

Sociability vs. accessibility:

Static pattern of uses as new urban design dimension in measuring the liveliness of street spaces in urban spaces

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Abstract

Architects and planners have always been concerned with the spatial and social function of streets. This is because of the growing recognition that the way streets are designed and planned may determine the functional efficiency for urban space use, including its sociability and its liveliness. Efficiency is a function of the street itself since it is concerned primarily with movement, that is, how people and traffic move from anywhere and everywhere. It emphasises that the flow and functional efficiency of streets in this manner are consequently significant to urban designers and planners.

Streets serve either unipurpose, mixed purpose or multipurpose functions depending on the objectives and goals of the designers and planners. This manifests the concern for the functional efficiency of streets as a setting, a living space or a place of interaction. The concern with this specific functional efficiency is visible in the hierarchies of primary, secondary and tertiary structure of streets. It is also present in the spatial relationship between these different hierarchical levels of streets, including their accessibility, the differences in width measurement, number of lanes, parking spaces, location of facilities, landscaping, and the connectivity of pedestrian pathways in the overall configuration of an urban design. This concern helps to define how each street may manifest its typological condition which will accommodate the spatial and social functions simultaneously.

The spatial function is performed where streets serve as a channel for urban space use or movement from one point of origin to another point of destination. On the other hand, the social function of streets is realised by interaction which results from co-awareness and co-presence of other people using the same streets, where there are spatial facilities that enable people to access other urban opportunities such as entertainment, work, or sport.

The design of streets generally provides guidance and support mechanisms to enable people to maximise their experience of urban areas. Streets as a living space or a place of interaction are, therefore, the main interest of this research because they are vital to the understanding of the functional efficiency of the urban fabric which results from people generally moving about every day in urban areas.

Keywords

Streets, movement, interaction

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This research focuses towards a better understanding of the relationship between the following functions of a street as a place for interaction; the capacity to accommodate dynamic patterns of use, when the street is regarded as a channel for urban space use or as a conduit to direct the flow of movement (defined as the accessibility of the street); and the capacity to absorb a static pattern of use, when the street is regarded as a setting for cultural expression or a place for both spontaneous and planned interaction (defined as the sociability of the street).

Depending on the way street layouts are designed and configured, they can impede or encourage static and dynamic movement behaviour in a city structure. Static behaviour is described as a prelude to interaction, whilst dynamic behaviour is associated with mobility which is the ability of people to move. Mobility is the function of individuals seeking to utilise urban spatial facilities, like streets, for the purpose of fulfilling their personal preferences and needs.

This thesis aims at understanding the importance of the streets in the urban fabric, including the second important social dimension in urban design which may provide guidance for a design which incorporates support mechanism for the social function without doing violence to the normal spatial function of streets.

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