

SEARCH IN THE VOID: AN INVESTIGATION ON ROLE OF SPATIAL EXPERIENCE IN PARK DESIGN

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Abstract

This paper primarily argues about the nature of an urban void in the contemporary urban culture. In the age of urbanization, the role of an urban open space is manifold, and urban green and urban open space remains one of the most important link between man and nature. The urban park therefore, can become an important element within the fabric that tries to resonate with the city as well as engaging man into a range of enticing sensual experiences through natural elements. In doing so, striking a balance becomes a challenge - there are examples of parks who lean more towards urbanity while many remain close to the romantic aspect of the park as a 'gateway to nature' – and somehow the aspects of man and his perception of space, a topic that always gets the spotlight in the fields of architecture, remain side-lined. In this context, through analysing design strategies in one local park and two very famous and talked about urban parks - the highly successful Central Park in New York and the acclaimed design of Parc de la Villette in Paris, this paper tries to investigate the possibility of existential space theory and spatial experience as a strategic design tool to engage and enhance social cohesion and place attachment in an urban park..

Keywords: Urban park, Urban void, Park use, Place attachment, Social cohesion, Existential space, Sub-urbanism, Super-urbanism..

Introduction

As human civilization moved along its curve of development, urbanization and industrialization became the character of cities, towns and human settlements. The process of urbanization is not always uniform, rather inconsistent, resulting in highly developed areas and not – meaning there are areas in an urban condition that are more built up than others – producing blank areas within the fabric. Sometimes these blank areas, otherwise called as voids, are deliberate, or sometimes they are accidental, residual, or results of phenomena like war, invasions, change in socio-economic conditions etc.¹ But in the process of urbanization these voids are never completely

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¹ García, L., 2017. From Void to opportunity. Procedia Environmental Sciences, 37, pp.637-646.

abandoned or left without use –eventually adapting to a different or new use and often adding vital regenerative value to the existing urban fabric.

Theoretical Discussion:

Void and the Park:

The idea of 'lost space' was brought forward by Roger Trancik, in his book 'Finding Lost Space'². In these terms, urban voids are not very well-defined, lacking measurable boundary conditions, sporadically found and without any positive contribution to the surrounding urban context. While these overlooked spaces are lying hidden in the urban context, they hold tremendous possibilities for future re-use and can turn into potential breathing space for a dense urban area³. However, although urban parks are voids within the urban fabric, but they do not categorically fit with the idea of an urban void per se. It might as well be said that, all urban parks are voids, but all voids are not necessarily urban parks.

Historically urban parks are designated areas within the city, often designed to be incorporated with the urban area. These are recognized areas by the city as parks and are predominated by the experience of natural elements. The definition of urban park follows suite too - "Urban parks are defined as delineated open space areas, mostly dominated by vegetation and water, and generally reserved for public use. Urban parks are mostly larger, but can also have the shape of smaller 'pocket parks'. Urban parks are usually locally defined (by authorities) as 'parks'." ⁴ According to (Cecil C. et al 2013) among the many benefits of an urban park, the main benefit can be seen in the wellbeing of the users, and creating a ground for social cohesion and identity as well as tourism, biodiversity and positive effects on the environment such as improved air quality, lower temperature and better water management.⁵ This definition gets more testimony– "Parks offer a unique setting within the urban landscape, providing opportunities for physical activity, enjoyment of nature, social interaction, and escape. Participation in these opportunities is likely to help explain how parks contribute to improving health and well-being of users."⁶

Well-being & Social Cohesion:

According to (Ayala-Azcárraga, Cristina & Diaz, Daniel & Zambrano, Luis. (2019) well-being is "a state of the human being that arises when good health is maintained (physical and mental), social relationships of trust and cooperation are established, and individuals and groups can act to pursue their goals so that they are satisfied with their lives", and therefore park use can become an important factor for well-being. This is because large green areas bring together many groups of age and interest and create a condition of communication and activity, such as games, rest & play etc. These ultimately helps physical and mental well- being conditions and by introducing social interaction and place attachment also promotes social cohesion⁷.

