

Supple Landscapes

Niloofar Razavi

Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning,
Beheshti University, Tehran
n-razavi@cc.sbu.ac.ir

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Abstract

As humans, we have an intrinsic need to perceive the impact of our presence on the environment, and the freedom to leave an imprint. *Supple landscape* is a term chosen to name open spaces that allow and invite intervention by the users.

There are many historical and contemporary examples of human urge to communicate with the environment through expressive changes and imprints, some of which are reviewed in this article. In spite of these evidences, in many developing countries, the need to address the expressive needs of individuals in urban landscape has never been fully realized. The aloof objective stance of many planners and designers in these countries, and the willingness to create a good-for-all landscape, often results in places with minimum flexibility for diverse needs of individuals. The concept of changeability, and the affordance of a landscape to accommodate this concept, is introduced as a design and planning strategy. Examples of Supple landscapes, as places with inbuilt or bestowed affordance for change, are analyzed. Furthermore, different manifestations of the need for changeability in landscape are presented with Iranian and international examples. The examples are categorized under ephemeral expressions, recurrent changes of setting, and sporadic interventions.

Introduction

More than half the population of the world is subject to the condensed pattern and spaces of activity of urban life. In their minimized boundaries of freedom, the urban population can and will judge public spaces by the degree of restrictions they impose on the user.

In planning the urban landscape, and in designing open public spaces in the city, our success is always measured by public endorsement. As planners and designers, we are passed the stage of denying the user or claiming that architecture would live without being occupied. More often than not it has become evident that predictable, obedient, and passive user is also a myth (Hill 2003, pp.10-11). Therefore, it seems logical to investigate the dimensions of desired freedom in a public open space from the perspective of demanding and creative users.

It is emphasised by credible theories that “people do not stand apart from the landscape but rather are participants in the landscape in a situation of mutual influence” (Iverson Nassauer 1995). Accordingly, users are disposed to the effects of urban landscape, and in return, they appreciate the bending and changing that an environment is ready to offer, or in Gibson’s

words: “properties that are present within an environment that allow for the occurrence of behavior”; in other words, the affordances of a place (Alfonzo 2005).

Thus, a supple landscape in an urban setting could be defined as a flexible stage for the activities of urban population. A supple landscape may bend and curve at users will, and occasionally may hold the marks of such activities temporarily or permanently; similar to the skin of a healthy body.

Based on historical evidences and current practices, there seems to be a common agreement on the fact that “culture changes landscape, and culture is embodied by landscape” (Iverson Nassauer 1995). The new lexicon of political and social dialogue on urban issues is filled with words driven from this axiom; terms like vitalism, moods (stimmungen), atmospheres, interactions, etc. (Pløger 2006). Nevertheless, some would argue that even in developed countries, these concepts seem to have limited effect in planning and design solutions (Pløger 2006).

The present article is an effort in finding the missing concepts and reviving the narrative of historic experiences, which may help in realization of a supple urban landscape; a necessity that had once been well appreciated and easily accommodated in some ancient settlements of the present under-developed countries.

Current Definitions

In many developing countries, the need to address the expressive needs of individuals in urban landscape has not been fully realized in modern times. Even in the developed countries, the appropriate urban space has very often been programmed and designed with an aloof and objective stance, aiming for a good-for-all solution and a diffusion of conflict in public space (Malone 2002). This has been made possible through regulating and maintaining a shared value system in which public space is designed for appropriate uses and appropriate users (Malone 2002).

Perhaps in the criticism of individualistic urban life, all the mentioned efforts seemed reasonable in the post-war European countries. At times, there may be an urgent need to revitalize moral values and remind the city dwellers “how to behave properly in this place” or “how to care for others”. Moreover there might be instances of necessary correspondence between norms and forms (Pløger 2006).

This process is referred to as “purification of space” by Sibley (1995, pp.72-89). He writes extensively on the exclusive outcome of this approach, and the fact that this method would keep out objects, people and behaviors that do not fit the classifications. However, in accepting this method, professionals are at risk of stepping back into the rejected hierarchy of dominant designer and obedient user mentioned earlier in this text.

In search of alternative approaches, some have suggested varieties of responsive urban landscapes, in which affordances are defined as opportunities for physical alterations in the environment, such as self-mending pavements or equipments that would open up or disappear into the paving as needed (Ward Thompson 2002).

