

Shared creativity – a driving force of urban development

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the design thinking strategies that are applied to solve growing urban conflicts in developing countries as an unavoidable side-effect of urbanisation throughout the world. This analysis is based on the human factor as an inter-medium, thus becoming a design element in the process of urban development. Furthermore, the individual is viewed not as a mere passive pawn, but rather as a potential vector of spontaneous social change. This can be summarized in: “How to transform the negative into the positive from what occurs as an unavoidable large-scale side effect and to make such an effect an overall positive aim by engaging average citizens to deal with urban conflicts, express their creativity and diversity, and initiate an impetus of development?”

Rapid globalisation in the 20th century has considerably changed the morphology of cities in developing countries. Based on the assumption that the western urban planning paradigm proves inefficient in developing environments, these cities tend to lose their substance as an urban phenomenon through the ill-decoded application of western models. Moreover, modern urban thought could be stuck in this rut, inducing negative background effects on the strategy and management of urban planning. A possible solution lies in involving the entire community into these processes, on grounds which exclude a specific “plan”, as its statutory basis derived from urban planning examples of developed countries, and beginning to investigate less formal methods (creativity, knowledge, skills and originality), on which developing environments could be constituted, by altering the traditional structure and concept of cities. This issue is rooted in the idea that the benefits and prosperity of cities could be derived from resources such as style, brand, design and aesthetic values. What may be even more challenging is embracing uncertainty as a formation which seeks out opportunities to add value to “options” in order to represent these as a range of “opportunities” that are not static but iterative.

This new pattern of “participatory urban design” presents a community-driven, flexible method of small steps with the aim of finding compromises and consensuses between urban actors, all of whom are mobilized to willingly integrate their customs

and needs in order to creatively track their cultural identity and to contribute to a common base of knowledge on urban patterns and processes, so as to initiate “positive feedback” in the city’s self-creation as an organic, and not mechanical, surface. This is achieved through an open and dynamic system, which integrates different scales and partial urban actions in the creation of urban spaces, events and experiences.

The method outlined herein constitutes a challenge in the redefinition of the scientific approach to urban conflicts through a creative, dynamic and iterative process of design thinking within developing environments. Its technique – involving holistic thinking, flexibility in developing strategies as well as human-centred and user-friendly concepts – blurs the boundaries between various disciplines and stakeholders, rendering a wide range of potential solutions for recombination and application, and finally generates a new vision of cities that better suits developing environments.

1 Introduction

This paper aims at investigating design thinking strategies applied for solving current urban conflicts through participatory processes. The analysis is based on a participatory action research process (of) which focuses on how the individual perceptions of average city dwellers and their creative potential could be applied in the creation and re-creation of city structures and urban planning procedures. This concept is further elaborated through a methodology of participatory design thinking workshop. This issue is grounded upon current trends, which suggest that the city encompasses culture and creativity and applies it in physical and social regeneration through participatory urban design processes.

A new era dominated by creativity, knowledge, skills and originality has totally changed the traditional structure and concepts of development and has become a new research focus. The modern definition of society therefore focuses on a simultaneous orientation towards these capacities as the resources of the future through innovative and creative investigations and actions. In these terms, society is interpreted as something organic, constantly mutating and emitting new elements; a living system through which new combinations are brought, fragmented and recomposed. This driving force within an urban environment is shaped and formed through cultural activities. The city acts as a playground for creativity, while culture is a part of the city’s soft infrastructure (Louise Nyström, *City and Culture: Cultural Processes and Urban Sustainability*). Furthermore, culture is here meant to include values, assumptions, norms and behaviours that define life situations in particular settings, which also includes* people’s feelings, wisdom, intelligence, knowledge and scientific methods (Fred Fisher: *Building Bridges through Participatory Planning*).

Meanwhile, the focus of these processes and their immediate effects have moved to less developed and poorer regions of the world as a potential market for material and intellectual goods, as well as alternative places of production. According to the imbalance of circumstances between “the old and new world”, urban processes must address developing problems, which may be identified as the following: economic problems of imbalanced development, spatial problems of rapid urban growth, environmental deterioration, and cultural collisions caused by the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. Although the urban conflicts faced by developing countries seem particularly serious and complex, the possible solutions are not radically different from those in developed countries. Moreover, the principles and aims are the same.

Finally, urban conflicts can be resolved through creativity, by applying various understandings, perspectives and interpretative keys. From this standpoint, changes and involvement in city development should not be spectacular; they are more often the results of everyday work. This is a creative process, which involves inhabitants and encourages them to participate in designing the place/environment where they live. Additionally, it provides the opportunity to rescue citizens by inserting them into society, including them into economic affairs and drawing assets from their background, culture and roots. This concept engages ordinary people from a social and cultural point of view: it involves their identity and individuality (i.e. their feelings, intellect, morals, knowledge, memory and every other human capacity), fosters positive emotional response (enjoyment, excitement, feeling of freedom, self-importance and affiliation within society) and demonstrates the coherence and cooperation of inhabitants with their immediate surroundings.