² Trancik, R. "Finding lost space"; Theories of urban design, 1st ed.; John Wiley & Sons.; 1986.

³ Lee, Seog Jeong, S. Hwang, and D. Lee. "Urban Voids: As a Chance for Sustainable Urban Design." 8th conference of the International Forum on Urbanism. 2015.

⁴ Cecil C. Konijnendijk, Matilda Annerstedt, Anders Busse Nielsen, Sreetheran Maruthaveeran, January 2013, Copenhagen & Anlarp, "Benefits of Urban Parks: A systematic review: a report for IFPRA", p. 02.

⁵ Ibid, p.03

⁶ McCormack, G.R., Rock, M., Toohey, A.M. and Hignell, D., 2010. Characteristics of urban parks associated with park use and physical activity: A review of qualitative research. *Health & place*, 16(4), pp.712-726.

⁷ Ayala-Azcárraga, Cristina & Diaz, Daniel & Zambrano, Luis. (2019). Characteristics of urban parks and their relation to user well-being. *Landscape and Urban Planning*. 189. 27. 10.1016/j.landurbplan.2019.04.005.

One of the pre-requisites for social cohesion is accumulation of social capital which refers to resources accessible to social interaction and social networks, reciprocity, norms and mutual trust. In this regard, the importance of place remain central for social interaction and social cohesion because public places offer opportunity for interaction of various types as well as between various groups. This brings up the second issue of social cohesion - place attachment – which can be stated as a positive emotional bond between groups and individuals and their environment.⁸ Therefore, the relation between people and places is important and can contribute to form social capital.⁹

Park use & the Program:

From the discussion above, it is obvious that urban parks help maintain social cohesion, social inter-action, physical and mental well-being of the users and so many more. When assessing the characteristics, conditions and aesthetics that affect the use of a park, factors like quality of the play equipment, presence of certain activity (such as climbing, running etc.), park amenities (such as barbeques, seating, water fountains, etc.), lack of maintenance (cleanliness, lack of grass, pavement quality, trash can etc.), accessibility (distance from home, pet accessibility etc.) aesthetic preferences (presence / absence of graffiti, vandalism, presence of trees, etc.), safety (absence of non-desirable users, fencing off animals from human, illumination etc.) are expressed out as major points.¹⁰ However, all of these are quantifiable physical attributes and matter-of-fact objects that can be easily achieved with adequate measure. For example – better children equipment's can be provided, roads and sidewalks can be better built and maintained, adequate illumination and security measures can be ensured. However, such utilitarian elements perhaps are not sufficient to create a deeper relation with the user.

Beyond the utilitarian aspect, an urban park must have the capacity to engage into the complexity of the urban fabric in which program can be an important aspect. According to Kevin Lynch, "Design is the search for forms that satisfy program. It deals with particular solutions, while the program is concerned with general characteristics and desired outcomes. Design begins in the programming, and programs are modified as design progresses."¹¹ Hence it is understood that program validates the intentions of the design and address the generic character. But there remains something beyond the utilitarian aspect of the program as Bernard Tschumi mentions "(on inventing in a project)...about the 'second programme'. The first programme is the one given to you by the client, and then you have to reformulate the program into something that you invent, which interests you."¹²

The second program is something that goes beyond regular requirements and enables the architect/designer and the user to go beyond for some extraordinary experience(s).

⁸ K. M. Korpela, 1989, "Place identity as a product of environmental self-regulation." P. 241-256. Journal of Environmental Psychology 9(3).

⁹ Peters, K., Elands, B. and Buijs, A., 2010. Social interactions in urban parks: stimulating social cohesion?. Urban forestry & Urban greening, 9(2), pp.93-100.

¹⁰ McCormack, G.R., Rock, M., Toohey, A.M. and Hignell, D., 2010. Characteristics of urban parks associated with park use and physical activity: A review of qualitative research. Health & place, 16(4), pp.712-726.

