Municipal Spatial Planning Support Programme (MuSPP)

Making Better Cities Together
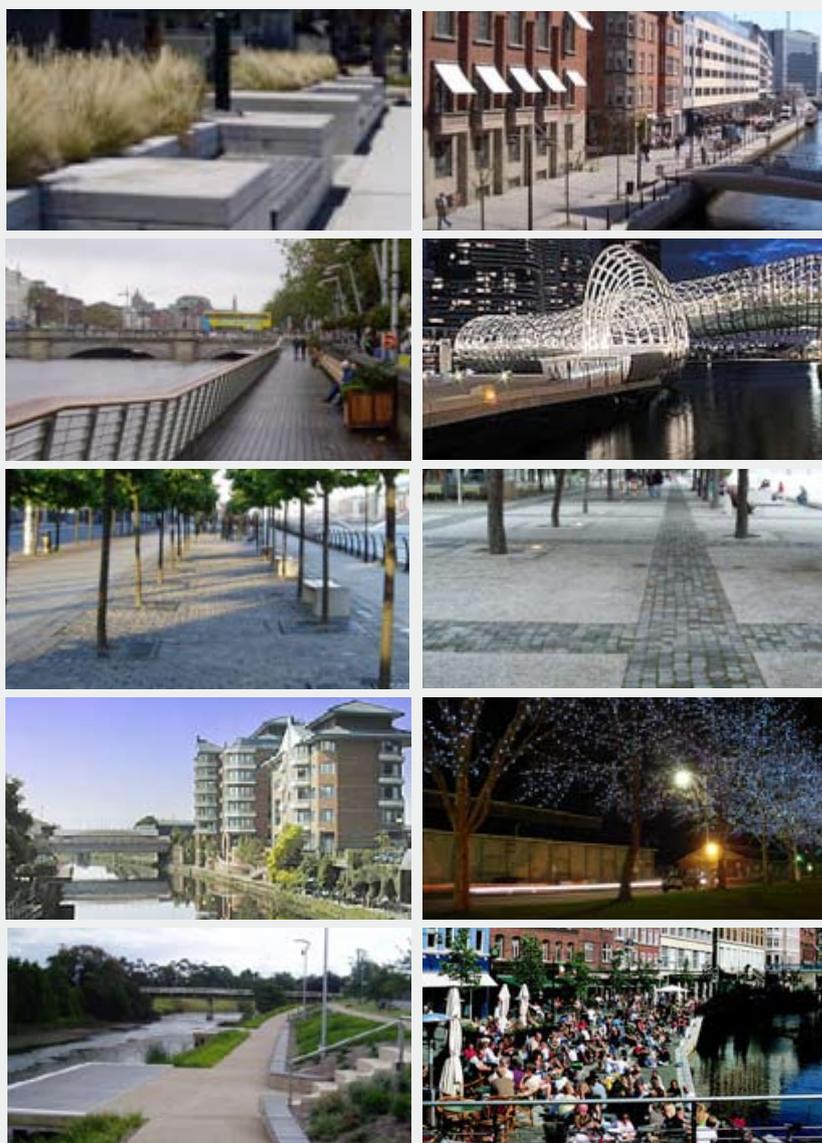
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the need for Urban design in Kosovo

Turning spaces into places

Introduction

Municipal and Urban Development Plans are urgently needed to guide the urban and rural development in Kosovo. Turning these strategic plans into real interventions that improve the urban environment also requires detailed urban design and landscaping proposals.

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Euro¬pean cities (EU Spatial Planning Ministers, May 2007), considers "creating and ensuring high quality spaces…to be of crucial importance for strengthening the competitiveness of European cities". This Leaflet considers this statement from the perspective of Kosovo - why it is just as valid here as elsewhere in Europe and what it means. Recent years have witnessed a rapid growth in the population of Kosovo's towns and cities, most notably Pristina which has doubled in size since the end of the conflict. This physical change has been paralleled by social upheaval as traditional bonds of clan and family are eroded with urbanization. Infrastructure, such as roads, open space and schools as well as water, sewers and electricity has struggled to cope with the demands of more people with increasing expectations.

These demands and expectations are fuelling the competition for city space, with a desire to facilitate personal mobility being prominent on the agenda of most decision makers. Perhaps one of the principal expressions of this is the roads of Pristina and other cities in Kosovo which are clogged with traffic that occupies nearly all the space from building wall to building wall. With discontinuous footpaths that are pot-holed, blocked by parked vehicles and with little landscaping they discourage any use other than vehicles moving through them. This is a major issue when you consider that streets and open spaces typically make up around 20% of most cities. They are the principal forum for social interaction, they connect the places we have to get to in order to meet our needs (school, work, healthcare, shops, etc) and are the perspective from which many of our day to day experiences are gained.

