Introduction

"Building the city today could mean the wish to find again, perhaps with different forms, the qualities of proximity, mixture and the unexpected, i.e. a public space accessible to all, a variety of mixed activities, a built-up area that keeps adapting and transforming itself in unplanned neighbourhoods." (Panerai et al, 2004, p.159).

Since Plato's *Republic* the city has often been conceptualized as a living organism where different parts combine together in the formation of a single compound. In contemporary science the organic metaphor has primarily to do with the idea of an *evolutionary* system where the whole is the outcome that *emerges* form ever-changing relationships between single components out of any external coordination, on the substrate of a *network of links*: the metaphor therefore unifies spatial phenomena – like city form – with biological, social, scientific, economic and technological systems. Because evolution only happens with change, systems that do not change are destined to decline and death by increasingly reducing their *adaptability* to external challenges.

That seems in fact the fate experienced by too many urban developments in the last half a century at least. While, in fact, traditional urban patterns change according to social and economic dynamics in history, modern environments generally show an extreme "reluctance" to provide a receptive ground to this overall change, as well as to the self-organized, unpredictable evolution of local social practices.

Time-conscious urban design is a set of principles, procedure and tools that focuses on what an urban designer can do to re-establish time flow, i.e. history, in the contemporary city by providing a change-available environmental context to social life at the global and local scale.

This guide assumes that the learner is familiar with concepts illustrated in the first six units "Fundamentals of urban design", and particularly with Unit 1 "How the city works and develops" and unit Unit 2 "What makes a good city". Also, the learner would take advantage of previous basic notions of architectural history.

Learning objectives

After completing this study guide you should be able to:

1. Conceptualize the time-conscious urban space framework in distinct components and in relationships between them.
2. Examine time-conscious and time-unconscious urban spaces on the ground.
3. Understand dynamics of urban life associated with time-conscious spatial environments.

1. Conceptualize the time-conscious urban space framework in distinct components and in relationships between them.

Time conscious-urban design has been described as a three-fold concept that includes architectural heritage preservation, ordinary old buildings preservation and incremental multi-actorial change (Thwaites *et al*, 2007). This refers to the realization of urban environments that are the outcome of an *evolutionary* process of development which keeps the memory of the past and opens to a future of piecemeal change mainly, though not exclusively, provided by the uncoordinated succession of individual action by single persons, families or small organizations. Exceptional historical buildings are in fact important for a community to find and recognize their roots, but they also offer 'anchors' for people to navigate the complex spatial setting around 'landmarks' of prominence (Lynch K, 1960). Even more important than that, the preservation and respectful renovation of entire historical areas and urban fabrics merges together historical ordinary buildings with their connectivity fabric of open spaces, streets and squares; prominence is here acknowledged not to single buildings of excellence, but to an urban environment as a whole that conveys particular spatial consistence due to a common historical formation. Such environments are relevant to contemporary cities in that they offer a different and rooted stage for the everyday life of entire communities, as well as a highly diverse building stock that provides shelter to a great variety of uses, activities, projects and personal trajectories. One specific feature that such historical fabrics do provide, for example, is relatively downgraded buildings which act as start-up opportunities for new enterprises or transient urban population (Jacobs J, 1960).

But *"If architectural heritage preservation is increasingly a common policy in city planning practices and ordinary old buildings preservation is a policy that in some places, under favourable conditions, has matured a long tradition as well as an advanced technicality, incremental multi-actorial change is by far the less experimented and the more challenging among the contents of time-conscious urban design. Implementing such kind of incremental culture, visions and practices would mean to experiment deep changes in current city planning context as it counters some of the foundations of the modernist disciplinary core."* (Thwaites *et al*, 2007, p.25). Multi-actorial change is a multifaceted goal that can only be achieved by means of a concerted action across different interrelated fields. At least, we can recognize a *political* dimension, that has to do with practices of social participation to decision-making, and a *spatial* dimension, that has to do with the way some fundamental urban 'materials' are put together in an organic whole maintaining a network of mutual relationships.

