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Tangible Qualities of Good Urban Design

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Abstract

In the last few decades' cities experienced social and spatial structural change. Management of cities requires the use of innovative, sophisticated planning tools (especially instruments of good urban design) that can assist in monitoring current conditions and projecting future developments.

In this paper the tangible aspects of good urban design is proposed to assess the current and future development of a city. It allows for a systematic analysis of the interactions among spatial coherence and townscape structure, building design quality and external appearance, security and safety and sustainability and eco-design.

The central focus in this article is to define the importance of following variables the tangible qualities of good urban design: spatial coherence and townscape structure buildings, which have a collective value when seen together and create places that are distinctive and understandable; building design quality and external appearance (buildings that are designed to be visually appropriate, attractive and fit for the purpose, providing architectural quality); security and safety (places that are intrinsically safer by design); sustainability and eco-design significantly (buildings and schemes that are more energy efficient). The main goal of this article is: to investigate how tangible qualities of good urban design operate in the consciousness of the examined group (employees/employers at design studios and students of design from the School of Form in Poznań and the Jan Kochanowski University).

Key Words: *Sociology, urban, city, design, good urban design.*

Introduction: Writing from the perspective of an urban sociologist, I am particularly attuned to the relevance of place to social life. I think that place matters for social life. All action is embedded in a place, especially in city where most of us live. The study of urban sociology explains, inter alia, how city spaces emerged and have changed over time. Generally, urban sociology is a normative discipline of sociology seeking to study the structures, processes, changes and problems of an urban area and by doing so provide inputs for planning and policy making.

The main aspects of urban social structure are various types of inequalities in the space of cities¹.

Because sociocultural, economic, environmental and institutional processes have become increasingly intertwined in cities, city management has become a complex undertaking. This is mainly because of globalization processes, technological development, and advances in knowledge about cities and the environment². On the other side, rapid urbanization, combined with uncontrolled urban growth, leads to urban sprawl, which results in the ineffective use of urban infrastructure or low density³.

¹ J. Musil, *Fifty Years of Urban Sociology* [in:] *Advances in Sociological Knowledge*, ed. N. Genov, Springer, Fachmedien-Wiesbaden 2004, p. 293.

² J. Rotmans, M. van Asselt, P. Vellinga, *An integrated planning tool for sustainable cities*, "Environmental Impact Assessment Review" 2000, Vol. 20, Issue 3, p. 266.

³ J. Dirk, J. van Rensburg, M. Maléne, *The Management of Urban Sprawl by Applying an Urban Edge Strategy*, "Urban Forum" 2012, Vol. 23, p. 61.

Typical urban landscape is a kind of complex socioeconomic-natural ecosystem⁴. The mass migration to the cities creates a significant challenge for city planners as they work to create a sustainable infrastructure to support the vast population growth, whilst being sensitive to the preservation of cultural heritage and historic landmarks as well as existing structures already shaping the development of the dense conurbation. Ensuring that environmental awareness and protection, economic growth and social wellbeing also remain at the heart of a city's urban strategy⁵. All that aspects should be complemented by the idea of good urban design.

Trends in Urban Theory: Epochal change is often a source of new types of urban capabilities⁶. These days we face with a growing debate about the range and substance of the city. The term "urban studies"⁷ evokes an image of an approach that draws on a great variety of theories and disciplines across the social sciences.

The branches within sociology that deal with space are normally referred to as "urban sociology" or, with Tonboe's more neutral term, "sociology of space"⁸. Urban sociology dates back to the work of the early German sociologists, who focused on the social reality of the new metropolis of the nineteenth century, such as Berlin and Vienna. It was consolidated by American sociologists associated with what has become known as the Chicago School of Sociology. Like the German sociologists, their point of departure was social life as it was shaped by the new metropolis and Chicago in particular⁹.

