Civic Vitality & Urban Space

Introduction

In this article we try to identify civic vitality and its characteristics, such as legibility, imageability and clearance, we note an important condition to create civic vitality that is a space with legible body and valuable visual effects. And finally we note the role of urban designer and participation of people in creating a pleasure image in city.

Civic vitality

The relation between design of urban space and civic vitality has a long history. The relation between usage of buildings and attendance of people in urban space, the relation between art of architecture and interest and consideration of people, the relation between the form of community places and relaxation of citizens and so on have a historical life.

Civic vitality is a combination of experiences of relaxation and safety in city. Civic vitality includes the complex of contacts, relationship of people with their surrounding environment and with each other. Civic vitality forms in urban spaces. Relaxation is resulted from contacts which are pleasant and made satisfactory feelings.

Safety is an important factor in civic vitality, which is resulted from continuous social supervision in urban space. So safety and relaxation are two basic factors in civic vitality. With these two factors we can have some places and situations in city that create **memories**.

We can call these spaces a pleasant environment. Creating this pleasant environment has a direct relationship with organization and management of urban space; this pleasant environment actually is a cultural environment that forms social behavior inside that.

So according to identify of civic vitality we can conclude that the first and the most important step to reach a good civic vitality is enriching the community or improving the urban space.

Urban space can provide the pleasant community for growth of civic vitality. Urban space indeed is a container that concludes several types of community, and this community shows the sign of health or weakness of city.

Civic vitality is spirit of body of city. Body of city is not only for biological requirements of human being but also is a bed to flow civic vitality.

Urban space

Urban space is one of the components of city that forms and transfers during the history of a nation in several periods.

Urban space is a place to flow civic & social habitat.

Zoker identify urban space as: "an organize, ornamented and ordering structure like a body for human activities an base on clear and identified rules such as: relation between form and surrounding facade and being similarity or variety of them, proportion of façade to wideness and length of space, the angle of passage or routes that reach to squares and finally the situation and place of historical buildings, waterfronts and fountains or other 3D elements that we can emphasis on them.

Plaza san Marco- Italy

Naghsh – e – jahan square - Iran

So we can't call every space as urban space.

An urban space is like a stage that community activities of civic life happened on them. Streets, parks and squares form the human activities. These dynamic spaces, which are against with static and move less residential and working spaces, are the vital and main component of a city and include urban web, relation center and create public and recreational space in the city.

Cullen notifies "the art of proportion" in his book and calls it the base of "Art of architecture" because of the wise ordering that is between elements of a built environment.

He says that we should connect buildings, trees, water, traffic, advertisement signs and so on with each other in a manner that create a "demonstration of art of city " because city is an exciting happening.

If we notice the specialists that a good city need to them, we see that several specialists such as socialists, engineers, traffic specialist and so on all should cooperate with each other in order to gather countless elements to create a sound, functional structure. Cullen knows this as "a great promise in human beings".

Then Cullen says that if finally the city looks spiritless and gloomy so this city hasn't answered the requests of people and is a failed experience.

So Cullen knows the solution of this problem in enriching the visual sense of people, because according him people percept their environment by visual ability or visual sense.

According to Lynch if a city have a legibility, Imageability or complete clearance look noticeable, good manner and honorable. This city invites ears and eyes to itself much more.

The ideal is that the image of city causes visual utilization of people and people share and participate themselves in that visual perception.

Here we face with education, which means enrichment of visual sense and grow up the taste of beauty of people to create the participation between people and city. Maybe the designer has responsibility to educate the people.

Legibility of city

Legibility is an important factor in image of city and every urban space that haven't legibility cause unsafely and confusing in environment.

Lynch identifies legibility such as: "legibility is that recognizing the components of city easily and being able to relate them to each other. In a similar manner when we saw a printed page, if it is legibility, we can image some continuous symbols, like this in a city that have a legibility image we can recognize all of components such as: districts, interesting and important buildings and streets and avenues or imagine all of them in a continuous complex."

Legibility is an important factor in feeling safety and also enriched the sense of orientation and finding the way.

In a messy and chaotic environment one feel confusing and bewildering and have a little perception from his surrounding environment.

Legibility in a city is like legibility in a map that signs and signals arrange as clarity and readable that one doesn't miss his way and doesn't confuse.

According to lynch clarity or legibility isn't the only feature of a beautiful city, but if we notice the living environment of people by its size, time and confusing, so this factor will be very important.

Of course a marvelous environment in city that each corner of that has a new factor isn't bad. Much of us maybe like to walk in bending avenues, however two conditions should be exist: the fist is that one never feel that have missed his total image of form of environment or have lost. Second condition is that the total forms of avenues should be in such a way that there should have a total clarity in environment.

Evaluation of beauty in urban space

At a glance to the history of architecture & urbanism in the world we notice that in modern movement in 19th century function is overcome on buildings and urban spaces. In this period volumes of buildings were became more and more pure and simple by "form follows function".

To solve this problem the first step is putting some criteria and measures to evaluating beauty (visual effects) and aesthetic factors in urban space.

Now urban spaces often are places that only belong to vehicles and give a few attentions to pedestrian and how they attend in these spaces.

Contemporary urban spaces are messy, terrible, and ugly & without identity in spite the fact that historical urban spaces had & have characters that still are attractive for many people to see and enjoy.

Why should be this? Isn't the importance of beauty the same with the important of function? How should create beauty and how should evaluate it?