We can recognize at least three of such fundamental urban materials: *streets*, *lots (within streets)* and *buildings (within lots)*; the proper design of those materials, and especially the one that at the same time witnesses and ensures the maintenance of a strict mutual *spatial relationship* among them, appears to be critical for the emergence of an urban space that is available to change and evolves over time. Which are then the characteristics of such spatial relationships? Urban Morphology (http://urd.let.rug.nl/ekoster/isuf2/index.html) offers a deeper insight into this subject on the basis of a spatial theory derived from an extensive body of analysis of historical urban fabrics (Vernez-Moudon, 1986; Caniggia and Maffei, 2001; Komossa *et al*, 2005) in the context of the history of theories of planning and urban design (Panerai *et al*, 2004). A strong emphasis is put in these studies on, among others, *street led hierarchy of development*, *orthogonal lot design*, *diverse lot geometry*, *small properties (lots)*, *perimeter blocks*, *closed blocks*, *building type evolution*, in association to *street centrality* as a determinant factor for keeping all those 'materials' together in a correlated whole.

Finally, practicing multi-actorial change from the point of view of spatial design fully involves the system of land property and trade and the *financial/procedural* dimensions of implementing the process of urban development. Achieving a *disjointed process of development* emerges here as the fourth fundamental 'material' towards the realization of a time-conscious urban space: with this concept it is meant a process where the actors who conceive and deliver the spatial solutions *change at every scale* of the development: for example, the ones who decide for the masterplan are not the same who do it for all the public space, and that every single building has different owners and designers.

All this means that a shift towards time-conscious urban design will not come easy, for it involves many different dimensions that are interrelated in a complex whole, each one of which will deliver a certain – and specific – level of resistance to change. However, as for example in the recent renovation of the Amsterdam harbour's eastern docklands, like in the Java Island development, a time-conscious design of the spatial setting has led to a successful diversity of building types and lot schemes in a consistent but eye-catching urban landscape: here different techniques of disjointed development have been successfully experimented that include, like in the Scheepstimmermanstraat street front (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scheepstimmermanstraat), a radical fragmentation in land ownership as well as in decision making at different scales. Moreover, IT technology advancements also offer the opportunity to understand and control critical factors such as street centrality (Porta and Latora, 2008) with unprecedent ease. Examples like that confirm that in order to diffuse a real shift towards time-conscious sustainable urban design the major obstacle is not as much financial, technical or social as it is *cultural*.

[LEARNING ACTIVITY a]

1.1. Write a short essay of no more than 450 words listing what are the most basic *spatial* characteristics of a time-conscious urban fabric: try to focus – in different statements – on the fundamental materials of the fabric at different scales, then highlighting the *relationships* that should be in place between them. The overall deliverable, that we name hereby *Time-conscious notebook*, might take the form of a checklist that answers to the questions: "How would a time-conscious urban fabric look like? And, conversely, how would a time-unconscious one?".

1.2. Drawing from real-world contemporary cities, identify two cases that you can easily access personally, one of time-conscious and the other of time-unconscious urban fabrics, based on the previous exercise.

[FEEDBACK ON LEARNING ACTIVITY a]

The *Time-conscious notebook* may include, at this stage, features like those listed below.

At the scale of the building:

- many small buildings with visible architectural differences rather than few large undifferentiated buildings; this property may be related to differences in the lots' size and shape as well as in the age of buildings and the location (street centrality).

At the scale of the aggregation:

- an urban fabric of predominantly closed blocks presenting a mostly perimetral built-up area, rather than large 'super-blocks' and stand-alone buildings in the green; that may be related to the disjointed process of development which also provided a wide variety of formal solutions in the architectural streetscape;

- a variety of lot sizes and shapes with a certain variety of building types; that may be related to the level of centrality of the street front;

- a certain diversity of land uses related to single buildings rather than just one or few predominant land uses spread across many buildings; tat again can be related to street centrality, with non-residential uses tending to more central locations;

- a certain mix of aged and new ordinary buildings at different levels of maintenance rather than just new or just downgraded buildings; that can be drawn back to the variegated historical origins of the building stock which, in turn, recalls a disjointed process of development occurred over a certain span of time;

At the scale of the urban organism:

- a strictly interconnected, mixed used street layout without marked spatial differences and a visible hierarchy of centrality 'flavour' rather than a functionally hierarchical networks with rigid spatial separation of uses and users; this can be seen as an outcome of a centrality-led process of growth in the street layout, which in turn is mirrored in the variety of uses, lot sizes and building types.