Urban design: the challenge

Urban Design seeks to enable people to get more from their surroundings. Changing the unhealthy relationship described above requires designing the buildings and spaces in towns and cities to reconcile competing demands and enable people to meet a wide range needs. This will allow people to forge new links with each other and with their surroundings and can help hold the negative influences of social exclusion, economic fragility and physical blight at bay. Urban design seeks to create places with meaning for the people that occupy them to provide people with opportunities to do the things they need to do to enjoy a good quality of life. However, defining people's needs is not always easy. As individuals and as a community, people's needs will vary significantly. They are likely to change over time and between people. What someone needs at any given time will be influenced by their gender, age, upbringing, experience, values, and even the time of day.

Designing places that are relevant to everyone means designing places that can be used in many different ways by many people. Urban space is too precious to commit to a single use. In urban design, as in nature, a monoculture is best avoided. Good design does not cost significantly more, nor take longer to complete, than poor design. The desirability of achieving these goals for Kosovo is self-evident, but the extent to which they can be achieved depends on two key factors. Perhaps the most important is the ability **to create a culture** of urban design. We all influence the quality of our surroundings, from the mayors and planners who make big decisions, to the people passing through a street whose smile or laughter momentarily lights up a space, or an individual who drops litter or parks on a footpath. Getting people to value shared space, to recognize its contribution to peoples lives and to provide the democratic mandate for cities to make and pay for improvements is essential. This may seem like a big ask but visionary leadership and coordinated programs of information, education and public works have changed the culture of cities (and found economic benefits) in places as diverse as Bogota in Colombia, Copenhagen in Denmark, Melbourne in Australia and Tirana in Albania.

Secondly, and very much connected to the first point, is the **development of a uniquely Kosovan sense of urban design**. At the end of the day, importing overseas urban designers is not sustainable, no matter how good the designers. Beyond some fundamental ground rules that relate to accessibility, comfort and safety, what is 'good' is to a large extent culturally specific. The best people to understand that sense of place are the people for whom that place is part of their day to day experience. If these changes are made, the cities and towns of Kosovo can become places within which the newly urbanized people will have a better chance of thriving and reaching their potential. It is an essential part of making the most of Kosovo's finest asset: its people and helping them compete on an equal footing with other European centers.

What is placemaking?

Placemaking is the objective of urban design. It is the name of a design process that seeks to enable people who live in cities to get more from their surroundings. More opportunities to get around their area, more opportunities to meet people, more opportunities to learn, to grow, to express themselves, enjoy beauty and be moved, inspired and connect with each other and their surroundings.

"Placemaking" does this by intervening in the public realm to create places that facilitate people to interact with each other and their surroundings in a way that they can meet more of their needs than would otherwise happen. In other words placemaking seeks to enable people to enjoy `places' to be in rather than just `spaces' to pass through.

Spaces allow people to do just the essential things that are the bare minimum functional requirements of a city's shared spaces, such as allowing people to get safely and conveniently to work, the shops or school but places will allow them to additionally choose a range of optional interactions that are relevant to their personal needs and values.

Placemaking relates to how places work and the way they make the people who experience them feel. It seeks to ensure we design new buildings and spaces, or redesign existing spaces, so that they feel safe, comfortable and interesting. Placemaking relates to how places work and the way they make the people who experience them feel. It seeks to ensure we design new buildings and spaces, or redesign existing spaces, so that they feel safe, comfortable and interesting.

A fictional example of the type of space that can be found in many city's in Kosovo that is unsafe, unattractive and offers little to its surroundings, used only for informal parking.


The same area as a place, illustrating how it might be made into an attractive, inviting area that accommodates many social and recreational uses and contributes more to its surroundings.

