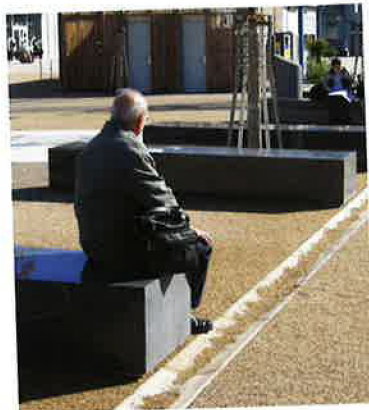
urban elements suitable for sitting. "The entire City is sittable" reports William H. Whyte, apropos of Venice, in the film *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*.<sup>11</sup>

Generally speaking, children and young people can sit anywhere and on anything. Comfort, climate and materials do not play a significant role. These two groups normally dominate the city's secondary seating. Adults and seniors want more comfort and are considerably more meticulous about choosing where to sit. Comfortable city furniture, preferably with back and arm rests as well as good sitting comfort on "seating-friendly" materials, is often decisive for whether these groups want to sit down in urban space and stay a while. If the idea of urban space for everyone is to have any meaning, it is particularly important to offer good seating for older people. Young people can always make do.

It was mentioned earlier that longer stays mean lively cities. The extent and length of stays are often crucial to city life. Creating socially viable cities for everyone necessitates staying options for all ages.



straight backs and cold bottoms



Many designers and architects have a penchant for square stone benches placed decoratively in front of buildings. However, users do not share their affection for this type of uncomfortable city furniture.



When uncomfortable benches are placed in the middle of city space, it is a good idea to add bronze people to sit on them so they are sure to be occupied (Hasselt, Belgium).

Here is another important area where common architectural practice is on a collision course with the principles for creating city space that is comfortable and attractive for staying. Concern for city life is often totally absent from considerations about the placement of seating and the choice of design and materials for benches. Benches are anchored in the middle of nowhere, far from edges, nooks and crannies, and seating is often designed as plinths or "coffins," which match building blocks in design but not the people who might want to sit on them. Even though marble and polished granite weather beautifully, it is only south of Barcelona that these cold materials are pleasant to sit on, and even then, only for a few months of the year. And without a backrest no one stays very long.

As mentioned earlier, primary seating can be various types of benches, but can also very well be moveable chairs like the ones in Parisian parks or Bryant Park in New York City. These moveable chairs provide flexibility to users, who can move them around to make the most of the site,

moveable chairs

staying in transition zones  
between private and public space

cappuccino — as a refreshment  
and an explanation

Chairs that can be moved around provide comfortable and flexible staying opportunities in the city (City Hall Square, Melbourne, Australia, and Bryant Park, New York City).



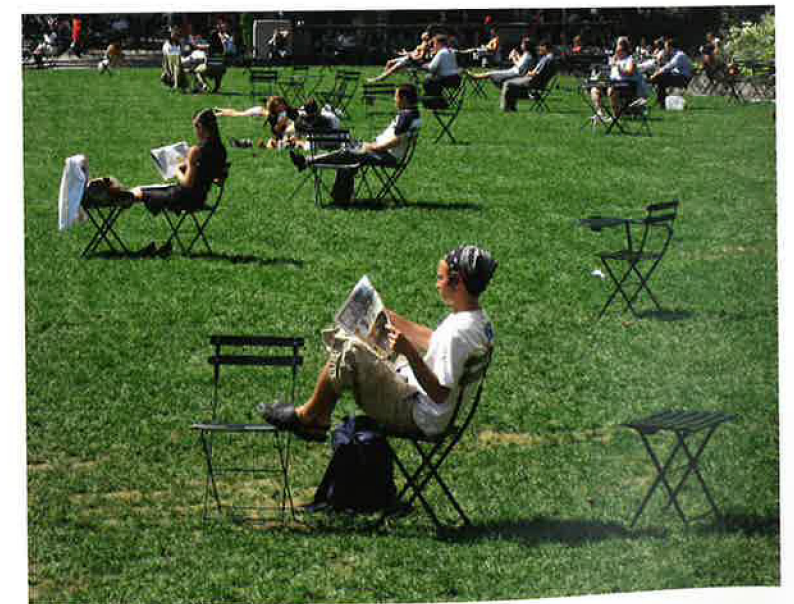
climate and view. The freedom to move chairs around provides a valuable opportunity in itself to arrange the social space needed for specific situations.

The simplicity with which moveable chairs can be stored according to season is another advantage. Empty chairs left outside in squares or parks in the cold months stir up memories of a seaside resort in the off-season.