[END OF LEARNING ACTIVITY a]

2. Examine time-conscious and time-unconscious urban spaces on the ground.

Annotated site maps (Cooper-Marcus and Sarkissian, 1986, p.17) are maps of and urban area, typically drawn at the scale of the neighbourhood, where both graphic and textual annotations are made with reference to one or many thematic issues that the author wants to highlight in relation to the geographic space of places. This kind of analysis can be used in this case by for developing a more realistic understanding of places with a focus on the spatial/physical characteristics that seems to her/him being more related with time-consciousness as conceptualized in previous Learning Objective 1.

The learner should keep clearly in mind that the scope of this learning objective 2 is *not* the delivery of a reliable and professionally sound site analysis, but instead the formation of a more advanced ground of reflections and concepts about what time-consciousness might turn out to look like *in real urban fabrics*. Consequently, important thing is here the feed-back that the learner is expected to address on her/his previous conceptual text, the *Time-conscious notebook* worked out in exercise 1.1., *after* the structured visits to two real urban areas.

[LEARNING ACTIVITY b]

2.1. Take a map of the two cases, or part of them, selected in previous exercise 1.2 at the scale of 1:2000/1000, visit the sites and annotate graphically *and* textually, directly on the map, what are in these real urban environments the *fundamental materials* and the *relationship* between them that you wrote about in exercise 1.1. Remember that at the end of this exercise the learner is expected to reflect about the conceptual framework s/he devised in the *Time-conscious notebook* (learning activity 1.1.) taking advantage of questions and issues raised in the personal visits to the sites and, hopefully, of more advanced practice of the literature that those visits may have stimulated. The learner could, and actually *should*, eventually modify the *Time-conscious notebook* accordingly.

[FEEDBACK ON LEARNING ACTIVITY b]

The *Time-conscious notebook* should, at this stage, have been revised including more case-specific observations like:
- a variety of lot sizes and shapes with a certain variety of building types; that may be related to the level of centrality of the street front. However, this mix is scarcely perceivable at the scale of the single street front, as the edification of this part of the city probably occurred all-at-once following a typical Victorian pattern of urban addition that lowered the level of disjointed development especially at the scale of the urban block.

- the monumental complex of Saint George provides visual reference and enhances the legibility of the street system while strengthening the sense of place for the whole neighbourhood.

3. Understand dynamics of urban life associated with time-conscious spatial environments

Why time conscious urban spaces should be beneficial towards the goal of building more sustainable urban future? The *social* dimension of urban sustainability is here primarily on the forefront of reflection. Throughout the comparison of the two real urban areas that the learner had already identified this question should be answered at least in terms of a basic understanding. What is relevant now is urban *life*, rather than urban *space*, therefore the learner is asked to visit again the selected cases and produce an observative study (Jacobs A, 1985); Whyte, 1980; Gehl, 1987) that focuses on what people in these areas actually do in the public space of streets and squares, leaving the spatial/physical characteristics of the urban environment on the background. Where do the people mostly gather, do they just pass-by or spend time on the streets, are public space crowded or are they mostly deserted, what do the environment (buildings, streets, yards or parks) reveal of the way they are used? In addressing the observative study the learner should take care not to overlay her/his personal impression to the observation of external collective behaviours and environmental clues, for the latter are the only focus here.

