

Paper presented at Walk21-VII, "The Next Steps", The 7th International Conference on Walking and Liveable Communities, October 23-25 2006, Melbourne, Australia
www.walk21.com

Quality for people

A set of quality criteria for the design of pedestrian places and networks - with people in mind

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Abstract

It takes more than just a good paving to produce an excellent pedestrian landscape. It is the whole environment around the person walking that has to be understood. So how can we evaluate the quality of the physical environment and which are the quality criteria for good design where people matter?

Based on pioneering research by professor Jan Gehl a set of quality criteria for the design of the pedestrian landscape has been developed at the Centre for Public Space Research in Copenhagen. The set of design criteria has been put into practice by the Gehl Architects office and it offers a way of looking at the environment based primarily on people and their human senses – not on a set of physical standards. The design criteria can be used to focus on problems in the pedestrian landscape, but they are particularly useful in the design process. The power point presentation for the conference will give a broad overview, and illustrate some of the 12 quality criteria. This paper is focused on the description of the criteria and where to find more information on the background and application in practice of the 12 quality criteria.

The quality criteria are divided into three groups: Protection, comfort and enjoyment and they span from the question of human scale to details of the physical environment.

1. Protection focuses on how to minimize unpleasant experiences like crime, traffic accidents and unpleasant climate conditions.
2. Comfort deals with the quality of walking and staying in a place. It involves walking, standing and sitting as well as the possibility for seeing, hearing and talking. Playing and unwinding are also included.

3. Enjoyment covers the human scale, enjoying the positive aspects of the climate and the experience of the artistic quality of the design of the place, including quality of materials used.

When the whole set of criteria has been fulfilled in the design of a space, it will be a place where people can use all the human senses and fully enjoy walking as well as staying. In that respect a “100% place” has been formed.

Biography

Born 1945. Senior Lecturer of Urban Design at the Centre for public Space Research and associate partner in Gehl Architects APS – Urban Quality Consultants in Copenhagen. Lectures have been given at conferences in North- and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Books published in English: "Public Spaces - Public Life - Copenhagen 1996", "New City Spaces", 2001 and "New City Life", 2006.

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What is quality in public spaces?

Many people are experiencing the environments of public spaces as places that offer a lot of problems. They can be windswept, over sized and lifeless. Or they are full of noise from nearby traffic or felt unsafe. How do we cope with the basic problems that seem to be repeated in many new public spaces?

We need to be able to deliver fine places for walking and staying, where the design has been based on the needs of the people on foot rather than on the need of car driving etc. It takes more than just a good paving to produce an excellent pedestrian landscape. If the direct and natural routes, which people would like to take across a space, are obstructed by a maze of guard-railings, tunnels or bridges, even a short trip can be transformed into nightmare. People will stay away unless the route is the only possible link between the places they have to visit. For many elderly people, families with small children or handicapped people even smaller obstacles can be too much and the space will be less used regardless of the fine materials used or the elaborate detailing. Squares and other places for staying must be inviting by giving good quality for sitting, standing and interacting with other people.

The 12 quality criteria described in the following are not a set of norms that can be added from 1 to 12 and then everything is fine. It is rather a way of looking at the relations between the needs of people and the physical environment as a whole. First we have to understand the needs of the user groups and how the whole setting around people can be inviting instead of repelling. Then we can start to arrange the elements of the space and design the buildings surrounding the place and their relations to the public space.

Background

In the 1960s professor Jan Gehl started to study what people actually do in public spaces and in his book "Life between Buildings", which was published in Danish in 1971 and in English in 1987, he describes the logic of how people use the physical environment. The use is often different to what the designers have been anticipating. In "Life Between Buildings" the themes of walking, standing and sitting are explored as well as the way our human senses are the key to the understanding of which qualities we need to have fulfilled in public spaces. The findings of this early research form the background for the development of what is presented here as the 12 quality criteria for the design of good public spaces as they have been further developed at the Centre for Public Space Research. The set of quality criteria has

just been published in a new book: "New City Life" by Jan Gehl, Lars Gemzøe, Britt Sternhagen Søndergård and Sia Kirknæs, The Danish Architectural Press 2006. In "New City Life" a selection of good and poor public spaces in Copenhagen has been evaluated and the different qualities of the spaces have been described.

The set of design criteria has also been put into practice by the Gehl Architects office and some of the most interesting reports like the study for the City of London: "Towards a fine City for People – Public Spaces and Public Life – London 2004" and the study for the City of Melbourne: "Places for People – Melbourne 2004" can be downloaded on www.gehlarchitects.dk. The London study is particularly detailed on the way pedestrians behave in relation to existing street design and the study for Melbourne is documenting the great improvements in the public realm and the growing use of public spaces, which has taken place over a 10 years period. The design criteria can be used to focus on problems in the pedestrian landscape, but they are also useful as guidance in the design process.

12 quality criteria

The quality criteria are divided into three groups: Protection, comfort and enjoyment and they span from the question of human scale to the microclimate and details of the physical environment. (The following text is based on the description in "New City Spaces")

Protection

Protection focuses on how to minimize unpleasant experiences. It expresses our need to be kept safe from accident, insecurity and discomfort. Traffic is an important factor. Good city spaces provide such good traffic safety that we do not have to fear being run down or remain on constant alert, with children firmly in hand and so on. In short: good city spaces provide good conditions for pedestrian traffic.

