

Vitality of The Cities

Sena Işıklar*

Gazi University Department of Architecture, 06570 Maltepe Ankara / Turkey

Abstract: The physical formation of city, where all members of society live, is created by non-living and tangible elements such as buildings, roads, public squares, and vegetation. On the other hand, city acquires meaning by the existence of citizens, who reinvigorate it, their behaviours within the city and the interactions between them as well as with the city. The more the citizens are actively present in the streets, the more the city is a vivid and living place. There are many studies on vitality and liveability in urban spaces. In this study, urban vitality is defined according to the information gathered from previous researches. By scrutinizing the definitions of vitality made by Lynch and Jacobs, who are leading figures in the subject of research, social interaction, sense of belongingness, and security, inclusion of different functions, transformability, aesthetics and accessibility were identified as criteria determining the urban vitality. As a result of the study, it is asserted that the cities which bear these qualifications are liveable and vivid places which can maintain their existence.

Keywords: Vitality, living cities, liveability, city, user.

1. QUALITIES IMPROVING THE VITALITY OF CITIES

In urban spaces, survival of individuals is depended on their ability to meet their needs from their environment. These needs are defined by Lynch and Jacobs as the sources of “vitality”. In dictionaries vitality is defined as “exuberant physical strength or mental vigour; capacity for survival or for the continuation of a meaningful or purposeful existence; and power to live or grow” [1].

Lynch, defines vitality as the degree to which the individual can acquire his/her nutrition, safety and ergonomic needs from environment; above all his/her survival [2].

Jacobs, on the other hand, defines vitality through the interactions between the individuals on the streets. Jacobs prioritizes individual and social life over physical needs in urban planning [3]. According to her, space should be alive likewise the people in order to provide individual and social life. For her, features such as the variety of spatial practices and scheduling activities to different hours of a day are signs of urban vitality.

The qualities that increase the vitality of cities are sorted from Lynch's and Jacobs' definitions paraphrased above. The titles selected are;

- Social interaction,
- Individual's sense of safety and belongingness towards the space.

- Provision of different needs in city quarters, homogenous distribution of spatial practices in the schedule,
- Active use of open/semi open/closed spaces, where individual can satisfy his/her personal and social needs, realize daily life practices,
- Provision of ergonomic conditions,
- Transformability of units according to the needs of the era,
- Provision of aesthetic criteria satisfying the visual needs,
- Citizens' ability to access social networks.

These qualities are explained below:

1.1. Social Interaction

Space, apart from its physical dimensions, is a phenomenon having a social dimension [4]. According to Rapoport, spatial characteristics of built environment configure the social organization by influencing communication of users. Social interaction and behaviours are based on nuncupative rules and individuals' roles within society. These roles appear stationary as signs, shops and objects in the space and semi-stationary as interactions between individuals [5].

Social interaction in urban spaces legitimizes the existence of the community by creating the balance in the city [6]. In the urban plans, which are based on the principle that the urban spaces are a cultural product [7], vitality of individuals interacting with each other makes the space a living environment.

*Address correspondence to this author at the Gazi University Department of Architecture, 06570 Maltepe Ankara / Turkey; E-mail: sena.isiklar@gmail.com

According to Gehl, users find chance to observe other's behaviours, habits and life styles by running across each other. These interactions are restricted to seeing and hearing unknown people. When human interactions are categorized into two as low density and high density interactions, interactions set in the urban environment fall into low density interactions based on visual and auditory senses. With the aid of increasing interaction density as a result of brief conversations between individuals, users obtain information and experiences about outer world from each other [8]. Therefore, as a result of realization of learning and communication activities between individuals in urban spaces [9] city becomes an area allowing exchange of ideas, friendships, skills and etc.

1.2. Safety and Sense of Belongingness

Feelings towards the space are based on parameters such as the observer's cultural condition, his/her experiences and goals [2]. Diversification of feelings through different individuals and places is

influential on the spatial practices. Of these feelings, safety and sense of belongingness, pave the way for development of genuine behaviours by allowing the individual to internalise the place he/she is present and see him/herself as a part of it. With this contribution to cities, safety and sense of belongingness are counted among the qualities increasing the vitality of cities.