¹¹ Kevin Lynch & Gary Hack, 'Site Design, 1984' in Theory in Landscape Architecture- A Reader, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002) p. 57.

¹² Samantha Hardingham, "Bernard Tschumi: Supercrit #4, Parc de La Villette", 2012, p. 95

Place attachment, Existential space & the Senses:

Even after ensuring all of the physical attributes, it does not ensure a spatial environment that has the ability to communicate with the human nature. The human process of perception of space and identification of places is fundamental in creating place attachment which eventually form the basis for social cohesion. In general, the idea of place attachment is generated from 'attachment theory' which is "grounded in the notion that infants form an attachment or bond to the mother, which influences expectations and behaviours as children develop. Derived from this theory, place attachment is viewed as a bond or link between people and places."¹³ This indicates that core human behaviour is engaged and this engagement works in multi-dimensions –many related directly with the design world, others co-relate with social, psychological, economical aspects. Thus to develop place attachment "...there are seven common processes: (1) sensory, (2) narrative, (3) historical, (4) spiritual, (5) ideological, (6) commodifying, and (7) material dependence. Each process describes a unique series of action and associated meaning making. While these processes are distinct, they are also co-occurring. Collectively, they contribute to a person's place attachment."¹⁴ These processes somehow relate with the aspects of space and place. Therefore, theories and ideas of human understanding of space, in this regard, can become more relevant – after all, the users of the park and members of the society are mere humans and the sense of space resonates with human nature.

Existential Space Theory:

The idea of space had always been an integral part of human existence. Consciously or subconsciously space is embedded in our lives –in the form of relations such as inside and outside, above and below, near and far and so on. The theory of space is always evolving, for example, from Gestalt psychology to J. Piaget's theory of 'schemata' and then on to existential space.¹⁵ Schemata is a large interaction database built on our continuous interaction with the environment, and eventually form the basis for our perception of a particular situation or surrounding. This implies that man gradually builds his perception of space and place around him. The theory of existential space revolves around this idea of schemata. Kevin Lynch argues on the similar direction when he says - "The world may be organized around a set of focal points, or be broken into named regions, or be linked to remembered routes."¹⁶ But this idea becomes concrete and practicable when Christian Norberg-Schulz underlines the principal components that build our perception of space and surrounding - "the elementary organizational schemata consist in the establishment of centers or places (proximity), direction or paths (continuity) and areas or domains (enclosure)."¹⁷

The center is always a place of action –be it any particular activity, or places of social interaction, thus actions give meaning, recognizability and purpose to convert a space into a place. This center is not like a personal territory, rather it is public in nature. But what is similar with territory is the

¹³ Plunkett, D., Fulthorp, K. and Paris, C.M., 2019. "Examining the relationship between place attachment and behavioral loyalty in an urban park setting". *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 25, pp.36-44.

¹⁴ Cross, Jennifer Eileen. "Processes of place attachment: An interactional framework." *Symbolic Interaction* 38.4 (2015): 493-520.

¹⁵ Christian Norberg-Schulz, 1971, New York, "Existence, Space & Architecture", p.10.

¹⁶ Kevin Lynch, "The Image of the City", The MIT Press, 1960, p. 7.

¹⁷ Christian Norberg-Schulz, 1971, New York, "Existence, Space & Architecture", p.18

identification of boundary or limit –the place is experienced as an ‘inside’ which is confined and separated from the surrounding ‘outside’.¹⁸

Direction can help man occupy and access space as well as establish a mental state. The path is characterized by its continuity, it is a mean to reach a goal and contains direction, but during the journey events create the punctuations and characterize the path. Area and domain are created by paths when they divide the environment into known and not so well known areas. The well-known and defined areas can be called domains. Domains are similar with places, as they have a significant boundary, but do not become places as they do not function as goals. The domain perform as a unifying element that fills out the blank portions and makes the image more coherent.¹⁹ The interaction of the elements of existential space formulate the key basis for man to identify his position in this world.