2 Analysis

2.1 Conceptual framework

- *Theory about urban development and developing environments*

The rapid development of cities in the 20th century has considerably changed the morphology of cities. What is therein produced is a city as “a collection of conceptually ill-decoded enigmas” which in the process of planning has lost its substance as an urban phenomenon (*Jean-Claude Bolay 2004*). Moving forward from this concept, the city is defined as “the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community” (*Mumford 1961*).

According to one of the leading urban theories of David Harvey and Manuel Castells, urban planning cannot be seen as an autonomous process, but as one that is constantly overlapping with current economic and social changes, which are

momentarily grounded in the development and expansion of industrial capitalism, neo-liberalism and consumerism. Urban areas are and have always been the spatial and symbolic manifestations of broader social forces (*Giddens and Birdsall 2001*). In the scope of the rise of liberal capitalism, economic conditions are the most common triggers of social actions, which increase or reduce social and environmental well-being. Production, exploitation and consumption of goods are the generators of social relationships and possible conflicts.

Therefore, the city is regarded as the most complex social phenomenon on one hand, and on the other, it is a highly-structured economic phenomenon. Every urban issue (spatial distribution, social relations and social structures) is inextricably linked to the economy, as today cities are exposed to global economic changes. Since they host the largest concentration of finance, industry and manufacturing and constitute primary markets for all products, cities are viewed as the main driving forces of development (*Sassen 1991*).

- Developing environments

The formation and re-formation of modern cities unfold through urbanization (territorial and social), globalization (of the economy, of culture, of ideologies) and change (social, innovative, potential change and spatial, territorial change). An urban setting in a broad sense, and a city as its physical and social manifestation, outwits any human attempts to imagine it. Within the compass of developing countries' environments, cities are viewed as multi-dimensional integrated systems composed of qualitatively different and semi-autonomous processes.

The theory of the modern city lends dynamism and innovation to cities of the Western World (developed countries) while modernity in cities of the South is almost exclusively reduced to development (Robinson 2006). According to the latest statistics, about 2 billion people now live in the urban environment of developing countries and almost one third of this population is estimated to be poor. Development may be therefore circumscribed as an initiative to improve the life of the poor in these cities. Moreover, the scope of the Millennium Development Goals (Goal 7 target 11) emphasises the importance to relieve the basic precarious conditions (access to water, sanitation, secure land tenure, and adequate housing space), which these poorest city dwellers live in.

Such an approach addresses the poor as a problem in urban environments and reduces their role in the urban environment and society they live in. Conversely, if they could be seen as a human capacity, which aggregates the diversity and complexity of cities, their competences and capabilities would be considered in addressing current urban conflicts and in planning the future of their cities. If every

city is a complex polygon of interactions between urban actors and actual space, then urban life is the sole product of the inventiveness of urban dwellers. Circumstantially, the city is a place which tells the story of one society and its development, its framework for social life and its subsequent collective identity milestones. It is a cultural phenomenon which, in terms of incompleteness of cities in developing countries, gives them the opportunity to constantly renew themselves.

2.2 Contextual analysis

- *The constitution of a modern urban actor*

The core definition of society refers to social actors, social practices (policies and processes), and the production and reproduction of social order. The role of an urban actor is constituted on these basic items; our reality is in constant constitution and restitution and while we continuously transform the world, we also transform ourselves (Slater 2003). These processes in an urban environment imply production and dealing with urban conflict, which thrive on inequitable power relations, cultural differences, and a set of colliding perceptions within a city and germinate from an individual level towards a socio-urban dimension.

Individuals or constituted groups within the city are the actual actors of these urban conflicts. They produce their urban environment, governed by their different values, their logical processes, influenced by their relationships and representations and driven by their aspirations. This may refer to the city as an urban phenomenon and “as the objective product of the reciprocal actions of the actors involved.”¹

This concept of society is conspicuously dependant on communication and the process of exchanging goods and knowledge, which requires the creation of networks of objects and subjects constantly in flux. Such social structures are dynamic, potent and open-ended systems, ready for any kind of innovative activities providing that they do not jeopardize their functional balance.

- *Culture and Creativity – a personalized engine for urban growth*

Modern society has evolved from a relatively rigid system to multi-dimensional and unstable social, economic and industrial entities. These systems require a new approach based on dynamics so that they can operate in their full complexity. Conversely, culture is a focal point, the "knowledge in context", which simultaneously relates to new information and communication technologies and substantially addresses modern social conflicts in a real context.