In the early and middle decades of the 20th century, a sort of orthodoxy, based on the work of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, could be said to dominate in urban analysis. Classical statements of scholars like Park¹⁰, Burgess and McKenzie, Wirth, and Zorbaugh dealt with the city. By the late 1960s, however, the ideas of this school of thought were coming under critical scrutiny, especially by Castells. By the early 1970s, then, the main traces of the Chicago School were being swept away by a stream of Marxist and marxist approaches pioneered by Castells, Lefebvre and Harvey who insisted on a concept of the city as a theater of class struggle and domain of political claims about rights to urban space and resources¹¹.

The 1980s brought several additional conceptual conceptions to bear on cities. First, feminist scholars like Massey and McDowell presented a strong analytical framework focused on gender dimensions of cities, and further, helped to revitalize an older set of attention about ethnicity, race and class in cities. Second, there is an increasingly interest in the globalization on city-forming processes – e.g. Wolff and Sassen. Third, there is a steady flow of research on urban politics and governance – e.g. Brenner, Cochrane, Jessop. All of these different lines of urban research continue to develop and grow at the present time¹².

⁴ H. Chang, Z. Li, R. Wang, Y. Wang, *Urban landscape pattern design from the viewpoint of networks: A case study of Changzhou city in South China*, "Ecological Complexity" 2011, Vol. 8, Issue 1, p. 51.

⁵ T. Saaty, M. Sagir, *Global awareness, future city design and decision making*, „Journal of Systems Science and Systems Engineering" 2012, Vol. 21, Issue 3, p. 340.

⁶ S. Sassen, *Does the City Have Speech*, "Public Culture" 2013, Vol. 25, No. 2, p. 212.

⁷ Examining social relations as "relations of space" was central to Robert E. Park's formulation of the "science" of urban sociology, Ch. Heap, *The City as a Sexual Laboratory: The Queer Heritage of the Chicago School*, "Qualitative Sociology" 2003, Vol. 26, Issue 4, p. 456.

⁸ J. C. Tonboe, *From Urban Theory to the Sociology of Space* [in:] *Research in Urban sociology: Gentrification and Urban Change*, ed. Hutchison, JAI Press, Greenwich 1992.

⁹ N. Steino, *Vision, Plan and Reality – urban design between conceptualization and realization*, PhD Thesis, Aarhus School of Architecture, August 2003, p. 101.

¹⁰ A. J. Cortese, *The rise, hegemony, and decline of the Chicago School of Sociology, 1892-1945*, "The Social Science Journals" 1995, Vol. 32, Issue 3, p. 237.

¹¹ A. J. Scott, M. Storper, *The nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory*, May 2013. Forthcoming: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, p. 4. Source: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/whosWho/profiles/Michael%20Storper/pdf/NatureofCities.pdf>

¹² A. J. Scott, M. Storper, *The nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory*, May 2013. Forthcoming: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, p. 5. Source: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/whosWho/profiles/Michael%20Storper/pdf/NatureofCities.pdf>

Additionally, the contemporary and future nature of cities is captured in watchwords such as the postmodern city, the fragmented city, the dual city and the creative city¹³.

Design and city: The city concept and design of its new urbanism, is becoming more and more of a strategic tool in the global competition of knowledge¹⁴. Design of the built environment of cities as well as creating places is the basic contents of urban design¹⁵.

Design is a creative activity whose aim is to establish the multi-faceted qualities of objects, processes, services and their systems in whole life cycles. Therefore, design is the central factor of innovative humanisation of technologies¹⁶.

Beginning with the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain in the 19th century, the relationship between design and social issues was a main concern. Dutch design historian J.W. Drukker equally affirms this view that social engagement was a main driver of design theory from the time of the emergence of the profession of designer in the context of industrialization¹⁷.