The Hidden Dimension of Senses

The idea of boundary and limit set forth by center, place and domain bring the question of human perception and sensual limits. The dimension provided by the sensory receptors can become an innate and integral component of human existence and experience in a space. For example, regardless of the cultural orientation of a person, the capacity of the human eye is universal and to some extent precise. As E. T. Hall says - “The unaided eye, on the other hand, sweeps up an extraordinary amount of information within a hundred-yard radius and is still quite efficient for human interaction at a mile.”²⁰

This can be even used as definitive tool to set the limit of architectural space that contains appeal for all human beings in general. The human body and its sensory impulses still remain as the key tools for defining our sense of boundary. Sensory impulses of sight, hearing, smell, touch etc. define the boundaries of visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile spaces –often forming the key anchorage of our being in a place.

Methodology:

A qualitative analysis has been made between four designs of three parks (two foreign and one local) from a rather contrasting approach of design. The parks under consideration are- the Parc La Villette in Paris –designed by OMA (as a project) and by Barnard Tschumi Architects (later built), The Central Park in New York, and The Garer Maath in Kolkata, India. What is striking about these study cases are the strategies at play. The Central park and Parc Villette represent two different approach of design- ‘sub-urbanism’ and ‘super-urbanism’ respectively, where “sub-urbanism is an approach to design where the hierarchy established by modern urbanism between program and site (“from the inside outwards’, from programme to site, from the city to the territory) is overturned, such that the site becomes the regulatory idea of the project and almost the *subject* in which the programme has to be deciphered. Super-urbanism is just the opposite: not a simple re-affirmation, but a super-version or ‘radicalisation’ of the way of modern urbanism, a discipline of design applied to producing and literally inventing a site (or scape) through the reading, analysis and manipulation of the programme.”²¹ Another basis for selection was that all

¹⁸ Ibid, p.20.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.23.

²⁰ Edward T. Hall, “The Hidden Dimension”, 1969, p. 43.

²¹ Marot, Sébastien. "Sub-Urbanism / Super-Urbanism: From Central Park to La Villette." AA Files, no. 53 (2006): 20-37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29544815>.

three parks are in large size category, (large > 4.5 hectares)²² and can be brought under the same canopy. A qualitative research method through physical survey and literature study has been used as this is a theoretical discussion and a qualitative research can go beyond statistical associations and can help understand the complex contextual and humane issue²³ that this discussion concentrates upon.

STUDY 01: Park La Villette (OMA, Project, Competition finalist, 1984)

OMA was one of the two architecture offices that were short listed for the final phase of the design competition. To accommodate a large program, the objective was to propose a set of elements that through mutual interference and superimposition generate a new experience of park. The elements were: a) The Strips, b) The Point Grids, or Confetti, c) Access & Circulation & d) The Final layer.²⁴