¹The definition of George Simmel interpreted by Yves Pedrazzini, Jean-Claude Bolay in Social practices and spatial changes (Jean-Claude Bolay 2004)

Generally speaking, human creativity exceeds the singularity of personal production of novelty and actually arises from the synergy of many different sources. It is a systematic rather than an individual phenomenon, which evolves from the interaction between personal activities and a socio-cultural context, and is directed towards a positive future, social change and the satisfaction of human needs (*Csikszentmihalyi 1996*). Effectively, creativity attempts to impose a human vision of the future on reality, to reformulate everyday forms of life, and struggles to respond to social problems and to build a better society.

Creativity is a process, not a status. Society is the venue where creative actions are concentrated, induced and gradually built, and creativity can be observed only in the interrelation of the system within the social boundaries where it manifests itself (*Csikszentmihalyi 1996*). Intellectual and social networks are the core stimulus of applied creativity, with adequate social mechanisms that exceed known patterns, recognize creative potential and spread innovative ideas. Creativity therefore thrives in places where there is an overall understanding of new ideas. A complex, stimulating environment, with a greater density of interactions of novel and original ideas and information, is a common ground for new insights, an inspiring setting for pursuing creative endeavours, and a stimulating factor for an open-ended approach towards the richness and complexity of the future. So, creative powers tend to gravitate toward nodes of vital activity and spatiotemporal contexts, where their capacity to generate a positive future is more likely to succeed.

Creativity thus re-shapes immediate surroundings, activities and patterns, and affects the cultural patterns in which it takes place. Conversely, traditions are in essence conservative in their tendency to preserve the achieved social order. So, it takes effort to allow creativity to express itself and to make it accessible to a broad base of people, and to prevent the stagnation caused by centrality within tradition. The process of continuous flows of information as well as active, formal and informal learning leave open the possibility to generate and develop creativity.

- *The modern city – a venue for applied creativity*

The city slowly developed into a place of consumption as soon as it started to decline as a manufacturing centre. In due course, the city has become the spatial expression of globalisation, attaining in this process its economic independence and importance (*Miles 2010*). Society and social development are gravitated by: non-material goods, commodity aesthetics, mediation of goods and non-material functions of production, and the city is a respective venue for people to express themselves as citizens of a consumer society (*Slater 2003*).

On the other hand, the city of consumption represents a city of built environment. As Marshall Berman puts it, the city is a symbolic expression of our present time, and human factor in the city is represented in the places we build. Consumption plays a mediating role between our human self and society and provides a bridge between the social and the individual. Consumption dominates the city, and it seems that the individual experience of that city is filtered through the processes implied by consumption (Miles 2010).

This apparent domination of the non-material transforms human encounters with cities into a sheer perception and representation of images: a never-ending circulation of signs (Slater 2003). This commodification robs cities of their particular identities and turns them into clones (Miles 2010). Conversely, “the city has always been the world’s incubator of innovation” (Savitch and Kantor 2002). If innovation is defined as a design approach inside material culture, the city may be presented in light of the “creative city”, where innovation is generated and exploited through the incessant process of subject-object interrelations, based on the process of generating and exploiting knowledge as a non-renewable resource. City provides a quality base for the exchange of ideas and information.

Cities as creative centres provide an integrated, open, free and diversifying “habitat”, where all forms of creativity (artistic, cultural and technological) can take root and flourish. Culture should expand, share and celebrate humanity and human values (Rifkin 2000), should be more accessible for an average user/citizen. In other words, culture and the arts, the fields of expressed creativity, constitute the identity of cities and make them competitive on the global stage.

- *Design thinking activates urban actors in the urban realm*

In view of the accelerating development of modern society and liberal capitalism, the traditional role of the designer needs to be reviewed to respond to a growing number and widening range of needs. The design process has henceforth been slowly and gradually reformulated to designate human-centred, creative activity within the modern consumer society, which aims at tackling complex social problems and conflicts in order to create an even better system. In order to achieve such high-standard demands, design has become both a problem-seeking and a problem-solving activity; a complex, future-orientated decision-taking procedure with one ultimate goal: to improve the quality of human life.

By placing the human in a central position, design thinking occupies with not only detecting and responding to a wide range of consumer-related and social needs, but it is also actively engaged in formulating their needs, as part of current subject-object relations. This interrelated process favours social interactions, continuous adaptivity

and perpetual innovation. It represents a modern “social game”, where human creative and emotional powers are captivated to identify social pattern, express the innate part of human nature and apply functional solutions to social problems or conflicts.

Design thinking corresponds to the group and develops within groups, but in a way that liberates individual creativity instead of suppressing it through the group’s united spirit. This emphasizes a high level of effectiveness, where collaboration is carried out transversally among equally valuable fields and individuals, enabling free access and open-mindedness. Correspondingly, ideas are common property and responsibility. Problem-solving extends beyond specialized fields and urges to find collective solutions that work as bridges for realms of ideas (*Brown and Katz 2010*).