Principles in placemaking

When designing a public area, ensuring it can become a valued place will typically depend on applying the principles described below. These can also be used as a checklist. As designs emerge the designers need to refer back to these principles to ensure they are still applying them all and the pursuit of one objective does not compromise another. Not all of these will be in the scope of the designer, however, and where they are not, the designs should be accompanied by a report stressing their importance and the need to make sure they are dealt with at future stages

Principle 1 Optimise connectivity - so people can easily access the place and the effort and inconvenience do not outweigh any potential benefits.
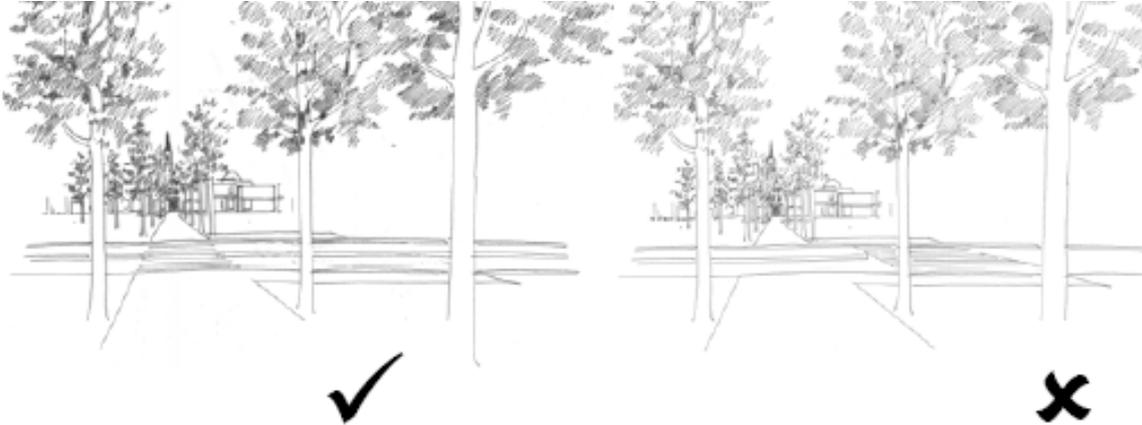
One of the characteristics of connectivity is about designing spaces that are as easy to get to as possible

Principle 2 Maximise safety - so enjoying the place does not expose the visitor to harm or fear

Principle 3 Facilitate robustness - so the place can easily be enjoyed and used by many people with different needs and expectations

An example of robustness is Sustainable drainage systems – such as this example from Perth, Australia – these can help to define a space, add interest and make more sustainable use of water

Principle 4 Maximise comfort - so the place can be enjoyed without any unwanted emotional or physical stimuli (such as feeling uncomfortably cold, hot or having nowhere to sit down).

One of the ways of maximising comfort is to provide sheltered attractive places to sit, relax and rest along important pedestrian routes.

Principle 5 Safeguard against appropriation - so visitors are not made to feel they are intruding on someone else's territory.

This type of space provides an example of appropriation as drivers passing through it will predominantly be aware of the space as linear road rather than any sense of being in a distinctive place. Consequently road users will unintentionally dominate the space "appropriating" it from other uses.
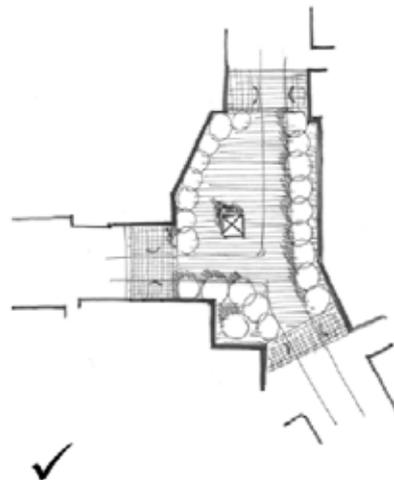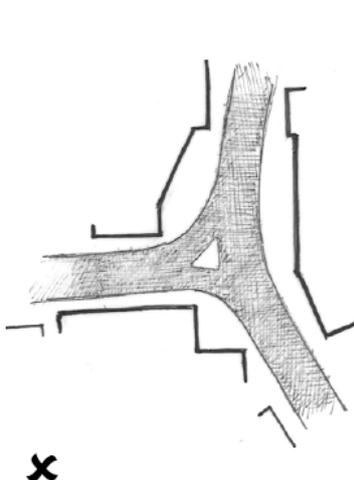
However if this space was redesigned as above, drivers passing through it will be aware of passing through a distinctive place and their impact on the space is less likely to dominate it, minimising the extent to which they appropriate it.

Principle 6 Provide opportunities for people to express themselves - so they can find ways of contributing to their surroundings, add character and exercise their artistic, cultural and social skills.

One of the main ways open spaces can allow people to express themselves is by providing places for people to meet, see other people and be seen by them.

Principle 7 Reinforcing the areas genus loci (sense of place) - so visitors are aware they are entering somewhere special and distinctive and expressing something of the area's character.