3.1. The learner should visit again the two selected case areas and annotate on the map, both graphically and textually, his/her understandings about how people use public spaces and the urban environment. This goal can be accomplished by observing directly where people is and what they do or, indirectly, what clues ('traces') the environment offers of collective behaviours (abandonment or care, diversity or uniformity of uses, active or passive frontages, one or many visible activities). The learner is then expected to add another max 450 words text to the *Time-conscious notebook* that summarizes major dynamics of urban life in the two selected case-areas, separating those *observed* directly from those *deducted* from observed environmental traces

3.2. A cross comparison between the two cases should then be addressed with the specific aim of correlating *space* and *behaviours* as they come out from the two analysis worked out in Learning Activities 2.1. and 3.1.: the learner should pose special attention to, on the one side, whether the spatial settings seem to be the product of a multi-faceted, multi-actorial and un-coordinated effort over time or a unitary single project, and to, on the other side, the emerging correlations between such spatial characteristics and observed/deducted collective behaviours.

The overall result of this Learning Objective 3 should take the form of a third feed-back on the *Time-conscious notebook* wrote in Learnig Activity 1.1. and then revised in Learnig Activity 2.1; in this final task, the learner should act on the text in two successive steps: firstly, s/he; secondly, s/he will write a final max 450 words outline about emerging correlations between time-conscious *spatial* features and observed/deducted *social* dynamics.

The resulting three-partite *Time-conscious notebook* will be therefore compound of a first outline about the spatial/physical dimension of time-conscious urban environment in general (Learning Activity 1.1, then revised in Learning Activity 2.1 with reference to the two selected case studies), a second about the social dynamics observed/deducted in the two case-areas (Learning Activity 3.1.) and a third about emerging relationships between space and behaviours as recognized in the first twos.

The final *Time-conscious notebook* document constitutes therefore the final deliverable of the whole Study Guide.

The *Time-conscious notebook* should, at this final stage, have been revised including an evaluation of *social* dynamics as related to previously identified *spatial* features, like for example:

- a variety of lot sizes and shapes with a certain variety of building types; that may be related to the level of centrality of the street front. However, this mix is scarcely perceivable at the scale of the single street front, as the edification of this part of the city probably occurred all-at-once following a typical Victorian pattern of urban addition that lowered the level of disjointed development especially at the scale of the urban block. As an overall observation, the structural spatial variety appears to enhance the presence of a wider diversity in the social composition of the local community. That appears to favour a lasting street life that encompasses a longer period of the daytime;

- the dispersed spatial configuration of the streetscape in the second case study area appears to be correlated with a loss in the street life, especially in the night time. That is probably due to, and is probably a reason for, a sense of unsafety and unsurveillance which makes the public space uncomfortable especially for women and the elderly.

Summary

Having completed this study guide you should now have understood that:

- A time-conscious urban space is one that offers: *prominent monumental buildings* that are of reference for both the enrootment of the community in local space and the legibility of the spatial system; *a variety of buildings, streets and squares of different – but recognizable – historical origins as well as different level of maintenance,* whose value is recognized not just in the excellence or historical nature of any single component but rather in the unique blend of different qualities that time has put in how single components and relational spaces, i.e. the street and public spaces layout, do work together; a spatial setting that, because of how streets, lots and buildings have been growing and evolving over time, and can grow/evolve in the future, are available to *adapt to changes* imposed by single persons, families or small size social actors in their attempt to follow their personal or specific trajectories and initiatives.

- To acknowledge time-conscious spatial factors in a real urban fabric means to develop specific skills of observation and annotation. *Annotated site maps* are a particular kind of graphic and textual format of recording information that emphasizes the direct experience of places while allowing a more structured organization of knowledge to be developed and put at work. Buildings, first, can be distinguished in terms of historical prominence and, secondly, evaluated in the context of the complex mingle of street and public space layout, property scale and fragmentation, building typology origin and evolution that consistently characterizes entire urban areas. Finally, the level of social access to spatial change is reflected in specific features of the urban environment like the amount and variety of visible interventions, adaptations and stratification that it is possible to recognize in the built fabric of the city across the many scales of its spatial structure, form the detailed scale of the single railing or lamp post to the large scale of the public space.