3 Explanation of the methodological approach

3.1 Generating creative activity

In terms of the subject-object relationship (product/designer) and vice versa, creativity can be defined as an activity which generates new working (operational) problem-solving concepts (*d’Agostino 1984*). The integration of design in the knowledge economy is a challenge, which affects the physical environment, reflects human needs and generates a more vibrant built environment.

All urban actors integrate their customs and needs from their past in order to creatively trace their cultural identity. Yet, what is necessary in actual urban environment is to activate such unconscious creativity and develop it through adequate professional supervision (*Nyström 1999*). But the major problem in participatory urban planning is to provide a common base that is suitable for integrating comprehensive and interdisciplinary, explicit (expert) and tacit (local stakeholder, experience), knowledge on urban patterns and processes. Professionals should only coordinate and articulate this process of collective planning procedure (*Bolay 1996*) by conducting/ teaching in order to initiate “positive feedback” in city self-creation, dependant at least as much on the individual’s direct experience, as on a sense of well-being. Defining the identity of a city and leading its own development is a way to actualize the self-understanding, self-creation and self-representation of an operating urban environment. What may be crucial here is that through social practices, individuals can be indirectly thought to take an active part in urban developing processes and in the design of structures and spaces within a city.

3.2 City as a system based on creativity

The prerequisites for the development of creativity include an open-minded approach, risk-taking, clearly focused long-term goals with an understanding of strategy, the capacity to embrace local differences and cultural diversity, and willingness to accept continuous change and learning. These strategies are approaches that use participatory processes to generate an action plan for city development to achieve an agreed vision, goals and priorities for a city, a set of strategies and action plans, and to establish institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. (Fisher 2001)

The design thinking approach in urbanism aims at the maintenance and development of certain indicators which denote urban quality: social order, production of space/place, continuity of development, richness of experience, completeness and belonging (Peter Buchanan, *(What is Urban Design? 2011)*)². On the other hand, planning has hitherto been mainly concerned with urban forms: analysing, organizing and shaping them in order to respond to inhabitants' needs.

Bearing in mind that the design process has already surpassed its traditional scope and it actively serves in forming modern society, the shift in urban planning towards participatory design could offer more flexibility and involvement through the summary of small movements, partial approaches and real-time responsive actions. Therefore, the ultimate goal of "designing the urban" is to solve urban conflict and produce a better city. Concerning consumer society and its needs, this process is actually a dynamic interdependence and mutual development of both city and citizens. In other words, creative interventions guide cities' growth and change, giving them unique identities. The inclusion of design within cities enhances the quality of lives and multiplicity of lifestyles, fosters cultures, promotes artistic activities, enables informal learning and generates development.

Participatory urban design involves obeying to economic currents, cooperation and partnership among different actors and stakeholders and setting up guidelines and standards for zoning, building, historic revitalization and reconstruction. Moreover, it is a collaborative and interdisciplinary process of shaping not only a physical, but also a social, component of cities. Design in an urban context transfers the spatial component into a broader framework in reference to time.³ It exceeds its main purpose of place-making and encompasses all the activities and events which denote a certain space.

²(*What is Urban Design? 2011*)

³Peter Webber defines urban design as 'the process of molding the form of the city through time' (*What is Urban Design? 2011*)

From this standpoint, the city is not merely a venue but a dynamic and complex system – a network of subjects, objects and activities where the human component is nestled. City is a reality, a situation where social practices take place and where urban design structures these activities, frames them and puts them in a wider spatial and social context. So, participatory urban design actually is the articulation of human life in an urban realm which urges for active citizenship.

In terms of the already mentioned variability of modern contexts and the importance of individuality and humanity in all of this, finding such a way of fighting urban deterioration with appropriate non-intrusive, creative measures can only be obtained with a clear understanding of every particular context: society/ city and its actors/ their social background. Moreover, indirect conducting/teaching through participation encourages individuals to take an active part in urban developing processes, which cohere with society's scientific and technological advance and the design of structures and spaces within a city. Additionally, the aesthetic factors of a city's architecture and space design is responsible for qualitative actualisation in urban development. As soon as international design fails to respond to one's local comprehension of needs and demands, the design should indicate that a different course is necessary. In this way, continuous and simultaneous participatory actions and interpretation based on momentum and flexibility allow not just for a visual solution, but also one that includes time, action, and uncertainty.