1.2.1. Safety

In addition to personal, social and cultural needs, humans also need to feel safe [10]. Safety is highly associated with the survival instinct [11]. Spatial features that cover these needs of users should also be considered in the planning process.

According to Gehl, a quality design has three main schemas; these are protection, comfort and enjoyment [12]. The notion of protection is classified into three categories: protection against traffic; protection against crime and violence (safety) and protection against unpleasant sense experiences.

**DESIGNING / DETAILING THE PUBLIC SPACES
A KEY WORD LIST**

PROTECTION	<p>1. PROTECTION AGAINST TRAFFIC& ACCIDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Traffic Accidents -Fear of traffic -Other accidents 	<p>2. PROTECTION AGAINST CRIME&VIOLENCE (FEELING SAFETY)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lived in/ used -Streetlife -Streetwatchers -Overlapping functions in space&time 	<p>3. PROTECTION AGAINST UNPLEASANT SENSE EXPERIENCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wind/ draft -Rain/ snow -Culd/ heat -Pollution -Dust, glare, noise 	
	COMFORT	<p>4. POSSIBILITIES FOR WALKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Room for walking -Untiering layout of streets -Interesting facades -No obstacles -Good surfaces 	<p>5. POSSIBILITIES FOR STANDING/ STAYING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attractive edges -Edge effects -Defined spots for staying -Supports for staying 	<p>6. POSSIBILITIES FOR SITTING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Zones for sitting -Maximising advantages primary and secondary sitting possibilities -Benhes for resting
		<p>7. POSSIBILITIES TO SEE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seeing-distances -Unhindered views -Interesting Views -Lighting (when dark) 	<p>8. POSSIBILITIES FOR HEARING/TALKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Low noise level -Bench arrangements talkscapes 	<p>9. POSSIBILITIES FOR WALKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Invitation to physical activities, play, unfolding & entertainment day&night and summer&winter
ENJOYMENT	<p>10. SCALE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dimensions of buildings & spaces in observance of the important human dimensions related to senses, movements, size & behaviour 	<p>11. POSSIBILITIES FOR ENJOYING POSITIVE ASPECTS OF CLIMATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sun/ shade -Warmth/ coolness -Breeze/ ventilation 	<p>12. AESTETIC QUALITY/ POSITIVE SENSE EXPERIENCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Good design & good detailing -Views/ vistas -Trees, plants, water 	

Figure 1: Keywords related to urban life [12].

schema, feeling of safety is obtained through lived and used spaces; street life; street watchers and overlapping functions in space and time (Figure 1).

Jacobs describes the most important feature of a successful city quarter as an individual feeling safe while walking in the street among strangers [3]. She asserts that the level of safety in street would increase in parallel to the increase in the number of users and diversity of actions in the space; and as a result, mutual protection, vitality and social interaction would emerge. Presence of permanent users of the space and usability of space in different hours of a day are important factors for emergence of the feeling of safety [3]. Permanent watchers in the space provide protection for children playing and adults wandering around. These permanent watchers are essential for premonition of potential crimes and violence by sorting out local habitants and strangers [3].

1.2.2. Sense of Belongingness

The sense of belongingness has sociological and psychological dimensions. The sociological dimension of the sense of belongingness is associated with image and meaning of built environment reshaped by individuals' location and the place of society while the psychological dimension is related to individuals' feeling of attachment to their society and culture [11].

Emotional and functional ties are completely different. A user establishes emotional bounds with spaces that have meaning and value for him/her while he/she sets functional ties with the spaces in order to maintain particular activities [13]. Cities calls for a unity

between space and humans and create emotional meanings in spaces. Because of these features, while vital activities take place, the sense of belongingness towards the urban spaces emerge ipso facto [14].

Kahraman quotes Lovell's ideas of sense of ownership and belongingness as following:

The base of the relationship between human and space is making the space a shelter to him / herself, that is the sense of ownership. The basic instinct of an individual, who does not feel belong to someone or a place, who is alienated to that place is to leave that place. In that sense, in addition to the potential of binding individuals to space and social relationships, sense of belongingness creates notion and/or aspiration of there-being emotionally. This emotional attraction of space exists by emphasizing origin or originlessness [15].

