

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FORM OF CITY STUDY AND SOME TOPICS FOR STUDY

There are a number of alternative organizations that might be used:

1. In terms of the process of perception, i.e., distinguishing between immediate biological response, perceptual response, and conceptual response;
2. In terms of normative criteria of city form: patterns facilitating existence, understanding, and development;
3. In terms of the formal characteristics of city form: rhythm, scale, balance, etc.;
4. In terms of descriptive elements of city form: spaces, planes, detail, mass, use-pattern, communications, setting;
5. In terms of design problems or features: vistas, panoramas, residential areas, river banks, etc.

As a beginning, the second system of organization is chosen, leaving open the possibility of using the other systems at later dates, since all structure the same material from different viewpoints. The third system, for example, is rejected as being a rather sterile approach in terms of organization, although the concepts of rhythm, scale, etc. may be used freely in working within another general system.

The fifth system was felt to be piecemeal although useful for certain special studies. The fourth may be a most useful device for descriptive work, although a city is so complex as to resist this kind of analysis. The first system would provide a new logical basis, but is essentially removed from the competence of the principals and entails many basic controversies in the psychology of perception.

In choosing the second system as a beginning, it is intended to stress the normative aspect of the city. That is, we desire to put the human being and his needs at the center of the work, and to emphasize the ideas of purpose and of the remodeling of the city to fit human ends. Such an attitude is taken in full realization of the multiplicity of human purposes among classes, cultures and individuals. To some extent, we shall be looking for basic human values common to all men and, to some extent, for values typical of our own time and culture.

This chosen framework, which is basically a hypothesis as to the criteria for "good" city form, but whose subdivisions may in themselves be used as the skeleton of the study, may then be stated more precisely:

The fundamental criterion is that the outer world of the city be so shaped that, as it interacts with the inner human world in perception, it facilitates human existence, understanding and development. From this follow three basic criteria for city form:

1. That it be well adapted to man's internal structure:
 - a. That the stimuli themselves, their level of intensity, and the degree of variety of stimulation, be in the comfortable range – neither too high nor too low.
 - b. That there be a maximum use of direct or "implied" stimuli, or of stimulus rhythm and progression, which is in itself "pleasant".
 - c. That the stimuli be perceived and organized into images with a minimum of effort and a maximum of information, including those in time sequence as well as those considered instantaneously.
 - d. That the environment be one which does not threaten safety or equilibrium, which symbolizes life and situations comfortable to human beings, and which evidences intimate human care and adaptation.
2. That it maximizes the range and depth of comprehension (emotional and sensuous as well as conceptual comprehension – an active, not a passive process):
 - a. That the form facilitate the grasp of the largest possible whole along with the most intimate possible comprehension of parts and their relationships.
 - b. That the form clarify in particular the presence of men, their activities and their marks; and secondly their relationship to the greater whole in which the city is set.
 - c. That the forms have a maximum coincidence of functional clarity, intuitive sense of use or meaning, and clear and well organized conceptual and emotional symbolism – and that they have a distinctiveness sufficient for easy recognition and association.
 - d. That the form be such that it retain its unity at different stages of increasing familiarity, while gradually unfolding in its detail and complexity.
3. That it facilitates growth, choice and control:
 - a. That the city provide contrasting states which are distinct and yet sensed as part of one process, that is, provide a needed rhythm of experience.

- b. That there be contrasting regions giving the sense that environment can be chosen or changed, i.e., regions decisive in character yet allowing comparison and intercommunication.
- c. That the environment facilitate growth and change by a certain degree of neutrality, by allowing some “slack”, or by imposing certain new or irritating stimuli.
- d. That the city be made evident to be a process, not a static object.

* * *

The subdivisions of these criteria suggest a great number of interesting topics for the normative study of the city. Some thirty have been sketched out, among which are:

1. {margin: X} What are the comfortable ranges of city stimuli, and how may they be achieved, especially in regard to: microclimate; noise; air pollution and smells; floor surface; and freedom of movement?
2. {margin: G.K.} What is the nature of sequential perception in the city – how may effort be minimized and continuity maintained? What is the role in such perception of: scale; rhythmical experience; observer – object relationship, including speed; concurrent signals from various senses? What part do analogues – continuities of line, form and color – and contrasts play in this process?
3. {margin: X} What is the perceptual role of such associational connotations as cleanliness or dirt, waste and neglect, care and adaptation, “warmth” and “intimacy”?
4. {margin: —} What are the connotations of the natural and of the man-created elements in the perception of the city?
5. {margin: K.L.} What are the means, and what is the role, of orientation in the city?
6. {margin: —} What means may be employed to make evident human beings and their activities?
7. {margin: —} What means are available to gain a sense of total setting of which the city is a part, placing both man and city in a larger context?

8. {margin: X} How may the congruence of function and form be maximized for some set of city functions such as “flow”, i.e., waste disposal, power and water supply, goods and person movement?
9. {margin: K.L.} How does the city communicate to the observer?
10. {margin: X} What is the difference between first impression and familiar image of a city area?
11. {margin: G.K.} What is the nature and value of city transformations: seasons, weather, day – night, workday – holiday, movement – stillness, etc.? Which environments best accept the opposed states, setting them off most clearly, yet retaining a unifying thread?
12. {margin: —} How can regions of contrasting character be employed to maximize choice of environment, including such contrasts as in the type or intensity of land use, or in the character of visual or aural environment? What are the qualities of boundaries such that contrast is decisive yet intercommunication allowed? What minimum size of a region is needed to establish character?
13. {margin: 6, in circle} What city forms facilitate the making of a personal mark by the citizen?
14. {margin: —} What are the means of expressing the city as a process, with a past and a future? That is, how can a sense of continuity be maintained with the historical past and with the future as it is coming into being?

* * *

Certain more general investigations of the reactions of people to cities might also be considered:

1. {margin: —} Unstructured interviews on the subject of cities.
2. Analysis of verbal reactions:
 - a) {margin: M.R.} on the spot, recording the verbalized flow of impressions;
 - b) after the event, from memory (including analysis of what is most prominent in memory).
3. {margin: —} Analysis by movies of face or body movements and expression in the street.
4. {margin: —} Analysis of present and past theories and attitudes on city form.

5. {margin: A.L.?} Analysis of reference to the city in novels, poems, paintings, newspapers, real estate ads, magazines, popular songs, etc.

* * *

Another set of studies are those relating to the development of graphic analogues and graphic analyses of city form:

1. {margin: X} Studies in the transformation of patterns (visual to aural; normal to contrasty; etc.); scale distortions; abstractions of sets of stimuli; new juxtapositions.
2. {margin: X} Graphic interpretation of city pulsation and growth, or of the pattern and grain of city motion.
3. {margin: K.L.} Development of techniques for expressing such city qualities as spatial pattern or orientation.
4. {margin: J 2. [in circle]} Development of motion picture analogues to the experience of sensing the city in sequence.

* * *

Finally, it will be useful to complete a careful descriptive analysis of one rather restricted city section on as many levels as possible, and also to proceed in collecting a library of literature, quotations, city views, and city recordings – all organized on the basis of the chosen framework.

Choices, at least for initial exploration, must now be made out of this extensive list.

Kevin Lynch
Gyorgy Kepes

December 22, 1954