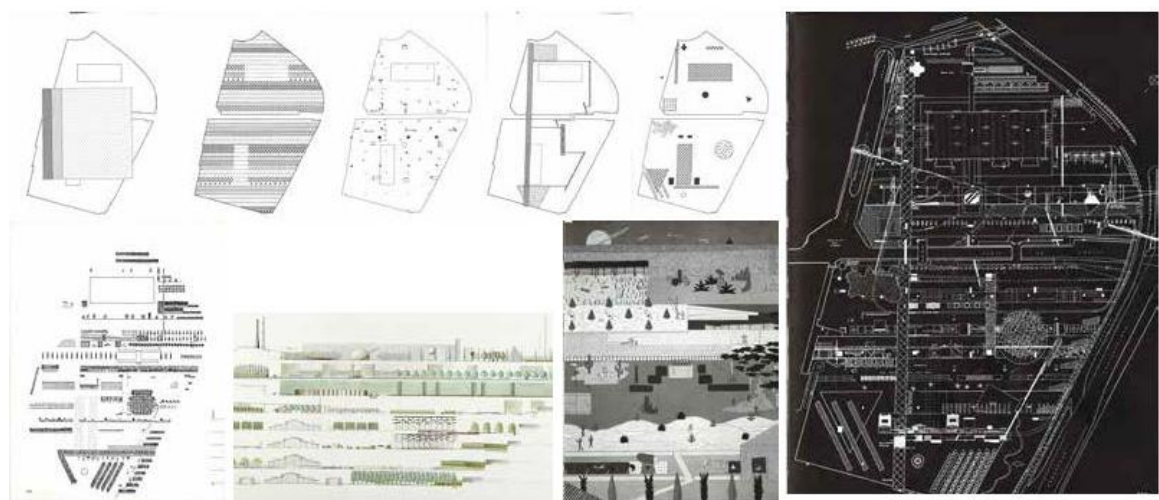


Figure 01: Design Concepts, (Source: Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, “S,M,L,XL”, The Netherlands 1995)

- a) **The Strips:** The whole site was divided into parallel bands. Each of the 50m wide was to represent a major programmatic category and green was also considered a program element and articulated accordingly. The parallel strips create a maximum length of contact between programs, and create a sense of continuity throughout the site.
- b) **The Point Grids, or Confetti:** Distributed mathematically, these are points where the small scale programs and fractions of large scale major programs are placed. The distribution is done in the north-south direction, so that the programs are distributed in various types of strips.
- c) **Access and Circulation:** There are 2 types of circulation – the Boulevard, and the Promenade. The boulevard is the obvious, the promenade is the mysterious. The

²² Ballester-Olmos, J.F. and Carrasco, A.M., 2001. Normas para la clasificación de los espacios verdes. Ed. Univ. Politéc. Valencia.

²³ McCormack, G.R., Rock, M., Toohey, A.M. and Hignell, D., 2010. Characteristics of urban parks associated with park use and physical activity: A review of qualitative research. *Health & place*, 16(4), pp.712-726.

²⁴ Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, 1995, The Netherlands, “S,M,L,XL”, p. 925.

Boulevard cuts through all the bands in right angle, connecting the two most significant pre-existing elements of the site. All night programs gather around it, and it is the widest of all access ways. On the other hand, Promenade is composed of plaza-like elements that moves through the density of the bands and allows slow movement and a discovery of elements of the park hidden in the layers of the bands.

- d) The Final Layer: The final layer is comprised of major elements that are unique or too large to be accommodated according to the mathematical rules. These are the existing Science Museum, the Grand Halle and the new 'Circular Forest', and 'Façade Building'. These elements help to break away from the regularity produced by the bands and other ordering elements.