- City life can be approached directly by observing and recording the visible activities of people in public spaces or indirectly by tracking traces that people leave in the urban environment by using it. Observative quantitative techniques and the analysis of traces are applications of urban anthropology that can help in developing a deeper insight into the level and kind of use that people exhibit in the ecological dimension of their urban experience. It is assumed that a *certain* impact on urban life, in its extremely diverse manifestations, is due to how the urban environment is shaped: the level of this 'certain' and the kind of

impact that a time-conscious urban fabric shows on the local life can be assessed correlating spatially and statistically the presence and frequency of spatial features with that of people and activities in the public space of urban streets and squares. General conclusions can be drawn from local case study analysis under certain conditions and with certain limits that can inform guidelines for future developments.

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Self-assessment

[SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTION a]

Question: How can an urban designer contribute to the participation of society as a whole to spatial change in cities? How can multi-actorial change be benefited by a properly conceived design and process of development?

[FEEDBACK ON SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTION a]

Spatial change has always been the engine of cities' evolution over history. Spatial change is actually the history of cities as spatial systems to the point that if a city does no change it is most likely to be a dead city. This brings us to parallel the evolution of cities with that of many other complex systems in nature as well as in society or technology. However, the evolution of cities has witnessed a major breakdown at the beginning of the XX century when a massive jump of scale in spatial as well as financial factors and the emerging of modern city planning provoked a rupture with the fundamental habits that had been ruling the building of cities for ages. The cultural

shift introduced by modernism as the mainstream paradigm in the new discipline of urban planning brought to subverting several principles that lay at the very heart of traditional urbanism and deeply affect the adaptability of urban space to piecemeal, bottom-up growth. Among these principle we recognize (see in particular, Caniggia and Maffei, 2001):

The evolution of traditional cities progressed at four scales:

1. The building
2. The aggregation
3. The urban organism
4. The regional organism

Key: all scales are spatially strictly interrelated: what happens at one scale has deep impacts at the others

The investigation of traditional urban fabrics' evolution is especially relevant for an urban designer at the scales of building aggregation (2) and urban organism (3). Here we can see that:

- Some lots (red) are larger and more complex than others: these are special (extraordinary) buildings which follow, to some extent, rules that are different from those that apply to basic (ordinary) buildings. Special buildings often form an urban block by themselves, are mainly placed at most central locations and are especially relevant as 'poles' for the shaping of the network of principal urban streets. But the evolution of a city as an organism for the daily life of a human community is mainly the history of its basic, ordinary buildings aggregated over a network of public spaces. This is what we call urban 'fabric'.

- *Street centrality* affects the size of lots and, with that, the type and the size of buildings within lots; corner buildings may for example, after time, get larger if the corner is central, or thinner if it is marginal. Recent research confirms that street centrality also heavily affects the location of land uses such as retail commerce and service. Finally, street centrality impacts on the human presence on the streets.

The analysis of traditional urban fabrics reveals that very often:

- Buildings are located at edge of lots (perimetral lots, light red); they follow a rule of solar orientation, with more density at the northern edge of the lot. The cause of this is the derivation of all basic fabrics from the archetypical iso-solar 'domus' type.

- Lots' disposition is generally perpendicular to the street of reference; that allows understanding, in urban fabrics of our days, the diachronic order of their historical formation.

- *Layouts of lots and properties* are among the most lasting urban materials. They emerge as key factors in the evolution of city spaces in that they tighten together the scale of the building to that of the aggregation and that of the urban organism (streets).

The *process of formation*, in fact, often obeys to a growth rule like the following:

- The settlement emerges at a spatial location (most often a *street*) that is *central*, which means that it is 'prominent' among all other spaces in the system for the very basic characteristics of its geography (length and geometry) and topology (the way it is connected to all others). That street is called Generator Path.

- Lots grow on both edges of the Generator Path.

- Perpendicular to the Generator Path, secondary ways are traced that we call Path of Settlement, then lined with lots on both sides as well.

- The Path of Settlement are generally parallel at a distance equal to the depth of two property areas (lots): therefore lots gets back-to-back in the middle of the block. Where the block gets less than 20-30 meters lots cross the block from street to street.

- Parallel to the Generator Path, at a certain distance from it, a third level of street closes the loop, the Path of Connection, then lined by lots as the density of the fabric increases.