An example of supporting an areas sense of place is designing spaces that frame attractive views of heritage places.

Principle 8 Maximise enjoyment - so occupying a place is fun, interesting, and stimulating.

Principle 9 Make use of natural energies (such as sun, shade, wind or drainage) - so the place does not require additional man made energies to remain useable

Light, shade, colour, the perfume of flowers and seasonal change are examples of how natural energies can contribute to the experience of a place, such as this example from Australia.

Principle 10 Provide for sustainable maintenance - so the place can continue to contribute to the people who experience it in the long term.

These principles and the techniques by which they can be applied will be covered in the MuSPP Urban Design Guidelines, with concrete examples and practices, existing as well as proposed. You are invited to think and act with us on turning Kosovo spaces into liveable and enjoyable places.

There is no one recipe for placemaking, however, experience from Europe and elsewhere suggests that applying the above mentioned principles can assist in arriving at proposals that can achieve the goals described above. Given that urban areas are inherently complex and have both physical (i.e. built form) and social dimensions (i.e. how people act and feel about their surroundings) achieving good urban places requires getting the process right, in so far as the social dimension can be adequately considered and getting the product right so the qualities created within the spaces are relevant and helpful to the people who will experience them. A placemaking process typically involves the following stages;

1. **Understanding the challenge** so the problem can be identified and focused on. This requires understanding the site as a physical and social construct, identifying how people use it at present and the requirements of the brief. This is usually expressed through a site analysis and an explicit and graphic exploration of the issues that influence the design. It usually requires integrating inputs from a number of disciplines.

2. **Creating and testing a vision** so a design direction can be set that all the stakeholders can agree on and share in its development and implementation. This requires establishing a shared design agenda with the stakeholders and creating a vision that explicitly addresses the communities' and other stakeholders' concerns and

fulfills the requirements of good planning and design. This is usually expressed through a "vision" that explicitly addresses the issues identified in the previous stage, for amendment and confirmation by the stakeholders.

3. **Turning the vision into a plan** so the agreed direction can be turned into a realistic and achievable set of proposals. This requires understanding the built form implications of the vision and reconciling them within a coordinated set of proposals. This is usually expressed through a set of proposals that explicitly identify the interventions and how they address the issues and site appraisal of the first stage.

4. **Making it happen** so the documented plan can be translated into actions on the ground that will achieve the outcomes that will contribute to the city's livability. This requires making everyone's responsibility clear and ensuring the resources in terms of time, money and commitment are in place. These are usually expressed in an implementation section.

5. **Quality control and protecting its contribution** so the proposals, when implemented, can continue to meet the needs of the people that experience them as their needs change and as the built elements age and suffer from wear and tear. This usually requires that the project allows for on going maintenance, feedback and amendment.

Communicating a vision for a development with a realistic perspective is an effective method of getting people to share and create enthusiasm about getting a design implemented

The benefit of high quality urban design

Research from the UK (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and the Bartlett School of Planning, 2001) revealed that investment in the urban environment delivers a wide range of social, economic and ecological benefits, in particular:
- It adds economic, social and environmental value and does not necessarily cost more or take longer to deliver
- Delivers high investment returns for developers and investors
- Enhances workforce performance and satisfaction and increases occupier prestige
- Delivers economic benefits by opening up new investment
- Opportunities and delivering more successful regeneration
- Helps to deliver places accessible to and enjoyed by all
- Benefits all stakeholders –investors, developers, occupiers, public authorities and everyday users of developments.

"Peoples ability to work, bring up children, think, learn socialise and remain healthy is immeasurably improved by a conducive and responsive environment- and seriously impeded without one." **("Cities that destroy themselves" in Community Architecture, Nick Wates and Charles Knevitt 1987)**

Examples of good placemaking in Kosovo

Gjakova/ Djakovica Kulla

Attractive area shared by cafes, shops, university campus. The area allows vehicles but the scale and detailed design stops them dominating the area. The stone building/reproduction Kula provides an interesting termination to the view looking down the street and emphasizes the civic importance of the space by virtue of its height, scale and contrasting materials, being constructed of stone in a street where the buildings are predominantly wooden.

Prizren Riverside

The riverside walk allows people to walk next to the attractive river, where they can hear it as well as see it and enjoy the attractive view compositions of buildings, river nearby landscape and distant mountains. Careful attention to detail ensures that the materials chosen for the area complements the heritage character of this attractive town.

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