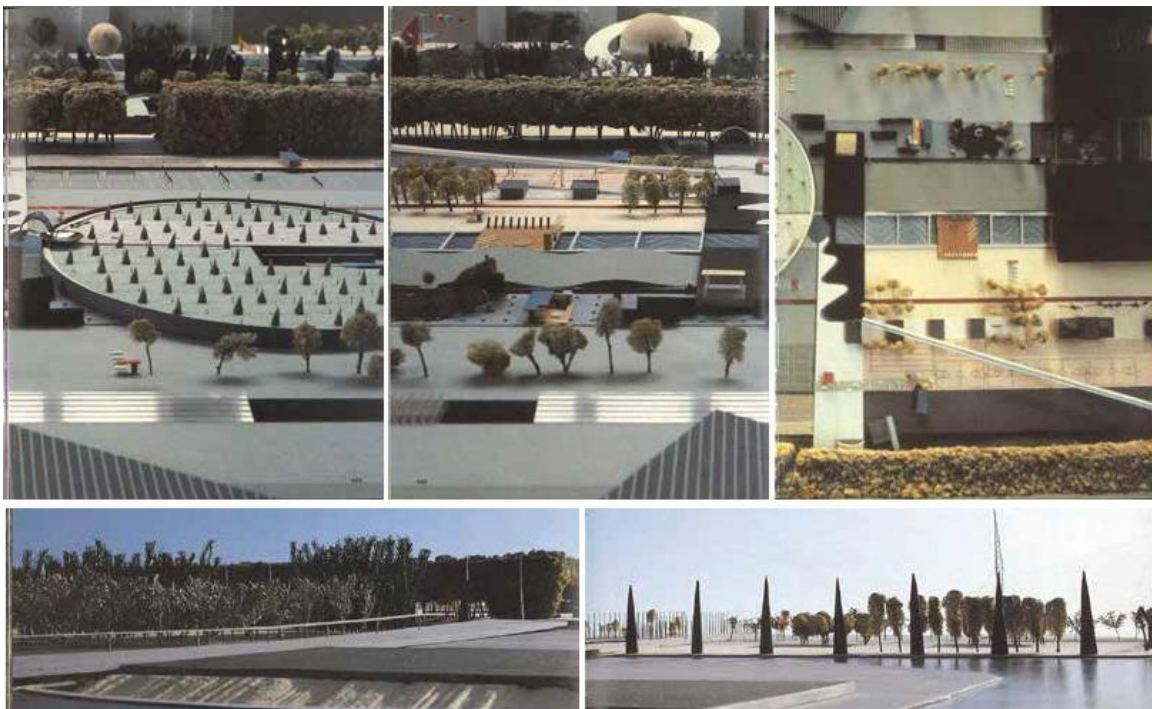


Figure 02: The Experience of the park. (Source: Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, "S,M,L,XL", The Netherlands 1995)

STUDY 02: Park La Villette (Bernard Tschumi, built, 1982-1998)

In 1983 Bernard Tschumi Architects won the design competition and later went to see the construction of the project. Rejecting the conventional formal organization of a park, the architects adopted a simple structural solution: to distribute the vast programmatic requirements over the total site in a regular arrangement of points of intensity, designated as 'Folies'²⁵. The project had three layers of elements superimposed on each other: a) Points – the Folies, b) Lines – movements, c) Surfaces – surface activities.

- a) Points: The Folies are 10x10x10 meter cube of neutral space placed in a point-grid coordinate system at 120-meter for maximum flexibility²⁶. The repetition the 'Folie' that

²⁵ Bernard Tschumi, 1994, MIT Press, "Event-Cities 2", p. 53

²⁶ Samantha Hardingham, "Bernard Tschumi: Supercrit #4, Parc de La Villette", 2012, p. 55.

can be transformed and elaborated according to specific programmatic needs, establishes territorial recognition and provides a comprehensive image for an otherwise ill-defined terrain.

