EDITORIAL

Musings on theorizing, co-producing, designing, and encountering the public space

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Musings on theorizing, co-producing, and encounters with public space

Public space design, management, and use have been major concerns of urban design. Over the past three decades, urban design researchers and practitioners have often engaged with scholarly debates on topics ranging from close encounters with buildings (Gehl et al. 2006) to the privatization of public space (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993). In this issue of Urban Design International, we find it timely to revisit these discussions and shed new light on them. The debates covered in this issue focus on four themes: the concept of public space as a "learning landscape," the advantages of affordance, assemblage, and actor-network theory (ANT) in thinking about public space, the interface between verticality and public space, and finally, the co-production of public space (Vicuña and Rivas 2022).

The first contribution on by Działek et al., focuses on campus learning. While public space plays an essential role in learning, its spatial attributes for promoting more meaningful experiences in university campuses remain underexplored. The authors introduce the concept of "learning landscape" against the broader backdrop of the "changing context" of universities, and how their shifting mechanisms affect the students' learning experience. These spaces serve as both facilitating the students' routine movements from building to building and stimulating social interaction and casual encounters among students. Using a Polish university as a case study, the authors delve deeper into this concept. Using crowdsensing mobile data, the authors take advantage of the research participants experiences on campus while walking. This way of data collection (both audio and video recordings) has provided a fresh outlook to collect, analyze, and interpret big data. This comprehensive interpretation, done by first-year college students along with expert opinions, can help identify the underutilized public spaces that despite their strategic or unique locations, do not induce their expected social support and participation by students and or failed to "encourage people to stop and spend their time there" (ibid.). Based on their findings, the authors make clear design recommendations to offset their existing shortcomings in attracting people to campus public spaces.

Using Gibson's theory of affordance, Stevens et al. underline the inherent complexities associated with "uses and meaning" and problematize the design of public space. Exploring the advantages of assemblage and actor–network theory, the authors offer new ways of thinking about the outcomes and possibilities of designing public space. Operationalizing perception as a conduit of not just one sensory experience, i.e., visual, affordance calibrates all senses including auditory and olfactory. Understanding the public space this way adds cultural differences to its perceptual complexities and variabilities. Assemblage thinking, on the other hand, adds another dualistic thinking of mind and body as opposed to either or, to the public space perception equation. Seen this way, understanding the real goes beyond the actual materials of here and now, and enters the realm of possibilities and capacities that are not yet materialized. Viewing affordance and assemblage in this way enables the meaningful integration of other concepts, including actor-network theory (ANT). This perspective allows designers and users to see stairs not merely as a means of moving up and down, but as a realm of possibilities—envisioned as a set of diagonal relations between horizontal surfaces (steps) designed to facilitate human movement between levels. Operationalizing these concepts comprehensively, the authors introduce four possible types of affordance from enabling and constraining to improvisation and serendipity.

The third paper by Magdalena Vicuña and Leonel Rivas casts a different light on public space. Using eight neighborhoods in Santiago, Chile, the author explores the verticality of plot transformation impacts on the use and configuration

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of public space. Analyzing four plot structures, including homogenous, incomplete, scattered with a partial plot configuration, and scattered with changes in plot configuration, the author discusses the impacts of verticality on neighborhood public spaces in Santiago. The findings show that increasing building heights and density impose significant changes in plot configuration including size, shape, and geometry. According to the authors' report on the transformation of public spaces, while verticality may often improve the quality of sidewalks, it also reconfigures the intersection of buildings and sidewalks. This reconfiguration decreases the points of contact between public and private spaces, deteriorates the sidewalk's capacity to sustain walkable conditions, and changes environments from 'soft and lively' to 'hard and lifeless,' thereby weakening the interaction and exchange between interior and exterior activities.

Conducting interviews with six experts in addition to exploring archival information, the last article by Lee and Scholten in this issue addresses the why, who, and when aspects of the "co-production" of privately owned public space (POPS) in Hamburg, Germany. As per the who question, the authors report that the co-producers range from local authorities and developers to the private sector and the public, who step in different stages of the design process and for different reasons. As per the why or how question, the production involves four phases: co-planning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-management, and by enacting or leveraging different instruments including competition, legally binding land-use plans, and contracts. This study clearly differentiates between the unfolding of POPS in Europe and the common practices of privately owned or privatization of public space in the U.S. (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993).

Contributing Articles/Authors

1) The assessment of the quality of campus public spaces as key parts of the learning landscape: experience from a crowdsensing study on the Third Campus of Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland by: Jarosław Działek, Bartłomiej Homiński, Magdalena Miśkowiec, Agnieszka Świgost-Kapocsi, Krzysztof Gwosdz

2) Designing for possibility in public space: affordance, assemblage, and ANT by: Quentin Stevens, Jonathan Daly, Kim Dovey

3) Plot transformation and effects on public space in eight verticalized neighborhoods of the Santiago Metropolitan Area, Chile by: Magdalena Vicuña and Leonel Rivas

4) Co-production of privately owned public space: Who, why, when, and how? By: Dahae Lee, Nele Scholten

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