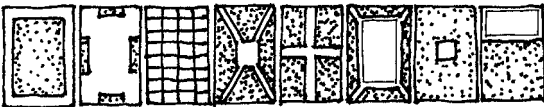


be several featured structures that contribute to the identity of the place. An urban space can be formed by continuous abutting facades or an ensemble of freestanding structures.

Attributes of plaza elevations can be understood hierarchically. We may appreciate the facade along a space's edge in terms of its overall height and length, its general coloration and its roof profile. Attention might move to the material palette, massing articulations and surface treatment such as window pattern, pilasters, columns, cornices, and balconies. We scan the elevation for building doorways, window displays, and gaps between structures that offer exit and entry options. Our intensity of focus, level of attention paid to facade detail, and kinds of elevation information that interest us are influenced by our reasons for looking. Porches, awnings, arcades, and entrances are objects of intense scrutiny if it begins to rain.

Urban places often contain freestanding elements such as statues, sculpture, benches, pavilions, fountains, flags, or trees. They may represent important events, mark historic spots, define areas, answer visual axes, form part of a composition, anchor significant geometric positions, or organize space and activity. These elements can be strong contributors to the thematic power of the place or simply serve as decoration and functional scenery.



The ground plane in a plaza can be primarily paved or grassed. Combination hardscape-softscape spaces create patterns formed by their figural relationships. Paths may be differentiated as defined walks, or the space might be completely paved, offering strolling opportunities in all directions. Some plazas are sloped or multilevel. Ground materials are of interest too. What is the paving made of? What are its most noticeable qualities? Color, texture, unit shape, size and scale, finish, consistency versus variation, joinery, edge conditions, and patterns within the paving may catch our eye. Is there more than one material used? How are they arranged? Landscaping properties that can be appreciated are type, placement, condition and maturity of plant materials, sub-places in the space created by landscaping, geometric configurations, and water features. Ground-plane geometry is often responsive to the overall geometry

and configuration of the space and to the dimensions, composition, and entry positions of important facades.

Experientially, spatial volume, building facades, freestanding elements, and ground plane are perceived holistically, dynamically. Our understanding of place is composed of moving and stationary perspectives that register plaza elements and qualities in a rapid succession of immediate experiences, immediate memories, and immediate expectations. Our point of plaza entry, movement pattern in the space, and scanning configuration may be motivated and purposeful or guided only by the visual dynamics of the place. Are we there to take slides of the church? Searching for the entrance to the museum? The address of a friend? A particular shop? Or are we just strolling with no particular agenda?

Activity

Taxonomies can be useful in recognizing, understanding, and describing human activity in public spaces. These noticing/naming systems tend to occur at two levels. The first level of noticing activity involves immediately observable attributes of behavior. The second level moves to recognition of finer, more subtle activity distinctions and similarities.

First level noticing/naming categories for recognizing and describing action in urban space are active-inactive, vehicular-pedestrian, moving-stationary, native-tourist, and thematic-hybrid.

One of the first things we sense about a public space is its aliveness. Is something happening? Are people there? Or is the space vacant, dead? This deals with the extent to which people are present regardless of what they're doing. A plaza may be elegant as an architectural container but unactivated. People don't come because there is no reason to come. There are no animating purposes for the population to get there and stay there. Aliveness intensity can vary over time. Plazas are sometimes active during weekday working hours but dormant in the evenings and on weekends. Aliveness may mean the place is densely populated, activated with high-energy. Mardi Gras-like action. Aliveness can also take the form of small groups moving slowly in quiet reverence.

Vehicular-pedestrian is another category by which we make immediate sense of activity. Is the space primarily dedicated to vehicular traffic or to people on foot? If the space is shared by both, we quickly notice the domains claimed by each. A plaza can be alive with honking, grid-locked, agitated drivers or packs of loud, speeding, smoking scooters. The