According to Baker, there should be communication, interaction and social activities between individuals for emergence of the sense of belongingness [16]. These elements determine satisfaction. Humans feel safe in urban places that they feel they belong to. This feeling of safety provides spatial satisfaction and development of permanent users.

In the diagram prepared by Montgomery based on Punter's study (Figure 2) it is illustrated that the sense of place, in other words the sense of belongingness felt in space is formed by activities in the place, its physical settings and meanings attributed to it [17].

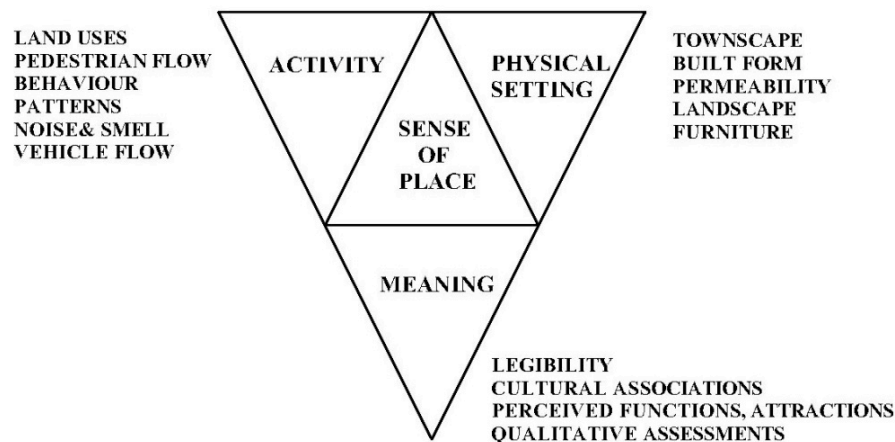


Figure 2: Components of the sense of belongingness [17].

1.3. Existence of Different Uses

According to Gehl, existence of different uses in the space is an attractive factor for users. People use a street only as a passageway in case there is not enough dynamism on it [8]. Presence of a particular unit or an activity on a street could make that street acquire importance [18]. For instance, places of commerce and entertainment perform as “social glues” attracting citizens towards themselves [19]. In these places, individuals get acquainted with each other, accumulate memories about the place.

According to Jacobs, the more the number of people in the street, the more vivid the place is. Making the street attractive and creating a vivid city are possible only by fulfilling the needs of individuals. Diversity and continuity of functions encourage day and night life in the city. In this way, a proportion between the number of users in a particular hour in a day and other hours would be maintained [3]. Jacobs describes the importance of presence of people in the streets of the city in different hours of a day as following:

On successful city streets, people must appear at different times...If this spread of street use spreads a variety of consumer needs or tastes through time of day, all sorts of uniquely urban and specialized services and shops can make out, and this is a process that builds upon itself. The more intricately mixed, and therefore efficient, (the pools of users are, the more: services and shops there can be that need to sift their clientele from all sorts of population, and in turn the more people are drawn [3].

In order to sustain human activities exhibited in spaces, people should be encouraged to spend more time in these places by fulfilling their physical needs [8]. According to Montgomery, places which are equipped with architectural form, scale, landmarks, panoramic views, gathering places, open spaces, vegetation etc. are more preferable for people [17]. One of these elements, lighting, encourages people to meet in evening and night times by urging the feeling of safety. In addition to lighting elements, accessories such as urban furniture can be installed in the place. Urban furniture can create better performing places [20]. Of the urban furniture, sitting units are divided into primary and secondary sitting units. Primary sitting units are chairs and benches while the secondary sitting units are stair steps and low walls. Sitting units installed in walking itineraries in certain intervals would allow citizens to rest, communicate with each other and

observe their environment. In order to increase the time spent in urban spaces, resting places should be configured with protective elements against external conditions such as sun beams, wind and rain. These elements, with their sharp and/or smooth lines define the borders of the place and thus contribute to the feeling of safety and closeness to human scale [9].

1.4. Transformability

Changing of needs in time is unavoidable. Transformability of functions in the space and their derivability from each other is considered important for maintaining vitality of the space and fulfilling demands of individuals [9]. Transformable streets which have the capacity to meet the changing needs of community can offer space for shopping, spectacles, games and local celebrations. Transformation program for the streets can be prepared with the aid of fast, affordable and temporary solutions [21]. Therefore, the streets which have lost its old importance can be attached new functions.

