

USP 575 Urban Design Workshop “Casing the City”

Overview

A city is a complex human-made organism, a continuously unfolding drama that, at its best, inspires the imagination and enriches the human prospect. Cities are the loci of social, cultural, economic, and ecological innovation enabled by an intense metabolism of knowledge, energy, nutrient, material, financial and cultural flows and interactions that animate complex and vibrant forms of community life. By 2030 about 60% of humanity will be urban residents while the US will approach 90%. Will these dwellers be victims of un-designed and poorly planned urbanization or residents of great cities?

This course will expose students to the basic elements of building great cities -- streets, plazas, gardens, blocks and neighborhoods. We will spend the first half of the fall quarter outdoors (yes outdoors!) exploring examples of these elements and wrestling with: What makes a great street? A memorable plaza? A welcoming garden? A functional block? A beloved neighborhood? How can designers integrate the art and science of placemaking into the creation of great neighborhoods and cities? We will “read” examples of these elements to discern their intent, underlying principles, materiality and dimensionality. We will record human behavior affordances and develop a documentation language. We will synthesize our work into a sharable catalogue of urban case studies for use in studio work. The second half of the quarter will focus on a project of each student’s choosing that employs the lessons learned from the readings and the walking tours to propose an urban design intervention not city fabric.

Objectives

Casing the City will provide a practical grounding in urban placemaking elements and will:

- Familiarize students with the urban design “kit of parts” foundational to urban placemaking;
- Develop skills to see, read, assess, sketch and diagram urban public space;
- Expose students to the principles underlying great streets, public places and neighborhoods;
- Develop an understanding of urban metabolism: how cities function and how resource flows provide social, economic and ecological function and animate public places; and
- Create a resource base for use in future urban design studios and professional practice work.

Themes

Underpinning our tactile city adventures will be a series of themes that will enrich our work:

- The legible city: How to make a memorable city by incorporating the cognitive elements-- paths, nodes, landmarks, districts, edges and gateways—humans use to navigate the city;
- The public- private city: How cities provide degrees of privacy and publicness in urban fabric;
- The defensible city: How “eyes on the street”, territoriality and active streets foster safe places;
- The City as a kit of parts: How to read the city and create a toolkit of precedents that can be drawn upon to inform placemaking;
- The City as urban metabolism: How urban fabric can integrate webs of resource flows into public infrastructure... and celebrate this through design, engineering and public art; and
- The spatial-temporal city: How cities evolve over time and change by season.

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