Another criterion that falls under protection is crime prevention to ensure a genuine sense of security when we move about the city. Dark, deserted spaces and streets often promote a feeling of insecurity. For places to feel safe, there have to be people around with things to do. This is best achieved by the presence of diverse functions: housing, offices, shops and restaurants, so that there are lights in the windows and people nearby at all times of night and day.

The third factor deals with protection against uncomfortable sensory experiences such as unpleasant smells, pollution or adverse weather conditions. In Scandinavia, the main problem is that wind cools us down and cloud cover keeps the sun from warming us up again. But the problems vary with the seasons and from region to region. Other parts of the world often have completely different climate problems, but protection from unwanted elements of the climate remains important.



We need safety from traffic



cameras

We need people living along the streets – not



We need protection against unpleasant climate conditions (In this case the bad conditions are man made - it is the turbulences from a high rise building, which is causing the problem)

Comfort

Comfort deals with the quality of walking and staying in a place. It involves walking, standing and sitting as well as the possibility for seeing, hearing and talking. Playing and unwinding are also included.

Opportunities to participate in a variety of activities and experience the surroundings rest on how city space is designed to facilitate basic human activities under good conditions. Pedestrians need to move freely, as well as stand and sit where it feels good and natural.

Designing the edges of public space is especially important to city life. People prefer to stay at the edges or border zones with their backs well protected. They want good opportunities for looking, listening and talking.

Good city space has multiple uses. It is important to be able to stay and experience city space, to use it for both passive and active recreation.



We do not need obstacles.....France



....or too narrow sidewalks - Argentina



.... or tunnels.... UK



...or guard rails – Hong Kong



...nor do we need blank walls... Germany



..or long boring distances – Denmark



What we need are good spaces for walking and staying with other people and things to see – Copenhagen, Denmark

Enjoyment

Enjoyment covers the human scale, enjoying the positive aspects of the climate and the sensory experience of the place, including design and the quality of materials used.

Creating thoroughly enjoyable spaces is highly dependent on utilizing the qualities, attractions and special opportunities found in and around city spaces.

It is vital to create city spaces on a human scale, with fine details, good materials and good street furniture. Good city space must also provide opportunities to enjoy the positive aspects of the local climate.

Finally, city space should offer good experiences, fine views and interesting sensory impressions. Last but not least and it almost goes without saying: all qualities should be part and parcel of beautifully conceived architectural unity.



We do not feel comfortable in oversized spaces – New Town, Denmark



Enjoying the positive aspects of the climate - Uruguay



Enjoyment and positive sense experiences – Japan



A relaxed meeting place – Denmark

When the whole set of criteria has been fulfilled in the design of a space, it has a good chance of being a place where people will be able to use all their human senses and enjoy walking as well as staying. In that respect a “100% place” has been formed.

DESIGNING / DETAILING THE PUBLIC SPACES

A KEY WORD LIST

P R O T E C T I O N	1. Protection against Traffic & Accidents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traffic accidents - fear of traffic - other accidents 	2. Protection against crime & violence (feeling of safety) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lived in / used - streetlife - streetwatchers - overlapping functions - in space & time 	3. Protection against unpleasant sense experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wind / draft - rain / snow - cold / heat - pollution - dust, glare, noise 	
	C O M F O R T	4. Possibilities for WALKING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - room for walking - untying layout of streets - interesting facades - no obstacles - good surfaces 	5. Possibilities for STANDING / STAYING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attractive edges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> »Edgeeffect« - defined spots for staying - supports for staying 	6. Possibilities for SITTING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - zones for sitting - maximizing advantages primary and secondary sitting possibilities - benches for resting
		7. Possibilities to SEE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seeing-distances - unhindered views - interesting views - lighting (when dark) 	8. Possibilities for HEARING / TALKING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low noise level - bench arrangements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> »talkscapes« 	9. Possibilities for PLAY / UNFOLDING / ACTIVITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - invitation to physical activities, play, unfolding & entertainment - day & night and summer & winter
E N J O Y M E N T		10. Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dimensioning of buildings & spaces in observance of the important human dimensions related to senses, movements, size & behaviour 	11. Possibilities for enjoying positive aspects of climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sun / shade - warmth / coolness - breeze / ventilation 	12. Aesthetic quality / positive sense-experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good design & good detailing - views / vistas - trees, plants, water

Bibliography

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Gehl, Jan (1987 - latest edition 2006), *Life Between Buildings*, The Danish Architectural Press. (General description of walking, standing and sitting (p. 129-183). The book has constantly been updated with new research and has become a classic book on people and space. It has been translated into numerous languages among others Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. The 6th revised English edition from The Danish Architectural Press has been published in 2006).

Whyte, H. W. (1988) *CITY – Rediscovering the Center*, N.Y. 1988, Doubleday. (The term a 100% place is related to William H. Whyte's description of 100% corners and 100% conversations in this famous book).

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