1.5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics is the order of the way of looking, prudence and taste. It is the set of rules making taste concrete. The basic meaning of beauty is acquired through the aesthetics [22]. “Every problem in the aesthetics is related to beauty. Therefore, the aesthetics is defined as the science or knowledge of beauty” [22]. However, since the aesthetics is not a positive science, its scientific explanation is not possible [23]. The aesthetics is open to elucidations. As told by Dufrenne “Before the aesthetic object, every observer is a speculator in his/her own way...” [22].

Urban aesthetics can be analysed in two ways as formal and symbolical aesthetics. Symbolical aesthetics is defined as the emotional reactions of individuals towards forms while formal aesthetics is described in terms of form, proportion, rhythm, scale, colour, hierarchy, spatial relationships [24]. Aesthetics in urban places can be explained as the harmony of units assembling in different times in terms of aesthetic criteria.

Gehl states that voluntary actions are related to external conditions [8]. One of these external conditions would be considered as the urban environment bearing qualities that satisfy individuals’ visual needs, and stimulate their desires to be there. At present day, the influence of aesthetic criteria on

reshaping of individuals' lives and their happiness is considered almost as a fact [23]. In this respect, in the planning process, it should be kept in mind that new buildings to be added to the built environment and modifications in the existing buildings can affect the quality of street view [24].

1.6. Accessibility

Accessibility is considered as a factor for maintaining the space, its integration with the users and convincing individuals to be present in that space. Main criteria of accessibility within a city are described as accessibility to;

- Key services and facilities,
- Routes of public transportation,
- Walking itineraries [6].

Togetherness of different units that individuals visit in their daily life such as doctor's office, post office, apothecary, grocery, bank, school, restaurant, coffee shop, library, sports facilities, playgrounds for kids, green areas and urban open areas increase the accessibility. Accessibility of public spaces in a city encourage people to move towards public environment from their private spaces [8]. By the increase of accessibility, people's participation would increase and as a result, urban place become a living space.

CONCLUSION

Urban places are invigorated by human diversity, mobility and continuity. These are the main sources of vitality. In this study, the qualities, which increase the vitality of cities, are examined under the titles of social interaction, safety and sense of belongingness, inclusion of different uses, transformability, aesthetics and accessibility.

Studies conducted in the recent years reveal out that the development of behaviours in city is related with spatial features. When the conditions of mobility are fulfilled in cities these places become meaningful. Participation of individuals in the urban life with their diversities such as age, sex, ethnic origin, economic class, social status etc. would improve vitality by creating unity and integrity. In order to achieve this, firstly, all of these human groups should be able to roam in the city safe and freely without any prevention. All citizens should be provided with places where they can maintain their social lives, express their opinions

and perform activities such as shopping, sports, walking, resting, reading, participating in spectacles, and auditing freely.

A city which bears qualities that increase vitality and citizen who maintains a quality life there would establish a mutualistic relationship. Vitality in the spaces which involve this relationship would invigorate the city and provide necessary energy and power for development of the city. It is observed that the cities, which does not have qualities of vitality, are otiose, stagnant and unfavourable places. Because the safety, the highest priority need is not achieved, people are withdrawn from these places. The economic collapse that is caused by this withdrawal may bring about many irrecoverable problems. One of the spaces that lost its vitality, urban lacunae can be used as mementos to remind the essentiality of creating and sustaining vitality.

From this point of view, cities can be transformed into attractive and lively places which invite citizens by certain measures such as providing mobility, supporting communication between people, adding functions, ordering, transforming, improving, distributing usage to different hours, adding urban accessories, increasing accessibility and adding aesthetic values.

