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50 YEARS OF PLACEMAKING

A HUMAN SCALE APPROACH

ISABELLE GIASSON

>FR_LP+ 50 ANS À CRÉER DES LIEUX

FR_
DEPUIS LES ANNÉES 70, les architectes paysagistes, architectes et urbanistes ont appris à décrire la démarche de création de squares, places, parcs, rues et fronts d'eau capables d'attirer non seulement par leur beauté, mais aussi par leur agrément et par leur intérêt. Isabelle Giasson fait état de leur réflexion et de leurs succès dans une présentation PowerPoint à :
 >bit.ly/50YearsOfPlacemaking

EN_ THE CONCEPT BEHIND PLACEMAKING

originated in the 1960s, when writers offered ground-breaking ideas about designing cities that catered to people, not just to cars and shopping centers. Their work focused on the importance of lively neighborhoods and inviting public spaces. The term came into use in the 1970s, when landscape architects, architects and urban planners began to describe

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the process of creating squares, plazas, parks, streets and waterfronts that would attract people, not simply because they were pretty, but because they were also pleasurable and interesting.

SEEING THE CITY THROUGH JANE'S EYES

Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) was one of the first thinkers whose ground-breaking books altered our perspectives. She advocated citizen ownership of streets, through an idea she termed, “eyes on the street.” In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, she presented a direct yet fundamentally optimistic indictment of the short-sightedness and intellectual arrogance that had characterized much of urban planning up to that time. She wrote about what makes streets safe or unsafe; she examined what constitutes a neighborhood and what function the neighbourhood serves within the larger organism of the city; and she examined neighbourhoods to determine why some remain impoverished while others regenerate themselves.

Jacobs developed a framework for assessing the vitality of all cities, which uses **five perspectives** – all revolutionary in their day. **1/** Cities are Ecosystems, she argued: over time, buildings, streets and neighborhoods function as dynamic organisms, changing as people interact with them in the same manner as natural ecosystems. **2/** Mixed-Use Development creates vitality: when neighbourhoods integrate different building types and uses, they attract a diversity of people of different ages

at different times of day. A vital city is “organic, spontaneous, and untidy.”

She also shook the status quo by arguing for **3/** Bottom-Up Community Planning – she insisted that local expertise is better suited to guiding community development than outside experts. She made the **4/** Case for Higher Density, because higher population densities could yield a critical mass capable of supporting economic growth and prosperity. And she advocated for **5/** Local Economies, dissecting how cities and their economies emerge and grow, and how vital cities will add new types of work to the old, by promoting small businesses and supporting urban entrepreneurs.

WILLIAM H. WHYTE AND THE STREET LIFE REVOLUTION

William H. Whyte (1917–1999) was an American urbanist, organizational analyst, journalist and people-watcher. In 1980, he published the findings from his revolutionary Street Life Project in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Both the book and the accompanying film were instantly labelled classics and launched a mini-revolution in the planning and study of public spaces. They have since become standard texts in urban planning, sociology, environmental design and architecture departments around the world.

Whyte established **seven basic placemaking factors** which bring social life to public spaces. Placemaking means creation of **1/** Sittable Places (mainly for two or three people), along a **2/** Street, remembering that people tend to sit more in the **3/** Sun. People are attracted by **4/**



1 2

THE DEATH
AND LIFE
OF GREAT
AMERICAN
CITIES
JANE JACOBS

*"Whisper the name, influential might work in
the history of your planning... a world of tomorrow...
The New York Times Best Seller"*

The Social Life
of Small
Urban Spaces



William H. Whyte

3 4

Jan Gehl **Cities
for people**



Water – and when they look for shade, they prefer **5/** Trees to other shading devices. Placemakers must think of **6/** Food (of course) and **7/** Triangulation: the process by which some external stimulus links people, prompting strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other. In a public space, the arrangement of different elements in relation to each other can put the triangulation process in motion (or not).

FRED KENT AND THE POWER OF 10

The Street Life Project led directly to New York's Project for Public Spaces (PPS), founded by Fred Kent 35 years ago. The PPS list brings the Placemaking pragmatics wittily home, reminding designers that "The Community is the Expert," and that "You can't do it alone." Kent's advice comes with a wry humour. "You can see a lot just by observing," he says, and shortly thereafter reminds Placemakers to – against their better judgement – "Start with the petunias."

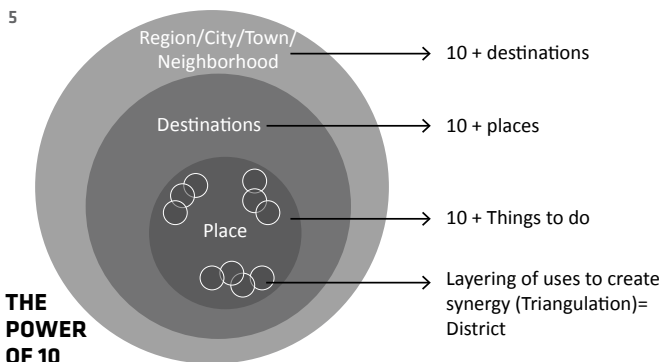
PPS invokes The Power of 10. In a city, you need 10 destinations, and within each of these destinations, you need 10 places to go, 10 things to do, 10 reasons to be there – places to sit, for instance, or art to touch, music to hear, food to purchase, historic information to learn about, books to read. For PPS, Placemaking is a process, not an outcome. It is community driven, and therefore, not the easiest route for a landscape architect! Each year, Kent and the PPS staff train 10,000 people in Placemaking techniques.