In Sibley’s text, however, the illustration of “closed” versus “open” space are based on definitions that are not entirely physical; along with the differences in positioning of the public and definition of boundary, he stresses the importance of dominant value system versus the support of multiple values, or the prohibition versus celebration of diversity (1995, pp.72-89).

Foucault’s emphasis on the fact that the experience of a place is not totally dependent on its form and space, and his often cited idea that “the experience of a building depends on the way its managed as well as designed” (Hill 2003, p.64), further stresses the intangible and dynamic properties that need to be considered in the design of human environment.

Yet there are some fixed definitions about the function of some urban landscape which are very difficult to change. There is strong and sometimes rightful determination to restrict inappropriate behavior in public spaces (Ward Thompson 2002), and with a vague definition of appropriateness, it would be very difficult to design and manage a dynamic, multicultural, or 'supple' landscape. Some efforts have been made to resolve this conflict with time-programming rather than space-programming (Ward Thompson 2002), but it is quite clear that only a resolution based on tolerance and participation would be successful in creating this form of public space.

It is undeniable that the theoretical dialogue of urban public space celebrates any term that refers to diversity and dynamism in tangible and intangible properties of urban landscape. The profusion of adjectives like transformative, fluid, unconstrained, nomadic, migrant, slippery, loose-fit, etc. (Ward Thompson 2002, Pløger 2006), in naming the quality of urban space, clearly shows the necessity to understand this demand. Perhaps adding yet another new term to the dialogue would seem unnecessary, but the word 'supple' conveys a graceful quality and an effortless affordance for change which seems to accord with all the other lissom connotations of the word 'landscape'.

Forgotten Necessities

The easily managed orders of a functionalist urban space, compared to the uncertain, diffuse, and fragile regulations of a supple landscape, would make many authorities reluctant in accepting this new scheme. Moreover, there are enough worries about the preservation of countryside and natural landscapes to occupy the thoughts of the responsible parties. Likewise, the general public's conception of certain defined spaces is resistant to change. "Typically, people believe that a yard, a park, a field, a forest, or a city should look a certain way without questioning the necessity of that appearance ... If personal preferences for an unconventional landscape structure exist, they tend to be subsumed by the power of convention" (Iverson Nassauer 1995). The fear of crime further intensifies this reliance on familiar images for public space; forms, events, and behaviors that seem different tend to create a general nervousness in some societies.

However, there are evidences to prove that even in Europe, some categories of people long for more interaction and engagement with other people as well as the environment (Ward Thompson 2002). There seems to be an ongoing argument which suggests a fixed vision of parks and a place of rather quiet interaction with nature, as opposed to streets and promenades as opportunities for somewhat noisy engagement and communication with people (Ibid.).

Notwithstanding the importance of either side of this argument, and the proportion of urban space that should be carefully allocated to these functions, one side illustrates the fundamental human need to communicate with people, while the other confirms the necessity of interaction with nature. Both the spatial and non-spatial qualities of a place that would offer such affordances need to be considered.

There are some evident spatial qualities in green landscapes that offer different opportunities for peace and seclusion as well as occasional opportunities for exploration and manipulation of the environment. The same may be said about the suppleness of waterfronts and beaches; there is no doubt about the popularity of the changeable setting these environments offer. In more natural landscapes, the unexplored and wild quality of space would add an intriguing ambiguity that may be attractive to some, while unsettling and threatening to others (Ward Thompson 2002). There are also some spatial qualities that explain the attractiveness of streets, plazas, and promenades; the illuminated night scenery, the neat and well kept finishing, the added colour and lustre in human-made environments and objects, etc., all of which have become familiar images and conventions for urban dwellers. Notwithstanding the physical qualities that make these spaces desirable destinations, there are strong intangible dimensions which complete the image; events and

activities to observe, as well as opportunities to take part and interact in many social episodes, and the important desire to see and be seen. The intangible qualities of these public spaces usually attract many, especially the youth, since regardless of the lower level of freedom compared to a secluded and natural landscape, here there is always a chance of some new event, or “some as-yet-unexplained promise” (Van Lieshout and Aarts 2008).