Table. Design policy generations

Generation	The changing role of design in policy
First generation technology push 1950s to mid-60s	Designers treated as secondary actors. Design viewed as mainly an aesthetic or surface activity
Second generation market pull mid-1960s to 1970s	As in first generation policies, designers viewed as a part of the development phase of products once opportunities have been identified by marketing personnel. Designers and market research have carried out detailed studies on the sociological needs.
Third generation coupling models mid-1970s – 1980s	Design emerging as a core product development function but with low visibility in national policy making.
Fourth generation integrated model early 1980s to 1990	Design becomes clearly visible and intrinsic innovation function. Design gaining more visibility in policy but not yet “on the radar” of innovation policy makers continue to privilege R&D as a key innovation instrument.
Fifth generation systems integration and networking post -1990	The prominence of design in innovation strategy leads policy makers to highlight design as a core element of policy and to promote design in official statements

Source: M. Hobday, A. Boddington, A. Grantham, *Policies for design and policies for innovation: Contrasting perspectives and remaining challenges*, “Technovation” 2012, Vol. 32, p. 276.

Taking into consideration the aspect of design activism there should be underlined design’s central role in: (1) supporting social change, (2) raising consciousness about values and beliefs (e.g., in relation to climate change, sustainability, etc.), or (3) questioning the constraints that consumerism place on people’s everyday life. Design activism, in this context includes areas such e.g. urban design¹⁸.

Table. Objectives of urban design

Character:	To promote character in townscape and landscape by
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¹³ A. J. Scott, M. Storper, *The nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory*, May 2013.

Forthcoming: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, p. 5. Source:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/whosWho/profiles/Michael%20Storper/pdf/NatureofCities.pdf>

¹⁴ L. Edvinsson, *Aspects of the city as a knowledge tool*, “Journal of Knowledge Management” 2006, Vol. 10, No. 5, p. 9.

¹⁵ K. Cai, J. Wang, *Urban design based on public safety – Discussion on safety-based urban design*, „Frontiers of Architecture and Civil Engineering in China” 2009, Vol. 3, Issue 2, p. 220.

¹⁶ B. Bochińska, I. Palczewska, *Diagnoza stanu wzornictwa*, Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego, Warszawa 2008, p. 5.

¹⁷ S. Dorrestijn, P-P. Verbeek, *Technology, Wellbeing and Freedom: The Legacy of Utopian Design* “International Journal of Design” 2013, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 47.

¹⁸ T. Markussen, *The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics*, “Design Issues” 2013, Vol. 29, Issue 1, p. 38.

A place with its own identity	responding to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture
Continuity and enclosure: A place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished	To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas
Quality of the public realm: A place which attractive and successful outdoor areas	To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people
Ease of movement: A place that easy to get to and move through	To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport
Legibility: A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand	To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable route, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around
Adaptability: A place that can change easily	To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions
Diversity: A place with variety and choice	To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs

Source: M. Biddulph, *Urban design, regeneration and entrepreneurial city*, "Progress in Planning" 2011, Vol. 76, Issue 2, p. 69.

In general, the physical urban environment can be shaped through various planning and design processes: urban planning (integrated city-wide planning/spatial planning/land use management); civil engineering (planning and design of infrastructure, e.g., roads and sanitation); architecture (building design); transport planning; and urban design/landscape architecture (design of public spaces)¹⁹.

In the context of urban renewal and new urbanism, networked individualism introduces challenges to conventional understandings of "place" and "public places"²⁰. Places are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not²¹.

This understanding opens up opportunities for city planning and urban studies to re-conceptualise their understanding of community and neighbourhood planning in the light of network ICTs. However, such a re-conceptualisation has not yet been achieved because of a lack of understandings of the freedom and constraints and the social and cultural meanings that urban dwellers derive from their use of location-based ICTs²².

Methodology and hypothesis development: The main goal of this article is: to investigate how tangible qualities of good urban design operate in the consciousness of the examined group.

The main research problem explored in this paper is: what is the attitude of the employees/employers at design studios and students of design from the School of Form in Poznań and the Jan Kochanowski University towards aspects defining good urban design.