Up to now discussion has centered on the free pleasures of benches, chairs and inventory details offered to everyone walking through common city space. However, wholly and semiprivate staying options along the edges of common city space also impact on the total activity level. A number of studies of city centers, streets and housing areas show that stays on balconies, terraces and front gardens that skirt city space often make up the bulk of all staying activities.<sup>12</sup> As expected, edge zones to which users have easy access and can furnish and fit out are used more intensively than all the other staying options in the city. The user group is well defined and the option is right at hand.

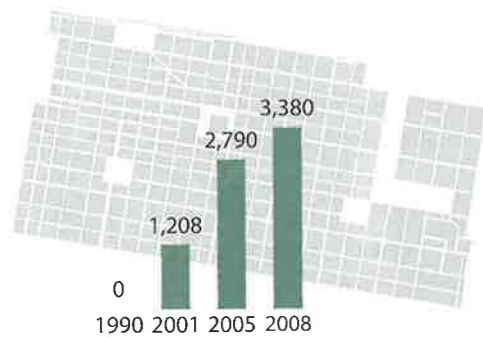
Of all the staying activities in urban edge zones, sidewalk cafés play a particularly significant role in the modern city landscape. Over the past two or three decades, outdoor service has spread in city space.

While sidewalk cafés were once the province of Mediterranean cities and cultures, the idea has caught on in cities throughout the economically developed part of the world. As city dwellers have become more prosperous and gained more free time, outdoor service has gradually spread from Finland to New Zealand, from Japan to Alaska. Tourists have

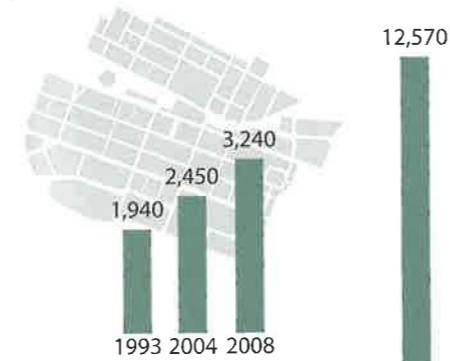


cappuccino as a refreshment – and an explanation

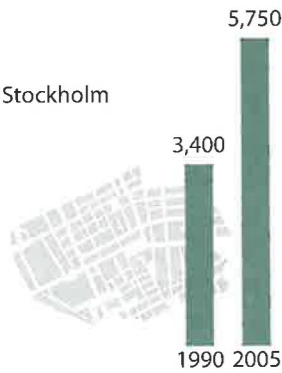
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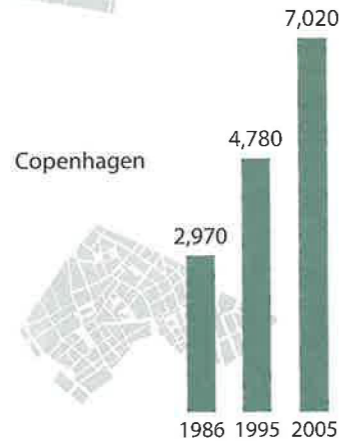
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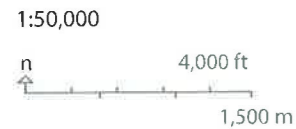
Stockholm



Copenhagen



Melbourne



Dramatic growth in the number of café chairs found in city space is a worldwide phenomenon. It reflects new needs and new ways of using the city. Coffee cups on tables represent refreshment as well as a good excuse for being in the city – for a long time.<sup>13</sup>



seen recreational city life in outdoor cafés in places they have visited, and brought home the concept of café culture. Whereas cities were once dominated by necessary activities, cafés have brought recreational life into play with a vengeance. Now people have the time and the resources to enjoy the city and city life from the vantage point of café chairs.

As recently as 20 or 30 years ago, many cities, Copenhagen and Melbourne among them, were considered out of the running for outdoor café life due to climate. Each city now has more than 7,000 café chairs in their centers, and cafés have gradually increased the number of months in which they offer outdoor service to eight, ten or twelve, with the 'season' extended year by year.<sup>14</sup>

The popularity of cafés and relatively lengthy stays in them underscores the fact that they offer an attractive combination of options: reasonably comfortable chairs and usually a good view of passersby. The real justification and attraction of sidewalk cafés is precisely that: life on the sidewalk. The opportunity to rest and have refreshments is another plus. Coffee is probably the ostensible reason for someone to be seated at a sidewalk café, but it is also an excuse to watch city life go by. A

combination of many attractive options is often the reason for the many café visits. The good reasons also explain why in almost all cases staying times are considerably longer than the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee. The real activity is recreation, time off and pleasure in city space.

In the old days, people spent many hours in city space doing necessary errands and meeting many practical and social needs along the way. Walking and being in the city was an integrated daily activity.