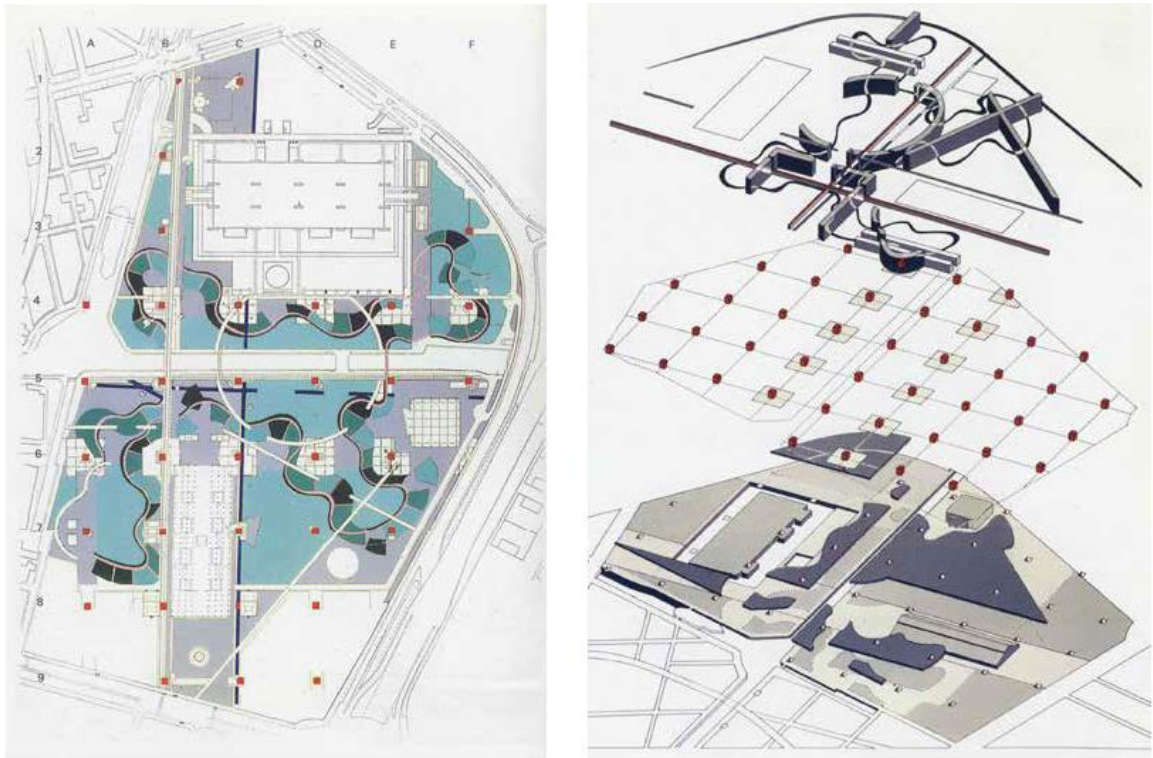


Figure 03: Points, Lines and surfaces, (Source: Bernard Tshumi, “Event-Cities 2”, MIT Press, 1994)

- b) **Lines:** There are two major pathways – the directional and the Cinematic. The direct pathways connects Folies, create access and provide shade, but the Cinematic Promenade is designed to create a continuous unfolding of drama with an analogy to the film-strip. The walk-way correspond to the soundtrack while the image-track correspond to the successive frames of individual gardens. Each part, each sequence are different from the one before and creating a sequence of events just like jump-cuts or flashbacks²⁷.
- c) **Surfaces:** The surfaces of the park receive all activities requiring large expanses of horizontal spaces for play, games, body exercises, mass entertainment, markets etc. Each surface is programmatically determined. The so-called left-over surfaces are dealt with a change of material (earth and gravel) that can be very flexible for adaptive use.

²⁷ Bernard Tshumi, 1994, MIT Press, “Event-Cities 2”, p. 70.