It is only at the completion of this *process of formation* that an urban area gets completely enclosed within the

borders of four (or more) streets and an urban block is formed. This leads to an important achievement that should be taken into account in the delivery of time-conscious urban design schemes for the contemporary city: *the urban block is a resulting form, not a unit of design*. That means to avoid the design of urban blocks as if they where over-sized pieces of architecture and to privilege, on the contrary, the formation of the block as an outcome of the development of perimetral lots.

This calls into question the need for good *design codes* that guarantee consistency at the level of the urban structure and, at the same time, save the largest possible space for the personal initiatives of single landowners and designers. The resulting time-conscious model for the contemporary age should, therefore, look back to the *disjointed process* that was typical of traditional settlements' evolution, where leading actors were different at every stage, and at every scale, of development, and reframe it under a mainly performative system of control based, as for the spatial dimension, on advanced masterplanning and design-coding.

What are the spatial/physical characteristics of a compact-sustainable neighbourhood developed in the late Nineteens that exhibits clues of time-consciousness, like for instance the Java Island in Amsterdam, that you would expect to find literally reversed in, say, a massive social housing built up in the late Sixties, like Hulme in Manchester, after a personal visit to both sites?

I would expect to find the following spatial features in the compact-sustainable neighbourhood:

- An urban core with retail commerce and services located at a nodal street intersection rather than in internal 'green' areas served by local streets.
- A high to medium dwelling/ha density with a reasonably high coverage rate rather than a similar density by means of high-rise slabs and 'towers-in-the-park' at low coverage density.
- A number of small to medium size lots with one or few dwellings each rather than just one gigantic lot with many buildings and dwellings inside.
- A vast diversity of lot geometries, sizes and building types rather than a few standardized ones.
- Mostly perimeter blocks rather than mostly a helter-skelter of individual buildings disseminated in a field-like open space.
- Mostly small to medium size, closed blocks rather than mostly gigantic super-blocks filled with green public areas and services.
- Liveable streets that offer a shared environment rather than a hierarchy of specialized streets designed for separating users and activities.
- A significant amount of old, ordinary buildings at different levels of maintenance and grading, if possible, rather than just new similar buildings.
- Traces of a noble past in the environment, like old prominent buildings, if possible.
- Traces of care, changes, and a stratification of meanings, and different details, at every scale of the built environment, rather than a standardized level of maintenance, no matter if good or not, throughout entire parts of the estate.

- A general prevalence of the unexpected and the personalized over the by-law or the mass-produced.
- A certain, significant, level of functional mix in the housing stock, especially at the ground floor close to most central areas and streets, rather than vast mono-functional spaces with specialized districts.
- An human-scaled interconnected street layout where, after a certain experience of the place, it is relatively easy to move around, rather than a grand-scale hierarchical network of car-oriented roads separated from a minor network of segregated local streets and cul-de-sacs.

What are the social dynamics that you would expect to find in a visit to a compact-sustainable neighbourhood that might be closely related to its time-conscious spatial features? Please make it clear both the kind of dynamics and the time-conscious spatial features you would think being related.

I would expect to find the following social dynamics in the compact-sustainable neighbourhood related to its time-conscious spatial features:
- *More, and more diverse, people on the streets* as the many different personal streetscape solutions, the perimetral edification of closed urban blocks and the variety of land uses, both at the ground-floor and in the rest of the building stock, make the neighbourhood more attractive, safe and friendly and the network of public streets and squares the only stage for human co-presence and face-to-face exchange.
- A *greater variety in the social asset of the community*, as a housing stock at different grading level favours a wider affordability both for residential uses and for commercial and economic initiatives in general.
- A *fairer balance between motor vehicle users and other street-users*, because the very presence of people on the streets contributes to what Jane Jacobs (1961) called the 'attrition' of the city on the automobile.
- More *shops and services at walking distance*, because the street centrality driven mechanism of urban fabric's growth leads 'naturally' to a strict interconnectedness between density, accessibility and the location of shops and services at least at the scale of neighbourhoods and districts.