JAN GEHL TURNS UNWORKABLE CITYSCAPES INTO LANDSCAPES

As North Americans brought Placemaking concepts to communities, a Danish architect and urban designer named Jan Gehl was conducting fundamental research into the ways people actually use – or could use – the spaces where they live and work. In his revolutionary book, *Cities for People* (2010), he clearly explains how to reconfigure unworkable cityscapes into

the landscapes he believes they should be: cities planned at a human scale.

Gehl developed a toolbox of concrete methods, which consider such fundamentals as distance. He invites placemakers to assemble the city's functions to ensure shorter distances between them, not to disperse them. Similarly, he advises planners not to segregate city functions, but to integrate them to ensure versatility, wealth of experience, social sustainability and a feeling of security. He encourages city builders to invite pedestrian and bicycling traffic, not to repel them, and to open up the edges between the city and buildings, so that life inside buildings and outside in city spaces can work together. Overall, he believes urban design should invite people to stay longer in public places, because, after all, if a few people spend a great deal of time in a place, they will provide the same animation and sense of vitality, as many people who spend just a short time.



Triangulation: the process by which some external stimulus links people, prompting strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other.

1] JANE JACOBS 2, 3, 4 VOLUMES FROM THE PLACEMAKERS 5 THE POWER OF TEN

PHOTOS: 1 PHIL STANZIOLA, 1961 5 PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES (PPS)



PHOTO ISABELLE GIASSON

laurier ave | before

Montréal planners awarded the cityscape a possible 2 points for each Gehl criteria met (see box below). The street was fairly safe and secure with buildings designed to human scale. It provided some places to sit and walk, but offered little else.

The score: 7/24.

THE JAN GEHL TOOLKIT: THE CITY AT EYE LEVEL

Gehl's toolkit is highly specific and therefore very useful. It can function effectively as a check list to assess creative design solutions. In Montreal, for example, we used Gehl's **12 quality criteria** to plan the revival of Laurier Street, carefully assessing its "eye level" appeal. Human scale Placemaking means providing protection from traffic, crime and unpleasantness, while providing numerous opportunities for people to positively experience their city. (See images above.)

GIL PENALOSA ENHANCES MOBILITY FOR ALL AGES



Closer to us in Toronto, Gil Penalosa works to create Placemaking projects that prioritize people's well-being. He believes that if everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for all people. Founder of "8 to 80 Cities", he improves the quality of life in cities by bringing citizens together to enhance mobility and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy and equitable communities. Penalosa says that every city should have a law of two words: Pedestrians First!

WHY PLACEMAKING?

The human scale principles of Jacobs, Whyte, Gehl and Penalosa are transforming our sense of proportion and scale in our cities. The introduction of cars and car traffic a century ago was a decisive factor in creating confusions of scale, and as more and more people spaces were given to vehicles, the results favoured cars, not people. Gehl says that when speed in urban areas increased from a walking speed of 5km/h to 40 km/h (car speed), all spatial dimensions increased dramatically. Our images and visions of the cityscape followed the same line.

WIDENING HORIZONS FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

For the last 50 years, we have been trying to repair these mistakes by advocating for a human scale approach to the public realm. Taking into account changing demographics and lifestyles, landscape architects, must consider the urban landscape through the five human senses, as experienced at the speed of walking rather than at the speed of riding in a car, bus or train. This small-scale view is too frequently neglected in contemporary projects. But when designers pay attention, the differences are dramatic. In cities from Copenhagen to New York to Montréal, a great many firms are even now transforming city neighbourhoods by focusing on pedestrians first.

To assume leadership in designing the public realm, we landscape architects are expanding our knowledge

The Jan Gehl Toolkit: 12 quality criteria

- 1 Protection against accidents (safe)
- 2 Protection against crime (secure)
- 3 Protection against sensory unpleasantness
- 4 Opportunities to walk
- 5 Opportunities to stand
- 6 Opportunities to sit
- 7 Opportunities to see
- 8 Opportunities to talk
- 9 Opportunities to play/exercise
- 10 Buildings designed to human scale
- 11 Opportunities to enjoy the climate
- 12 Positive sensory experiences: good design, materials, views

of how to design places, not through the addition of further design skills but rather through the integration of human skills. This is slowly occurring as we bring sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, recreaologists and economists on board. Let's be more proactive about gaining back the people spaces our cities lost over time; let's first be landscape architects for PEOPLE.

To view Isabelle Giasson's PowerPoint presentation,
> bit.ly/50YearsOfPlacemaking

REFERENCES >LP+
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laurier ave | after

The proposal for a redesigned street was awarded a much higher score. The design features plentiful opportunities to sit, with furniture that provides “talkscapes”; places to linger with supports to lean against and attractive zones to invite longer stays. The avenue is safe and secure, with unhindered sightlines and lighting in the dark, and it invites people to linger, with its trees, plants, water, and plentiful opportunities to enjoy the climate, be it sun or shade, warmth or breezes.

The score: 20/24

GRUPE IBI-CHBA (NOW LEMAY) PROJECT MANAGER: ISABELLE GIASSON (FOUNDER OF ARCADIA, 2016)



THE PLACEMAKING PILOT PROJECT TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY. PHOTO SOURCE WWW.TIMESSQUARENYC.ORG