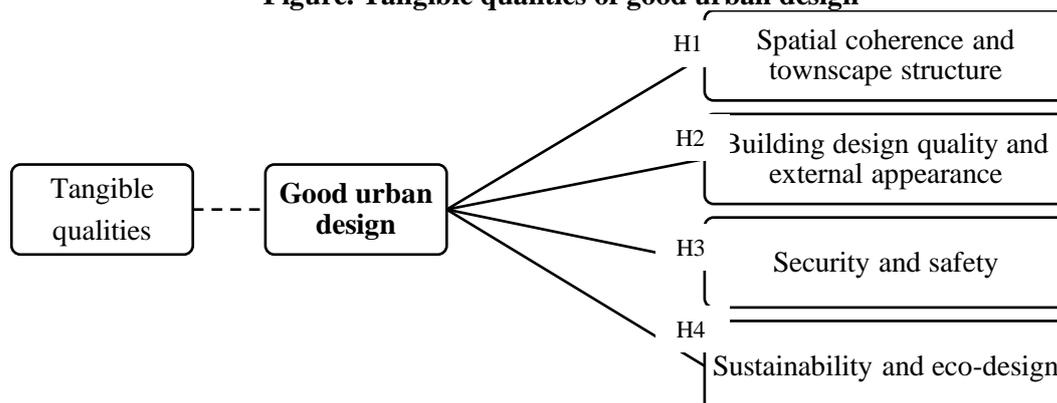
¹⁹ W. Smith, T. Hancock, J. Kumaresen, C. Santos-Burgola, M. R. Sanchez-Kobashi, *Toward a Research and Action Agenda on Urban Planning/Design and Health Equity in Cities in Low and Middle-Income Countries*, "Journal of Urban Health" 2011, Vol. 88, Issue 5, p. 876.

²⁰ M. Foth, B. Adkins, *A Research Design to Build Effective Partnerships between City Planners, Developers, Government and Urban Neighbourhood Communities*, "The Journal of Community Informatics" 2006, Vol. 2, No. 2.

²¹ T. F. Gieryn, *A Space for Place in Sociology*, "Annual Review of Sociology" 2000, vol. 26, p. 472.

²² M. Foth, B. Adkins, *A Research Design to Build Effective Partnerships between City Planners, Developers, Government and Urban Neighbourhood Communities*, "The Journal of Community Informatics" 2006, Vol. 2, No. 2.

Figure. Tangible qualities of good urban design



Source: Own analysis.

The detailed research problems explored in this paper are:

- Q1: What is the significance of spatial coherence and townscape structure in defining tangible qualities of good urban design?
- Q2: What is the significance of building design quality and external appearance in defining tangible qualities of good urban design?
- Q3: What is the significance of security and safety in defining tangible qualities of good urban design?
- Q4: What is the significance of sustainability and eco-design in defining tangible qualities of good urban design?

The detailed hypotheses explored in this paper are:

- H1: Spatial coherence and townscape structure significantly defines tangible qualities good urban design;
- H2: Building design quality and external appearance significantly defines tangible qualities good urban design;
- H3: Security and safety significantly defines tangible qualities good urban design;
- H4: Sustainability and eco-design significantly defines tangible qualities good urban design.

An open-ended online survey instrument was developed for this study. Data were collected from practicing designers, and students of design from the School of Form in Poznań and the Jan Kochanowski University.

To encourage response and to speed the data gathering process, I constructed an Internet-based survey. The questionnaire was published in February 2014 and closed one month later.

The survey received a total of 43 responses (15 employees/employers at design companies; 18 students of design – from the Concordia Design in Poznań; 10 students of design – from the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce).

To verify assumed hypotheses there were used measures of descriptive statistics (analysis of the frequency).

Data analysis and results: The first question concerned spatial coherence and townscape structure (buildings, which have a collective value when seen together and create places that are distinctive and understandable). In the opinion of employees/employers at design companies and design students from the School of Form in Poznań, spatial coherence and townscape structure significantly define good urban design (respectively 86,7% and 83,3% of respondents). In comparison to the above the Jan Kochanowski University students of design are more skeptical (only 60%).