4 Application of participatory urban design

4.1 Design thinking methodology

Design thinking is an exploratory process for transferring and adjusting ideas into models that are compatible with reality while constantly examining, re-evaluating and validating them. This method treats reality as a dynamic system of interactions among individuals and groups, which aims at generating a common behaviour to complement human needs and desires. It should encompass a range of plans and actions, from managing risk to fostering innovation in order to, eventually, lead to a set of opportunities. Finally, when it is socially-orientated, the core (crux) of design thinking is in fact a social problem/conflict to be resolved through this process.

In current social contexts, such a process should be organized as a project with a clear goal, operational framework, action plan and corrective measures for process updating. Clarity, goal-orientation, definition of weaknesses and boundaries, constant evaluation and updating, inclusion of risk and serendipity at any point of research and creation process are the qualities which enable a project to generate and maintain creative energy and to apply it effectively in practice. In order to choose the model

which best corresponds to the defined social problem/conflict, a design thinking process is coordinated in three overlapping and back and forth looping stages:

- *Inspiration: motivating the search for solutions from a hierarchical set of mental constraints*
- *Ideation – Conceptualization: generating, developing, and filtering, testing and iterating ideas*
- *Implementation – Realization: prototyping and turning ideas into actual products and services that are again tested, iterated, and refined.*

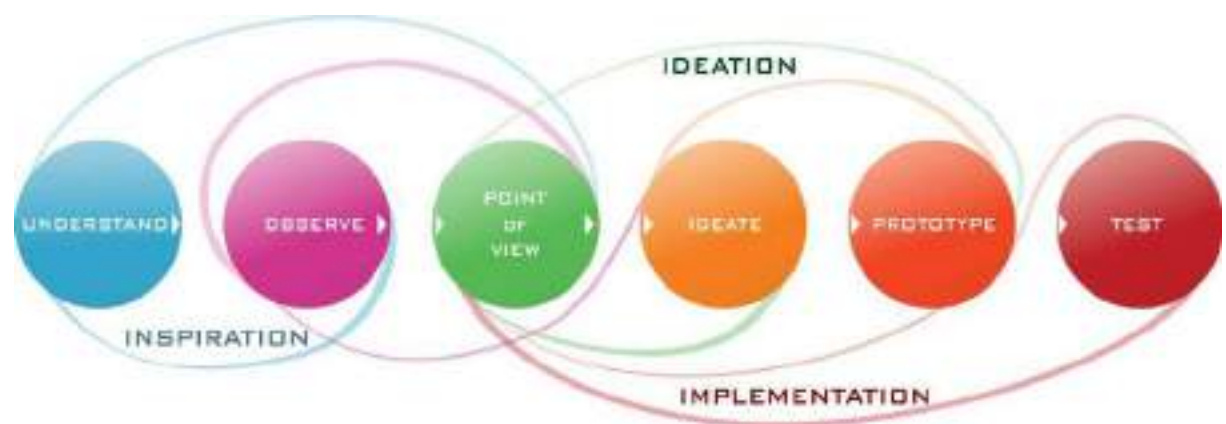


Figure 1: Process of Design Thinking. Original picture available at: <http://www.pferdt.de/archives/572>⁴

The final step is orientated towards a communication strategy, particularly through multimedia, which makes the solution accessible for a diverse set of stakeholders. To sum up, design thinking uses designer's sensibility and methods to match human needs with what is technologically feasible and economically viable (Brown and Katz 2010).

4.2 Ideology of design thinking in urbanism

Design thinking aims at articulating the spirit of a place, while leaving its realization to consumers / citizens. In urban terms, it may signify that it is design which leads to planning and then to development, integrating decision making to maximize innovation and render opportunities (Professor Laura Lee, (Value of Design 2009)⁵). In this sense, urban planning is reduced to branding: it defines the spirit of a place and then lets others (consumers / citizens) articulate that spirit. Citizens/urban dwellers are engaged within their environment, and professionals develop only a set

⁴(Pferdt 2009)

⁵(Value of Design 2009)

of performances based on outcomes that foster a dynamic model rather than automatically assume a product (*Professor Laura Lee, (Value of Design 2009)*⁶). The idea is to exchange the notion of a place for (the) place itself; space is not a product of creative process, but a venue for creative experience.

The design thinking method in urbanism could be seen as a step forward from a traditional planning process – instead of designing the urban in reference to space, this new instrument articulates the urban in reference to time, which energizes a public process of urban planning by using the lowest common denominator; an active urban actor. This means that an average urban actor is encouraged to participate in the decision-taking process concerning its immediate surroundings and to take an active part in designing it.

In order to achieve it, design thinking addresses individual cognitive potential by involving urban actors in the “story” and the “scenario” of place-making. It tells a story about what space could be and initiates the empathy and emotional correspondence of all participants in urban planning and designing processes. This story signifies the cooperation between professionals and average city dwellers (consumers), erasing the differences between them and making them equal in the process of place-making.