We need to consider beauty in urban space and also need to have some criteria to evaluate beauty & good visual effect in urban space. We also know beauty is not a quantity it is a quality.

In fact nowadays in designing the urban spaces designers always think about traffic function and neglected from some measures such as surrounding, harmony, equivalence, proportion & clearance, so we have spaces that are ugly, empty & without identity.

In this article we have some criteria to evaluate beauty of urban space, which are:

Ordering, unities, composition, correct proportion and harmony.

May be this is the simplest way to evaluate beauty & visual effect in an urban spaces.

We will identify these criteria and at the end we will evaluate some samples of urban spaces with those measures and give the final result about them.

There are several specialists that have issued some criteria to evaluate design in urban space such as: Lynch,Cullen , Alexader , urban systems researching Eng. SNG .

Totally these criteria of designing can be divided to three categories: measurable, non measurable and generic.

I myself prefer some visual criteria to evaluate urban spaces that are:

Ordering, unity & composition, scale & correct proportion and harmony.

So we can have a table with these criteria to evaluate urban spaces that is the following:

Ordering
Unity & composition
scale & correct proportion
harmony

Here is some example to evaluate (of course much of them is from Iran because I am an Iranian).

Example no.1: Amir chaghmage square (Iran –Yazd)

Ordering	Have
Unity & composition	Have
scale & correct proportion	Have
harmony	Have

Example no.2: siena – del compo

Ordering	Nearly
Unity & composition	Have
scale & correct proportion	Have
harmony	Have

Example no. 3: Sadegiyeh square (Iran – Tehran)

Ordering	Don't have
Unity & composition	Don't have
scale & correct proportion	Don't have
harmony	Don't have

Example no.4: Topkhaneh square (Iran – Tehran)

Ordering	Don't have
Unity & composition	Don't have
scale & correct proportion	Don't have
harmony	Don't have

Example no.5: Terreh (lion – France)

Ordering	Have
Unity & composition	Have
scale & correct proportion	Have
harmony	Have

Example no.6 : Azadi square (Iran – Tehran)

Ordering	Have
Unity & composition	Have
scale & correct proportion	Have
harmony	Have

With respect to these criteria we can design or evaluate urban spaces much better. Indeed here we have a framework to do in that.

Participation of people

City is a place for people to live, and people give meaning to urban spaces. So urban designers design city for society and people both of them and people should participate in this designing.

Edmond Beyckon knows the process of design in interfacing between society and designer and proposes two conditions for this:

1- Both designer and society understand this process
2- Both should be ready to involve completely, full participation and accept the disciplines of this participation.

Lynch says: " in process of creating an imagination of city, graduating the eyes of audiences is as important as creating a new and good image. These two create a spiral: visual teaching made people to see the world and this point cause that their careful and their consideration and carefulness have been increased. The art of designing the city needs people who watch well with interest and have a critic observing.

If this art and visual ability of people grow with each other, the city will be the recourse of visual utilization of settlers of city.

Conclusion

According to presented discussion and theme we should think about civic vitality and think about an equivalency that civic atmosphere form in that and this is nothing except revaluating the urban spaces.

The matter that helps social activities is participation of people to make a suitable structure for city and public spaces.

A group of planners and designers cannot decide instead of people. Renewing of spaces, providing a built environment and so on cannot occur without participation of people.

Also visual perception of people from environment and the visual utilization of people from environment cause improvement and enriching the image of city.

May be creating the sense of participation is the responsibility of urban designer and he should design in such a way that facing with cooperative feeling of people and he should thinks human and along with people in creating an orchestrated, legible and functional space for civic activity.

Lynch notifies the similarity between music and architecture according the relation of time; of course he notes a differentiation in contrast with music that we can't formulate the time in design of city or put any limitation between its distances.

Deference between music and urban design is that music can be described and discuss carefully in order to have its own literature and alphabet. There is such literature for painting too. But a complex modern city hasn't such a particular alphabet to discuss about its form and appearance.

So if we prepare such an alphabet, we can speak with clarity about form of city and policies that have influence on form of city and then discuss easier about legibility and imageability of urban spaces.

Lynch says that forming or reforming the component of city should be according to the plan that we can call it: "visual map". Preparing this map may be started with analysis of present form of city and the imagination, which people have in mind. Conclusion of this analysis can be illustrated with diagrams and reports that show imagination of people from present visual situation.

With using of this analysis can produce a "visual map" for city that aims to enriching the image of people from the city.

The final goal of this map isn't determining the form of city, but is creating a quality that make a good pleasant from image of city in mind of people. So, to improve this image eyes of seers should learn watching, citizens should learn watching various forms of

image of city and how to compose them with each other: people should be taken to street and teach them how to watch.

The way that Lynch suggests is establishing classes in schools and universities, he says city can be an alive museum for society and its hopes, such educations in not only useful for improving the image of city, but also is necessary to percept of new points that make because of some changes in image of cities. The art of city make alive when knowledgeable people see critically.

Education of people and reforming body of cities is a component of continuous and various process of designing the city.

References:

1-   Lynch, Kevin / the image of city / published in Tehran university / 1975

2-   Beykon , Edmond / Urban design / 1997

3-   Cullen , Gordon / Urban scape / Published in Tehran university / 1998

4-   Bahreyni , Hosien / Urban design process /
      Published in Tehran university / 1999

5-   Shirvany , Hamid / The urban design process / VNB company / 1985