Today there are almost no necessary errands or reasons for spending any appreciable time in city space with the pleasures and delights to follow. In this new situation sidewalk cafés and coffee cups provide new destinations and new reasons for spending hours of time in the city.

a good city is like a good party: guests stay because they are enjoying themselves

In a previous section it was described how life in the city is a product of the number and length of activities, and it has been shown how staying activities and thereby length are the key factor for establishing lively city space and cities. In contrast, many people with short stays in the city do not add much life.

To invite people to walk and bicycle in city space is a beginning, but by no means enough. The invitation must also include the option of sitting down and spending time in the city. Staying activities are the key to a lively city, but also the key to a truly delightful city. People stay in a place if it is a beautiful, meaningful and pleasant place to be. The good city has many similarities to a good party: the guests stay on because they are enjoying themselves.

*In recent years café culture has spread rapidly even to regions where the idea would have been unthinkable only a few years ago (summer afternoon, Reykjavik, Iceland).*



## 4.8 Beautiful cities, good experiences

concern for visual quality must include all urban elements

At eye level the good city provides opportunities for walking, staying, meeting and expression, and that means it must provide good scale and good climate. Common to these desired objectives and quality requirements is that they deal largely with physical and practical matters.

In contrast, work with the city's visual quality is more general. It deals largely with the design and detail of individual elements, and how all the elements are coordinated. Visual quality involves total visual expression, aesthetics, design and architecture.

City space can be designed so that all practical requirements are met, but randomly combined details, materials and colors rob it of visual coordination.

In contrast, city space can be designed with dominating emphasis on aesthetics to the neglect of functional aspects. That the space is beautiful and the details carefully designed is a quality in itself, but far from enough if basic requirements for security, climate, and opportunities for staying are not met.

The important aspects of city space must be interwoven into a convincing whole.

*Results are convincing when design and content are unified (Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland, Oregon).*



*The interplay between functional and spatial qualities has been convincingly treated in Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy, one of the reasons the square has served as a meeting place for 700 years.*



100% places

In his book, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988), William H. Whyte introduces the concept of the 100% place.<sup>23</sup> As the name implies, 100% places are the spaces and localities where all important city space qualities are present. Practical concerns for users' needs merge seamlessly with concern for detail and totality: here is where people want to be.

Perhaps the world-famous Piazza del Campo in Siena became famous precisely because this city square offers that rare combination of qualities. All functional and practical needs are convincingly met. It is safe and comfortable to walk, stand, sit, listen and talk here. In addition, all elements have been merged into a convincing architectural whole, where proportions, materials, colors and details reinforce and enrich the other qualities of the space. Piazza del Campo is a well-functioning and very beautiful city space that for 700 years has served and continues convincingly to serve as Siena's main square. Concern for the human dimension is never outdated.

celebrating the delights of place

In addition to independent work with space and details, it is often possible to make significant quality improvements if a city space is designed to highlight special qualities at the site. New and attractive combinations are possible when city space can be linked directly to water surfaces and quay edges, when contact with parks, flowers and landscaping can be ensured, when spaces can be oriented perfectly in terms of local climate.

Topography and height differences also provide good opportunities to add value. Any differences in height can enhance experiences for pedestrians compared to walking on flat surfaces. New views and experiences pop up. The streets of San Francisco are full of this type of possibility, however minor differences in height can also provide drama at eye level.



art in city space: example Melbourne



City space as a gallery for contemporary art was one of the goals of the art policy adopted in Melbourne, Australia. In addition to works on permanent display, installations and temporary artistic additions to the city landscape are featured, particularly in lanes.



Artistic treatment of light is an important element in the city's overall art policy (Melbourne, Australia).

Views of attractions near and far also enrich city space. Being able to look at a lake, the sea, a landscape or distant mountains is much in demand as a city space quality.

aesthetic quality — for all senses

There is inherent potential in working with visual and aesthetic elements. For people walking through the city, beautiful space, carefully planned details and genuine materials provide valuable experiences on their own merits and as a valuable extra layer to the other qualities the city has to offer.

Naturally, squares and streets can also be designed specifically to provide visual experiences. Here the design and details of the space play a very important role, which can be expanded and reinforced by appealing to the other senses by providing trickling water, fog, steam, aromatic and sound impressions, for example. The main attraction of these spaces is not just city life as such, but rather a potpourri of sensory impressions.

art in city space

Throughout history, art has made a valuable quality contribution to city space through monuments, sculptures, fountains, building details and decorations. Art communicates beauty, monumentality, remembrance of important events, comments on life in society, fellow inhabitants and city life, together with surprises and humor. Now as ever, city space can serve an important function as an interface between art and people.