This collaboration in a wider sense shows what transdisciplinary approach in urbanism may be – a field between the abstractions of planning and the concrete specifics of architecture and design. Not only defines it that aesthetics and consumerism is a new driving potential for solving urban problems, but also it is the emphasis of collective intelligence, common logic and broad-band solutions which lies in the heart of the design thinking approach to this new paradigm of urban development.

4.3 Implementation of design thinking in urbanism

The main idea of the implementation of design thinking in urbanism is based on the statement that design is a creative and productive activator for articulating human needs in a certain built environment. Put differently, the value of design lies in catalysing the impact of built environment on the quality of urban life and activating creative human potential for solving urban and social conflicts. This actually means that “participatory urban design” refers to strategic planning not as a procedure for generating a product - “urban plan”, nor as architectural aesthetics of cities, but as an integrated process of timing, rating and locating urban development in accordance with human needs and desires in order to generate an integrated vision, strategic

⁶(Value of Design 2009)

techniques and viable opportunities in urban planning, and to produce a functional and aesthetically valuable built environment.

According to the herein elaborated theory of creative potential as an impetus for solving social problems, the design thinking process is used to produce a creative environment, a place-shaping framework, a creative experience and an incubator for ideas. Design thinking makes the process of urban development and the production of social order feasible in such a way that ideas are pitched and then city and citizens respond to them in their own way.

In accordance with Sorkin's assumption that urban planning tends to prove inefficient on a very large scale and that urbanism could be stuck in it, the shifting point of "participatory urban design" is a functionalist idea of the city as a symbolic concept - an open and dynamic system of integrated scales (*Interview: Michael Sorkin 2005*)⁷. It practically means that the urban development of a city as a whole is brought through small-scale, partial urban actions and urban venues of different scales, which take care of the social and the public and create urban spaces, places, events and experiences.

In the course of urban planning, design thinking therefore encompasses a range of scientific and practical activities that all together form the continuum of innovation for solving urban conflicts. These activities are clearly structured in three stages within participatory urban design processes: Problem definition, Problem solving strategy and Product identification.

These successive stages serve to facilitate and improve identification and agreement over: an integrated human-centred vision of built environment or socio-urban context, explicit objectives of different time-frames, guiding principles for achieving them as well as tools, strategies, and methods to most effectively deliver them. The quality of such a gradually developed and looping process lies in its flexibility and dynamics to allow for a wide range of modifications or replacements to easily take place and change the course of the project and final product according to human needs and desires or to restrictions and constraints.

- *Problem definition - Identification of an urban conflict*

The initial phase of the process consists of agreeing on the vision of positive urban future, identification of an urban conflict to be treated and solved, analysis of all urban actors involved, the input of guiding principles and the definition of long-term and short-term objectives. Regarding the scale and the character of these conflicts,

⁷(Interview: Michael Sorkin 2005)

urban actors involved in the process are identified among average urban dwellers, different public and private stakeholders and professionals.⁸

In line with legal, economic and social constraints, urban actors agree upon guiding principles and develop objectives. In general, they have to fulfil these basic requirements of participatory urban design ideology: high aspiration commitment (cultural identity, sense of place, human-centred considerations), collective and collaborative actions, constructive engagement and constructive criticism, knowledge network and integrated design education (ensure environmental experience literacy for urban actors), practice-based/use-inspired (optimistic approach to existing reality) and intelligent investment. These principles should be well accustomed to each case individually and its current socio-urban context, they should address all socio-economic aspects and foster innovation and development in a defined urban environment.

- *Problem solving strategy- definition through action-orientated methodology of design thinking*

Problem solving in design thinking is processed in three steps (inspiration, ideation and implementation), which are included in a circular process of solution generation. All of these steps should involve reflection, contextualization and action on different models for problem solving. This process is divided in six sub-actions: collaboration on idea, acceptance with empathy, synthesis through integrative thinking, stake ideas, positive approach toward the selection of ideas, experimentalism in prototyping and testing results. This looping procedure iterates until the best solution is found.

⁸Now, if this pattern is applied, the actors of these cities (seen in a great number as being poor, excluded, marginalised, outsiders) can also be the actual “makers of the city”(Jean-Claude Bolay 2004).