In spite of the apparent contradiction in the configuration of pleurability in urban natural landscape and streetscape, there are tacit implications in both patterns of use that suggest common concepts; the desire for ‘intervention’ on user’s side complemented with the affordance of ‘changeability’ provided by the environment. Both of these concepts aim at the most basic human need for acknowledgment. We need to be recognized as an effective force by the environment we live in.

Research shows that “wishes for a place are closely connected to the function a place already fulfils for people, now and in the future, but also to the influence that people think they have or to the possibilities that they see concerning the influence they can exert” (Van Lieshout and Aarts 2008).

The often quoted words of Simmel — “Man does not end with the limits of his body or the area comprising his immediate activity. Rather is the range of the person constituted by the sum of effects emanating from him temporally and spatially” (Pringle 2005) — is evidence that this necessity has been recognized many years ago, but has been forgotten or ignored because of the complications mentioned earlier.

In an effort to improve the situation and fulfil this intrinsic need for intervention and changeability, some have focused on bringing back the ever changing properties of nature into the city. Some have argued that beside the ordered and maintained landscape of park, or the wilder image of some urban and suburban landscape, there must be a chance for renewed connection with agriculture for the city dwellers. The existence of agricultural fields inside the city would not only emphasise the fast-changing cycles of nature for the observer, it would also strengthen the connection between the urban population and land as a productive resource (Ward Thompson 2002). In some cases the idea is even boosted with the new possibilities offered by the advanced construction technologies to produce public spaces as attractive as a rice field on the rooftop of a skyscraper (Sasaki 2007). (Picture 1)

But even the return of agriculture to the city realm does not allow the form of unregulated intervention we are aiming for. The degree to which you can leave an imprint in these sites is even less than the cave painting of our ancestors that are strong proof for the actualization of this desire in a receptive environments. In case of continued denial of this need, the same desire that created the cave painting would give birth to other forms of expression like graffiti (Pictures 2 and 3); whilst the former is considered cultural heritage, the latter is known to be a form of vandalism by many. Perhaps that is why many environmental artists are refugees in search of not only inspiration from untouched nature, but also a setting that would accept and embrace some form of intervention.

Contrary to some early examples of environmental art (Carlson 2000, pp.150-162), today this form of expression is usually manifesting the events of the universe, using things that are already there (Picture 4). When defining the methods of acknowledging a space through association with special objects and events, Unwin relies only on physical objects in presenting the examples (2007, pp. 61-70.). In acknowledging a place through the “use of things that are already there” (Unwin 2007, pp.61-70), environmental artists seem to have outdone architects and urban designers. The events, customs, and values of the society can create strong enough concepts to inspire not only environmental works of art outside the cities, but also to form meaningful and supple landscapes within the urban fabric.

As a final point in defence of these forgotten necessities, it is worth noting that the lack of official public demand for suppleness in urban landscape is not just due to the authorities’ reluctance, or the blurring of public vision with the forces of convention. It is very often

due to the fact that people think they do not have the right or the knowledge to criticize planning and design policies. In a survey about public spaces in Netherlands, an unusual response came from an Iranian immigrant who formulated his demand as follows: “Let’s clash, let’s clash with our ideas and we will see what will happen. Out of clash beautiful things may arise. By planning everything beforehand, we will not become richer than we are” (Van Lieshout and Aarts 2008).

In search of resolutions that would accommodate suppleness in urban landscape, this article suggests several categories of expected interventions and some documented examples that may inspire planners and designers.

Ephemeral Expressions

In 2005, Ahmad Nadalian, a famous Iranian environmental artist who usually works in natural setting away from the cities, was asked to do a series of stone carvings on the pavements of Vali-e-asr, one the major streets of Tehran. The Beautification Organization (Zibasazi) from Municipality of Tehran supported the idea and its implementation at the time. Shortly after the inception of the project, the contractor mistakenly cut the carved stones before installation. Notwithstanding the installation problems and legal issues that followed this act, the event triggered another line of creativity in the artist. Inspired by the image of the cut carvings, he created new series of carvings and asked the same worker to cut them. The sued and outraged contractor broke all the new pieces this time. For the artist, this was the narrative of current dealings with art and many other essential human needs in his society and he documented them as such in yet another line of creations. (Pictures 5-6)

Nadalian’s reaction to imposed forces and the manner in which he illustrated his perspective of the event and its documentation, may be a dramatic example of how we can pose universal questions or reflect social problems through ephemeral changes in the environment. Although many of his creations were destroyed through this ordeal, and the rest may not last very long, he has made his point in this argument.