In recent years in central parts of Melbourne, efforts to combine art policy and city space policy have served as an inspiring example. The goal has been for the city's common space to serve as a versatile gallery for contemporary art, so that when the people of Melbourne are in the city, they will meet carefully selected and well-placed works of contemporary artists from many disciplines. A three-pronged art policy ensures that selections are current and provide a wealth of experience. The three focus areas are works on permanent display, temporary works and installations, and extensive communication about art to the inhabitants of the city through art centers. One particular emphasis is interactive opportunities for children based on the principle: come and learn more about what you see in the city.

The city policy of emphasis on installations and temporary works makes a valuable contribution to the attractive selection of experiences and unpredictability. Along the city's many narrow lanes and arcades, changing artists decorate spaces with intensity, fantasy and humor, but only for a limited number of months. Then other artists are invited to work on other passageways. There is always something new to look at, and many surprising and humorous comments to discover about the site, the city and contemporary life.

beautiful cities — green cities

Trees, landscaping and flowers play a key role among the elements in city space. Trees provide shade in warm summer months, they cool and cleanse the air, define city space and help accentuate important sites. A

Beautiful cities are green cities. Five hundred new trees are planted in central Melbourne, Australia every year (Swanston Street in Melbourne, 1995 and 2010).



large tree on a square signals: "This is the place." Trees along boulevards underscore a linear sequence, and trees that stretch their branches over the street hint of the presence of green space in the city.

In addition to their immediate aesthetic qualities, the green elements in the city have a symbolic value. The presence of green elements passes on a message about recreation, introspection, beauty, sustainability and the diversity of nature.

After many years in which trees were felled to make room for traffic, or simply died due to poor growth conditions and pollution, there has been a welcome renaissance of green elements in cities more recently. Efforts to improve the conditions for city life and bicyclists are often combined with planting new trees and expanding green urban areas. Every year since 1995, 500 new trees have been planted along streets in Melbourne as part of the city's urban renewal policy, and in accordance with a plan adopted in 2008, New York City's goal is to plant one million new trees in public spaces across the city.<sup>24</sup> The many new green elements make a crucial contribution to city quality while reinforcing New York's wanted profile as a sustainable green metropolis.

beautiful cities — also at night

The lighting in city space has a great impact on orientation, security and visual quality in the dark hours.

Many different lighting strategies are used around the world. One extreme is cities in the USA that have abandoned street lighting under the pretext that motor vehicles light up the night. Needless to say, these areas are usually as dark as a tomb and there is not much for people to look forward to after the sun goes down.

A variety of principles are employed in areas that do use lighting. Many cities are pragmatic and functional in their approach. Lighting principles have often changed during various periods of urban construction and expansion, leaving many types of lamps and various colors of light, which typically results in a random and visually chaotic city scene when night falls.

Other cities have taken a very conscious approach to lighting, recognizing the great impact it has on city quality, as well as its potential as an independent artistic means of expression.

In Melbourne city lighting is a natural part of the city's overall art policy program "Light as Art."

Lyon, France is another good example of a city that has adopted a well-considered artistic lighting policy that takes into account both light setting and color.

Valuable innovations in work with the visual appearance of space at night can also be seen at the city space level. One good example is the Town Hall Square in Sankt Pölten, Austria (1995 – 97), which employs indirect reflected light and a light setting that varies according to time of year and the events being held on the square.

*Lighting is the focus of conscious artistic treatment in many cities. Pioneering efforts were made in Lyon in the years after 1990 (Rue de la Republique, Lyon, France).*



*Water, fog, steam, materials, colors, surfaces, light and sound in many combinations can contribute to an attractive diversity of sensory impressions in city space.*



last but not least...

The criteria for good city quality in pedestrian landscapes are summarized in a 12-point keyword list on page 239. Point 12 is positive sensory experiences. The reason for listing this point last is that visual quality is an umbrella concept that should include all of the elements in the city landscape. The placement also represents a conscious underscoring of the fact that visual quality cannot ensure city quality on its own, but that good cities at eye level are created by working on all 12 quality criteria together.

If cities are to function and invite people to enjoy them, under all circumstances, the physical, practical and psychological aspects must be thoroughly treated and then enhanced with valuable layers through work on visual qualities.

This connection is emphasized because although many projects do a fine job of developing the visual aspects, they neglect other more pragmatic qualities.

All over the world are examples of city districts and city space where visual and aesthetic considerations have unilaterally dominated design. Perhaps these urban projects and urban spaces will be pictured in architecture magazines, but in the real world these city spaces typically work poorly or not at all, because key consideration for people and life in public space is missing.

All quality criteria must be part of deliberations — every time.