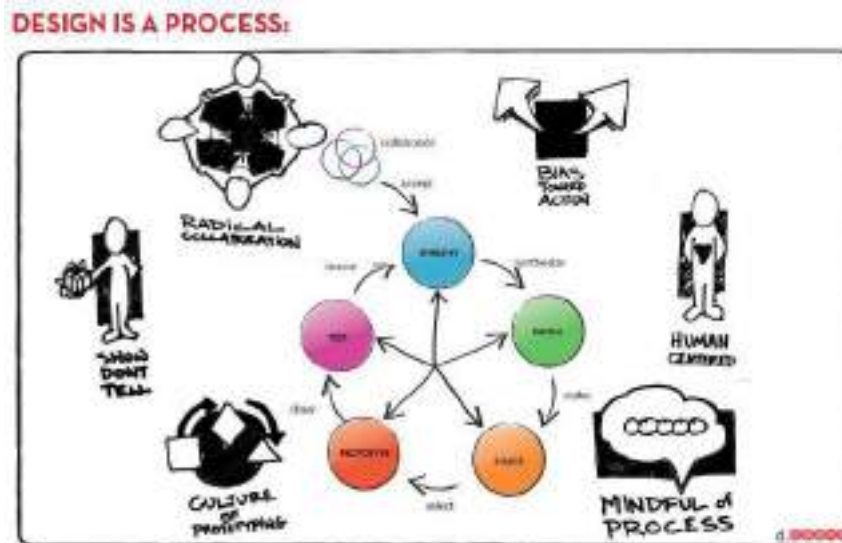


Figure 2:detailed procedure of design thinking⁹

In urbanism this process is transferred in a model of six basic steps¹⁰:

Step 1 - Research: explore spatial factors (urban environment) and investigate social aspects (human experience). These activities may be depicted through Lynch terminology and methodology (interviews and spatial landmarks)(Mary Foyder / courtesy IDEO).

Step 2 - Case Studies: communicate the essence of space or community through a creative process of functional analysis of human needs and urban identity of the environment, in order to define the issues at stake in very simple terms.

STEP 3 - Design Brief: translate ideas into action so as to experiment with possible solutions in the current context, while preserving positive aspects, cultural heritage and identity and promoting collaboration, creativity and a do-it-yourself approach.

Step 4 - Design Principles: transform the passive and ignite the active through the participation, densification and diversification of cultural models and identities in a spatial framework. The essential broad principles are to be articulated as specific guidelines and then broken down into services or strategies.

Step 5 - Design in reference to time: design around the behaviour and experience of urban actors

⁹(Ford 2009)

¹⁰The variations of this model have already been used in the urban design approach of the city of Adelaide in Australia (Value of Design 2009) and in urban designs of IDEO group in Kansas City(Mary Foyder / courtesy IDEO) .

Step 6 – Design in reference to space: reflect understanding of human desires and correspond to human needs concerning spatial aspects.

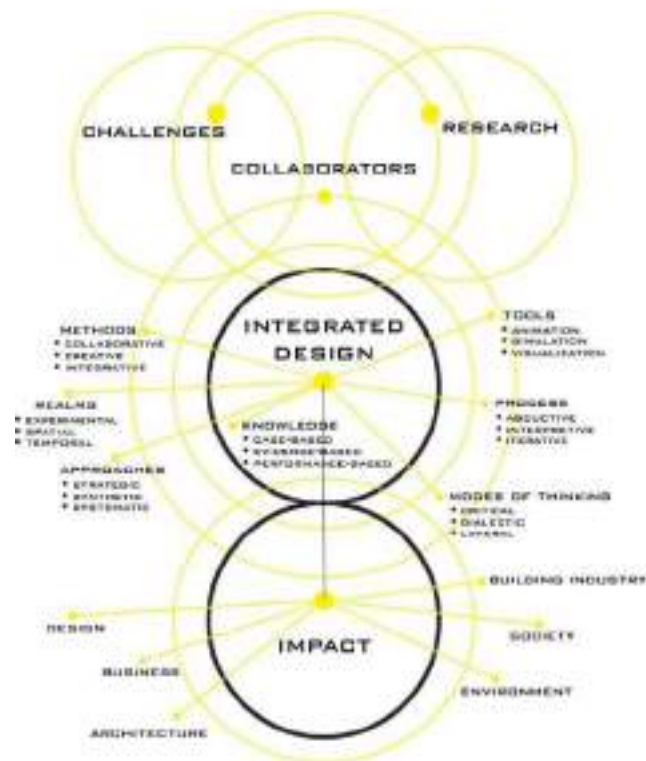


Figure 3: participatory urban design process. Based on integrated design thinking process for the city of Adelaide, Australia¹¹

- *Product identification– decision making and place-making in urbanism*

This final stage articulates the chosen model in practice in order to achieve reliable long-term results. Depending on the nature of the problem (urban conflict), applied methods and tools, these models could be implemented in decision-making or place-making strategies in urbanism. Additionally, according to these factors, models are formulated in terms of performance qualities, facilitation of innovation and impact in order to address the target group and produce the best outcomes.

5 Discussion – Wider social context

5.1 Results

Following the thesis that our current social context can be identified as a consumer society in a postmodern framework, it becomes apparent how economic values come to triumph over social ones in the practice of everyday life. Such social framework

¹¹(Value of Design 2009)

imposes pressure on the human environment, threatens social order and performance of social practices and produces social conflict. When we refer to these problems inside any urban environment (city), we define it as an urban conflict, a rupture in an urban system – symbiosis made of human environment in a built environment framework. These systemic problems need systemic solutions, which address not only spatial and social conflicts, but problems of urban actors as well.