In another experience he altered his own creations, shortly after their installation and followed by his observations on urban patterns of life. (Pictures 7 to 9)

There is a common pattern in both experiences; the creation of the work was unusual (both in concept and location), the alteration were accepted or tolerated by the artist, and they are not expected to last for long. In the latter experience, it seems that the artist even expected and welcomed the change.

The ephemeral quality of these types of creation shares a common quality with many aesthetically valuable events of nature like a rainbow, lightning, early morning dew, etc. The strong impact of this type of event lies in its short life; since they are dramatically ephemeral, they claim and conquer our senses and in spite of their short life, they arouse strong emotions. This intensity of impact is what every artist hopes for, and to be able to create a similar effect in the urban environment, is what many city dwellers dream of.

It is true that this type of intervention, even for the masterful hands of environmental artists, are traditionally done only outside the cities, but if the definition of environmental art is reinterpreted, we might find grounds for the valued activities of these artists inside the cities as well.

Established definitions point out that “Environmental works of art share a common feature that both distinguishes them from traditional art and makes them examples of the most intimate of relationships between nature and art. This is that all such works of art are in or on the land in such a way that a part of nature constitutes a part of the relevant aesthetic object. In other words, not only is the site of an environmental work an environmental site, but the site itself is and aspect of work... this is clearly not the case with, for example most

sculptures; with such works, although the site can be aesthetically significant, it is not part of the work itself” (Carlson 2000, P.150).

Based on the above definition, could we expect that in public works of art, the public should be part of the relevant aesthetic object? The answer to this question has definitely been positive for Anthony Gormley, for whom the empty plinth in the Trafalgar square has been an opportunity to turn the individuals into ephemeral works of art (Gormley 2009). (Picture 10)

This may indeed shake the rigid foundation of design for public space and public art in a positive manner. On another level, it might create opportunities for interactions between the artists and ordinary citizens, and would encourage participation. All things considered, the urban culture may accept these types of ephemeral expression for ordinary people, as well as artists, in acclaimed supple landscapes in due course.

Recurrent Changes

There seem to be a general agreement on fact that “the appearance of landscape communicates cultural values” (Iverson Nassauer 1995). However, the cultural values of many developing countries are strictly absent in their urban landscape.

Fortunately, there is a worldwide effort for saving the cultural heritage of all countries, regardless of their state of development. Moreover, these efforts are aiming for protection and preservation of the “intangible cultural heritage” as well as tangible heritage (UNESCO 2003). In the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO defines Intangible heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”(UNESCO 2003). The convention further clarifies the forms on manifestation of Intangible cultural heritage as follows:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship

According to this definition, there is strong participatory basis in the creation and ‘constant recreation’ of this heritage. Furthermore, through listing the performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, and the entire body of knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe, UNESCO has enlisted many forms of individual and collective forms of expression as examples of intangible cultural heritage.

There is undoubtedly a rich treasury of intangible heritage in every human settlement, some of which have lasted for thousands of years, and survived in spite of physical absence of permanent manifestation in the urban scenery. Accordingly, there is an abundance of traditional Persian festivals in Iranian cultural history. The majority of these festivities revolve around the respect for nature and all its forces. Some of these festivals and relevant traditions are very much alive and persistently practiced today. Among these, the well known Norouz (Persian New Year celebration) has been presented as a candidate to the World Heritage Organization. But there are also other festivals which are less known to the

world. One of these festivals, the Sizda-be-dar, is a one day celebration that officially ends the Norouz related ceremonies. On this day the urban or even the rural population leaves the man made environment in order to cherish the newly revived nature by passing an entire day in the only just green landscape (Picture 11). In spite of the fact that this festival takes place every year, there has never been enough determination or vision to prepare a setting for this event to take place. Apart from the fact that the rushing crowd of urban dwellers to the immediate suburban area may harm the just reviving nature, there is no evidence of this act of nature cherishment on the landscape on this day or the other days of the year in the entire country. In other words, there is a lack of mutual impact between culture and landscape concerning this ritual.