Table. What defines good urban design - spatial coherence and townscape structure (buildings, which have a collective value when seen together and create places that are distinctive and understandable)

Profession		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employees/employers at design	Valid No	13,3	13,3	13,3
	Valid Yes	86,7	86,7	100,0

		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – School of Form in Poznan	Valid	No	16,7	16,7	16,7
		Yes	83,3	83,3	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – The Jan Kochanowski University	Valid	No	40,0	40,0	40,0
		Yes	60,0	60,0	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own analysis.

The second question concerned building design quality and external appearance (buildings that are designed to be visually appropriate, attractive and fit for the purpose, providing architectural quality). Generally answers of all respondent groups were similar (range from 66,7% to 77,7%) in the indication that building design quality and external appearance is an important variable defining good urban design.

Table. What defines good urban design - building design quality and external appearance (buildings that are designed to be visually appropriate, attractive and fit for the purpose, providing architectural quality)

Profession			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employees/employers at design	Valid	No	33,3	33,3	33,3
		Yes	66,7	66,7	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – School of Form in Poznan	Valid	No	22,2	22,2	22,2
		Yes	77,8	77,8	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – The Jan Kochanowski University	Valid	No	30,0	30,0	30,0
		Yes	70,0	70,0	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own analysis.

The third question dealt with security and safety (places that are intrinsically safer by design). In all analyzed groups security and safety weren't important aspect of good urban design (range from 6,7% to 33%).

Table. What defines good urban design - Security and safety (places that are intrinsically safer by design)

Profession			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employees/employers at design	Valid	No	93,3	93,3	93,3
		Yes	6,7	6,7	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – School of Form in Poznan	Valid	No	66,7	66,7	66,7
		Yes	33,3	33,3	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – The Jan Kochanowski University	Valid	No	90,0	90,0	90,0
		Yes	10,0	10,0	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own analysis.

The last aspect contained sustainability and eco-design (buildings and schemes that are more energy efficient). Respectively to security and safety, sustainability and eco-design weren't important aspect of good urban design (range from 13,3% to 33,3%).

Table. What defines good urban design - Sustainability and eco-design (buildings and schemes that are more energy efficient)

Profession			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Employees/employers at design	Valid	No	86,7	86,7	86,7
		Yes	13,3	13,3	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – School of Form in Poznan	Valid	No	66,7	66,7	66,7
		Yes	33,3	33,3	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	
Design students – The Jan Kochanowski University	Valid	No	80,0	80,0	80,0
		Yes	20,0	20,0	100,0
		Total	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own analysis.

Discussion and Conclusions: This study examined the main research problem from which it follows, how presented tangible qualities of good urban design operate in the consciousness of the examined group.

Table. The detailed hypotheses verification

	Hypothesis	Verification
H1	building design quality and external appearance significantly defines tangible qualities of good urban design	+
H2	spatial coherence and townscape structure significantly defines tangible qualities of good urban design	+
H3	security and safety significantly defines tangible qualities of good urban design	-
H4	sustainability and eco-design significantly defines tangible qualities of good urban design	-

Source: Own analysis.

In all analyzed groups “coherence and townscape structure” and “building design quality and external appearance” were defined as an important quality of good urban design. On the other side “security and safety” and “sustainability and eco-design” weren’t so significant factors of good urban design.

Conclusions: Tangible aspects of good urban design are associated mainly with: building design quality and external appearance (buildings that are designed to be visually appropriate, attractive and fit for the purpose, providing architectural quality); and building design quality and external appearance (buildings that are designed to be visually appropriate, attractive and fit for the purpose, providing architectural quality). It may be assumed that, as for now: security and safety (places that are intrinsically safer by design); and sustainability and eco-design (buildings and schemes that are more energy efficient) are “in the lap of the gods”.

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