REFERENCES

- [1] Definition of vitality. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vitality?s=t> (accessed November 22, 2017).
- [2] Lynch K. *Good City Form*, 5th ed. MIT: London 1987.
- [3] Jacobs J. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Büyük Amerikan Şehirlerinin Ölümü ve Yaşamı)*, 2th ed. Metis: İstanbul 2015.
- [4] Akgün A. Upon the Relationship Between Social Practice with Segregation Based Spatial Practice (Ayrışma-Ayrıştırma Temelli Mekansal Pratiklerin Toplumsal Pratiklerle İlişkisi Üzerine bir Çalışma). *Journal of İdeal Kent* 2014; 12: 28-39.
- [5] Rapoport A. *Human Aspects of Urban Form*, 1th ed. Pergamon Press: Oxford 1977.
- [6] Dempsey N, Bramley G, Power S and Brown C. The Social Dimension of Sustainable Development: Defining Urban Social Sustainability. *Sustainable Development* 2011; 19: 289-300. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.417>
- [7] Tekeli İ. Thoughts on The Development of an Urban Design Theory (Bir Kentsel Tasarım Kuramının Geliştirilmesi Üzerine Düşünceler). *Journal of Ege Mimarlık* 1993; 93(1.2): 53-58.
- [8] Gehl J. *Life Between Buildings*. Van Nostrand Reinhold: New York 1987.
- [9] Hajmirsadegh RS, Shamsuddin S and Foroughi A. The Impact of Physical Design Factors on The Effective Use of Public Squares. *Fundamental Journals* 2012; 2(3): 49-56.
- [10] Moore GT. *Environment-Behavior Studies, Introduction to Architecture*. McGraw-Hill: New York 1979; pp. 46-71.

- [11] Lang J. Urban Design: A Typology of Procedures and Products. Elsevier: UK 2005.
- [12] Gehl J. Public Spaces for a Changing Public Life (cited 2017 June 20): Available from: <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fplangate.no%2Fmennesker%2FGehl.pdf>
- [13] Yıldırım Erniş İl. Effects of physical elements on spatial cognition of floating spaces:Relation with environment and human behaviour (Fiziksel Elemanların Yüzer Yapılarda Mekan Algısına Olan Etkileri: Çevre ve İnsan Davranışı İlişkisi Bağlamında İrdelenmesi). Phd Thesis İzmir: Dokuz Eylül University The Graduate School of Natural And Applied Sciences 2012.
- [14] Ersin Pamukçu A. Analysis of sense of belonging and residential satisfaction and immediate environment: Example of Bakirkoy (Konut ve Yakın Çevresinde Memnuniyet ve Aidiyetin İrdelenmesi: Bakırköy örneği). Msc Thesis İstanbul: Bahçeşehir University The Graduate School of Natural And Applied Sciences 2015.
- [15] Kahraman DM. Livability and Spatial Quality in terms of Human Needs and Spatial Affordances (İnsan İhtiyaçları ve Mekansal Elverişlilik Kavramları Perspektifinde Yaşanırılık Olgusu ve Mekansal Kalite). Journal of TMMOB Planning 2014; 24(2): 74-84.
- [16] Baker EL. Public Housing Tenant Relocation: Residential Mobility, Satisfaction, and The Development of a Tenants Spatial Decision Support System. Phd Thesis Australia: University of Adelaide 2003.
- [17] Montgomery J. Making a City: Urbanity, Vitality and Urban Design. Journal of Urban Design 1998; 3(1): 93-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809808724418>
- [18] Lynch K. Image of The City (Kent İmgesi). Türkiye İş Bankası: İstanbul 2010.
- [19] Holland C, Clark A, Katz J and Peace S. Social Interactions in Urban Public Places. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: US 2007.
- [20] Whyte WH. The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. Edwards Brothers: USA 2004.
- [21] <https://www.pps.org/reference/8-principles-streets-as-places/> (accessed August 15, 2017).
- [22] Timuçin A. Aesthetic (Estetik). Bulut: İstanbul 1998.
- [23] Tapan M. Evaluation in Architecture (Mimarlıkta Değerlendirme). İTÜ: İstanbul 2004.
- [24] Nasar JL. Urban Design Aesthetics The Evaluative Qualities of Building Exteriors. Environment and Behavior 1994: 377-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001391659402600305>

Received on 04-12-2017

Accepted on 12-12-2017

Published on 14-12-2017

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15377/2409-9821.2017.04.3>

© 2017 Sena Işıklar; Avanti Publishers.

This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.