In another festival that celebrates the onset of spring and the commencement of Norouz, the people cherish the purifying powers of fire in a ritual called Chahar-shanbeh Soori. Unlike the earlier mentioned festival, this ceremony takes place inside the city and all its loud and cheerful routine starts by nightfall (Picture 12). Again, in a curious lack of programming and proper location, the feast takes on the entire city and usually creates a great amount of chaos.

Unlike the ephemeral examples of intervention described earlier, the recent instances of change are mostly behavioral, although they may leave an uncertain and sometimes flawed physical impact on the environment. The current mismanagement of these events, has ignored the value of these customs as intangible heritage to be cherished and contained, and has turned them into troublesome ordeals that have to be endured and dealt with once a year for the urban authorities.

However, there are historic narratives that show how the proper management of such events would add to urban splendour and enhance place attachment and participation on part of city dwellers.

The water related festivals, another example of nature-cherishing customs, may be found in many countries and among many nations throughout the history and in far apart geographical location (for example see Razi 2001, pp.367-389). In many of these ceremonies, the solemn ritual of blessing the water sources with prayers or blessed symbols is sometimes followed by cheerful activities, which include splashing the crowd with water. The basis for these jolly acts is indeed to celebrate the purifying and fertilizing powers of water. In historic Persian territories, this ritual was persistently performed too, especially during the Safavid period of Iran, when the most important and graceful boulevards of the city – the Châhar-Bâq – was allocated for this festival.

Châhar-Bâq, the well known boulevard in Isfahan, is a famous example of relying on natural entities to create a charm that was superior to many urban masterpieces of its time, according to historians and travellers at the time. This major access route, with its graceful rows of plane trees, and carefully designed water features (Picture 13), was the stage for many formal ceremonies such as the reception of foreign ambassadors, military marches, or the very important royal hunting ceremony (Ahari 2006). Yet the design and management of the boulevard was such that in many occasions, cheerful and informal festivals and rituals were held in this setting as well. The ancient Persian water festival, which was considered a bonding ritual for the Safavid nation, was valued by Shah Abbas and performed in the Châhar-Bâq, and was a jolly ritual of splashing the passersby with water. According to historians and foreign witnesses, on this day social ranks and dress codes were ignored and the elite mixed with ordinary people to enjoy the festivities (Ahari 2006).

It is noteworthy that a ceremony, which is basically created to renew human ties with nature, is performed inside the urban environment. The result is so astonishing that not only it encourages all the social ranks to mix and mingle in the same location, but also attracted the foreign observers and enticed them into mentioning this event as one of the many splendours of the great Isfahan at the time. In effect, by planning and effective

management, a basically loud, crowded, and recurrent ritual was turned into something to look up to and look forward to rather than endure.

Sporadic Interventions

Henri Lefebvre says: “in every urban plan there is a concealed programme for everyday life” (Pløger 2006), and in some countries, the general policy is to enhance and encourage social proximity and interaction in the pattern of everyday life. Many believe that “planning must be regarded as the intentional spatialization of everyday habits and encounters”, and that “by designing sociospatial environments for meeting points, public spaces, open green areas, and semiprivate lots, where people could gather and talk and thus be able to recognize the need to take care of one another” the ethics of closeness are further reinforced.

For those who are aware of the possibility of “sudden breaks from everydayness” (Pløger 2006), and flows of unexpected encounters, the implementation of the mentioned policies would not undermine the need for occasional and sporadic changes in patterns of behavior or physical interventions in the urban environment.

Perhaps it is a lucky coincidence that conference for ‘open cities; within and beyond’ is taking place in the home country of an architect who appreciated the necessity of enticing the creative user into participation decades ago. Herman Hertzberger (born 1932) acknowledged the need for sporadic interventions on the part of user and responded to it by two principal strategies; polyvalence and incompleteness (Hill 2003, p.47).

Others have also suggested and celebrated similar concepts; Sennet talks of a narrative space, where the boundaries and zonings are not fixed, and the “construction is simple enough to permit constant alteration” (Van Lieshout and Aarts 2008), or Sibley who relies on the idea of open and closed curriculum organization (Table 1) and introduces open and closed spaces accordingly (Sibley 1995, p.79).