Participatory urban design relies on human capability to generate novelties (new systems, organizations or fields) by using a wide range of human capacities (ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that have emotional meaning as well as being functional, and to express in media other than words or symbols)(*Brown and Katz 2010*).Accordingly, urban actors are actively involved in processing scenarios for solving urban conflicts. When this individual potential is carefully directed toward solving individual social conflicts in an urban environment, it may produce benefits for individuals (by involving them in meaningful social practice and encouraging them to solve social conflicts) and for society (by forming a built environment and producing social order). The idea is such that urban actors participate in creating a harmonious, meaningful environment in space and time, one that will correspond to their needs and desires and obey the scientific and social rules defined by professionals.

The social goal is not only to validate best ideas and produce best results in the urban environment but also to inspire people to live a creative personal life and to be useful to their community and urban environment. Moreover, letting people intervene in their immediate surroundings produces positive social effects: it gives meaning and importance to their human existence, reduces the effects of alienation common in modern consumer society, and involves them in informal learning which broadens their human capacities and improves their lifestyles. Conversely, they will act upon their immediate surroundings and participate in production in the urban environment that best fits their requirements and in doing so reduce urban problems and social conflicts.

5.2 Impact

The key issue that participatory urban design could reduce the negative effects of consumerism, a by-product of liberal capitalism, is elaborated by emphasizing the importance of individual creative potential in solving current urban conflicts. This idea presents the “urban actor potency” to freely influence and choose its immediate surroundings.

Furthermore, according to new visions of urbanism in relation to consumer culture, the issue at stake is an “urban consumer” – an individual between citizen and

consumer – and the collision between the roles of an urban actor and a consumer. In brief, this is a social struggle of ‘ethics’ and human nature over the production of everyday life, which challenges the modern social discourse. The sphere of cultural reproduction is also coming to be overflowed by the postmodern pursuit of the self, where social relations, activities and objects are offered to be consumed as commodities (Slater 2003).

Namely, individuals unavoidably tend to conform to the expectations of their immediate social surroundings. In their pursuit of identity, self-realization and self-fulfilment, they are torn between the limits or boundaries of their needs and the possibilities to satisfy them, so that the whole system functions in a vicious, never-ending loop (Slater 2003). In terms of urbanism, there may be a risk that urban actors fail to participate actively in the herein presented new approach to strategic urban planning.

Additionally, consumer culture has already spread its tentacles into visions of the modern city. We witness nowadays the transformation of cities into products of consumerism and for consumption, venues for the production of public spectacle. Citizens/ individuals are not only the human capacity which build cities, but they are also consumers of cities. This relation identifies the city as a place of consumption, entertainment and services. In such a diverse urban realm, already threatened by liberal capitalism, participatory urban design could be, conversely, seen as a strategy that crosses the traditional boundaries between public, for-profit and non-profit sectors, and introduces a new transdisciplinary field which can be applied to all realms of city planning.

The other crucial point of this methodology is its participatory nature – the idea of urban development as a democratic process, where the “user-orientated” strategy surpasses the decision-making process and aims at involving users in an empathic version of place-making (Brown and Katz 2010).

On the other hand, its potential flaw lies in the question as to whether this form of economy is really a solution for urban problems and to what extent this concept is actually applicable in different environments. Namely, a human-centred approach and orientation toward a unique cultural context conspicuously bring social benefits; its experimental nature is a source of personal development through learning for urban actors who participate in the process. But it is actually difficult to assess whether the specificity of solutions and possibility of failure in experimentation prove to be profitable as well.

Finally, individual human potential could also be interpreted as a possible threat. In terms of the evolutionary development of human race, the importance of novelty has

been recognized as a propensity to explore and invent in order to better cope with the unpredictable conditions that threatens its survival. But the force of entropy, another antagonistic force that also strongly motivates humans, tends to prevail over the urge to create. The collision of these forces may also reduce the success of this method when it comes to application in practice.

6 Conclusion

Participatory urban design poses a challenge to the redefinition of a scientific approach to urban conflicts and corresponding urban planning procedures, through a creative, dynamic and iterative process of design thinking within an urban setting. Participatory urban design – a human-centred, user-friendly concept, which fosters holistic thinking and flexibility in developing strategies – blurs the boundaries between various disciplines and stakeholders, as well as their mutual endeavours to provide a wide range of potential solutions of recombination and application in certain environments, and finally, generates a new vision of the city that suits current scientific and cultural trends.

Key words: “participatory urban design” method, design thinking, creativity, developing countries

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