Even within the predicted recurrent changes in urban life, there may be unforeseen instances of sporadic interventions. Perhaps the Edinburgh yearly festival is a close enough example; the festival is recurrent, yet the interventions the participating parties bring to the event are quite unpredictable, both in the meanings they carry and the physical manifestations. Many of these interventions are ephemeral, and perhaps only those which include the permanent physical changes, like the refurbishment of a burnt building and turning it into a performance stage, could be called sporadic interventions.

It is evident that finding examples of this type of change in urban fabric and life is difficult; hence the title sporadic is well suited for the phenomenon. Best examples may be found in events that trigger a social reform or physical regeneration. Unfortunately many of these examples are sad ordeals vis-à-vis other examples presented here, and we would be drawn dramatically away from the goal of this article if we enlist events such as 9/11 under the rest of events mentioned so far. But it is true that most of the examples we can find here have a strong political character.

The freedom offered in the public domain during the Edinburgh Festival is not offered in many other occasions or locations in the world. Even in the democratic countries, the urban public space is contested domain when it comes to political issues. As Malone (2002) describes:

“Historical accounts from Europe and the United States indicate that, at least since the nineteenth century, if not before, public space has been regarded as a lively and contested domain, the site of popular protest and political struggle... Various social groups – the elderly, the young, the poor, women and members of sexual or ethnic minorities – in different times and places, have been excluded from public space and subjected to political and moral censure.”

She further explains the difficulties of this conflict from the perspective of politicians and urban authorities, quoting Jach;

“...that which can't be held, can't be repressed, can't be organized into neatness. The fear of politicians everywhere: the crowd in the street; the uncontrolled, uncontrollable display; the random, unpredictable event that punctuates the facade of normality, the facade of power.”(Malone 2002)

We would find the same description fitting many cities of the Middle East. Perhaps it was another coincidence that during the preparation of the first drafts of this article, in the hometown of the author, the vibrant campaigns for the Iranian presidential elections of 2009 were taking place. The streets were lined with white fabric-covered hoardings, over which ordinary people and official campaign personnel could express their hopes and promises. (Picture 14) In effect, the open environment enticed great exuberance and considerable participation. Notwithstanding the result of the removal of these hoardings, and eliminating the corresponding atmosphere, or its replacement with anti-riot forces, the planning and design of the entire event, or rather its unplanned outcomes are perfect examples of sporadic interventions.

It is true that this type of intervention may be accompanied by sad events, but one cannot disagree with Sennet in the fact that “Disorderly, painful events in the city are worth encountering, because they force us to engage with ‘otherness’, to go beyond one’s own defined boundaries of self, and are thus central to civilized and civilizing social life” (Malone 2002).

All the examples analysed so far are evidences for the inherent human need of changeability in the environment. In fact, the need is so deep rooted that people are willing to pay dearly with the slightest prospect of achieving and maintaining its affordance.

Lasting Effects

There is little disagreement of the fact that whatever we build contains a meaning. It cannot be denied that “Objects in the environment hold little meaning without their social context and social use”, dimensions which are no less real than physical facts (Bendiner Viani 2005). As professionals our greater hopes revolve around the idea of building something that would stay in the mind of the observers and be acknowledged through some superior meaning, or perhaps in Simon Unwin’s words the noblest purpose for the products of architecture would be to “frame life” (2007, p.97).

In order to achieve this goal, it is sometimes necessary to go beyond specific needs and explicit ideas. Some would argue that at this point, “Any attempt by architects to meet the specific needs of a defined group of users at a particular time is likely to be effective only in short term” (Hill 2003, p.62). In planning and designing a supple urban landscape, there may be no other way than leaving a margin for the user to participate in shaping, completing or even designing the public space. Here again Sennet’s idea’s would help our case when he argues that “city planners’ desire to create places of sharply designed character is misguided, essentially a form of bad art” (Van Lieshout and Aarts 2008).

It is perhaps worthy of note that as professionals in shaping the living environment, our sole responsibility is not to build. In creating or improving the urban landscape in modern times, more often than not it is the understanding and acknowledging the tacit concepts that would make our work valuable.

“Although architecture is always an activity of the mind, it does not follow that architecture always entails building something physically... architecture may be no more than a matter of recognizing that a particular location is distinguishable as ‘a place’...” (Unwin 2007, p.61)

This is exactly the kind of practice that would ensure the discovery and preservation of the intangible cultural heritage. In cherishing and acknowledging the intangible heritage, it may be necessary to go even beyond the common concept of tolerance. This is essential since the concept of tolerance and its current implications, would only allow a margin for many groups in the society to practice their customs and values; they may never fill the centre stage of participation under the arrogance of this title. In other words, “tolerance actually may not be good enough, we must aim at acceptance” (Malone 2002). Malone (2002) provides us with the following suggested tactics to help us through these steps:

- giving political representation to group interests
- celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups
- re-imagining the role of streets as sites of collective culture, and culture production and reproduction

There is a strong demand for “visibility” versus “invisibility” (Amster 2008) from all social groups, especially those who are marginalized or banned from the urban scenery. These tactics may respond to the basic human need “to belong to a community, to be recognised, to share, to care and to be cared for” (Pløger 2006). These chances of interaction may indeed help the people to develop a common identity (Ibid.). The role of planners and designers may well be to create a supple landscape that would accept and welcome change, which leads to a sense of attachment and ownership, even with the most ephemeral interventions allowed by the environment. This would in turn ensure the support and participation of the citizens in many development projects.

The examples of this approach are found in many community gardens in European countries. Some define these public spaces with their participatory definitions to be “a socially desirable provision which engages certain groups in the use of public open space who would not otherwise use a park” (Ward Thompson 2002).

There are some historic examples to support our argument here too. The Safavid approach in celebrating common traditions and rituals did not include the Persian Muslim citizen of Isfahan at the time. During the Safavid period (17th century B.C.), a large population of Armenians was deported to Isfahan, due to constant Persian-Turkish wars over the Armenian territories. Being known for their craftsmanship and proficiency in different technical areas, they were potentially important citizens for Isfahan; a fact that was well cherished by Shah Abbas I. To activate the latent talents of the new residents in Isfahan, and to create a sense of attachment to their new town, the yearly festival of Armenians, during which the water sources are blessed with sacred oil, were performed in the currents of the most important river of the capital; the Zayandeh-roud. The ceremony was performed with the consent of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and was witnessed by the Shah Abbas I himself in the first year of Armenian settlement in Isfahan (Razi 2001, p.370).

Through Shah Abbas’s well deserved respect for the Armenian immigrants, not only they were permitted to perform their rituals in a public place inside the most important city of the Safavid territory, but also the ritual was officially endorsed by the presence of the king himself.

Considering the fact that the newborn Safavid dynasty was the first Shi’a government of region, flanked by many powerful Sunni territories, including the Ottoman Empire, the height of religious prejudice in the society is conceivable. Yet, out of the superior vision of a ruler, the highly accomplished newcomers were welcomed into the society and declared as the rightful shared owners of public spaces, or in today’s lexicon, as the new stakeholders. In return, the Armenian population contributed dearly to the urban development of the city. The Armenian quarters of Isfahan (Jolfa), as well as many of their single works of architecture are now world known masterpieces and considered national heritage by all Iranians.

The examples presented here leave little doubt on the lasting effects of suppleness in vitality and exuberance of urban life, no matter how ephemeral the offered affordances are.

Conclusion

To shape close-to-ideal 'open' un-oppressive cities, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the need for visibility for all social groups. Furthermore, there is an essential demand for an urban landscape and public spaces that would acknowledge the presence of all groups, and would respond accordingly.

It is suggested that for a urban landscape to be able to respond to public, an affordance for change should be recognized and created. With regard to this, different types of changeability were introduced and further analysed with modern as well as historic examples. Through the selected examples, it was demonstrated that a public space could be the dynamic showcase of activities, and could really 'frame' the life and culture of all social groups.

The argument ends with the result that in agreeing with the necessity of a supple urban landscape, in spite of all the angst of leaving and maintaining an unregulated and unpredictable environment, we will be rewarded by the attachment and participation of all social groups in shaping vigorous city. Moreover, the freedom offered by these ephemeral, recurrent, or sporadic interventions will have lasting effects in creating a mature society, and will ensure the discovery and preservation of our intangible cultural heritage. The corporeal and immaterial effects of this approach may indeed create an open city that is, in Earnest Hemingway's (1964) words, a "moveable feast".

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