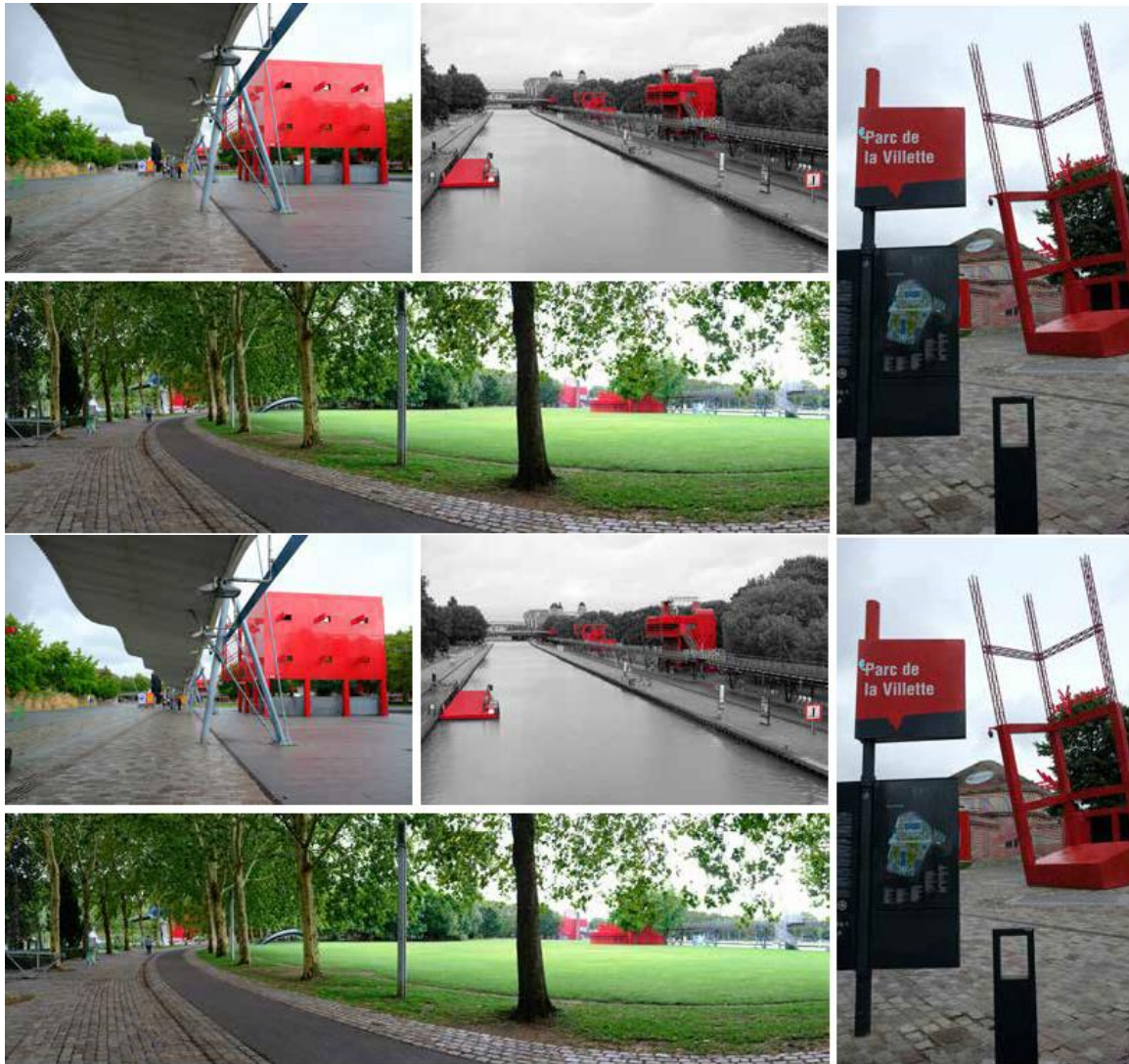


Figure 04: Photograph: Park Villette. (Source: Author)

STUDY 03: The Central Park, Manhattan, New York City. (Fredrick Law Olmsted & Calvert Vaux, built, 1857-1873)

Central Park is the most visited urban park in the United States, with an average 35 million visitors every year.²⁸ In 1858, the project was awarded through a design competition to landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted and architect/landscape designer Calvert Vaux with an approach they termed “Greensward Plan”. This approach, as indicated in the name, put high priority on natural elements, be it naturally present or artificially incorporated. The project was conceived at the beginning as *pathways running through nature*. The most influential innovation in the Central Park design were the “separate circulation” systems for pedestrians, horseback riders, and pleasure vehicles, and consisting as many as 36 bridges. The “crosstown” commercial traffic was entirely concealed in sunken roadways (today called “transverses”), screened with densely planted shrub belts so as to maintain a rustic ambiance.²⁹

²⁸ Wikipedia contributors. “Central Park.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 6 Oct. 2018. Web. 8 Oct. 2018.

²⁹ Clemens Steenbergen, Wouter Reh, 2011, The Netherlands, “Metropolitan Landscape Architecture: Urban Parks and Landscapes”, p. 216.

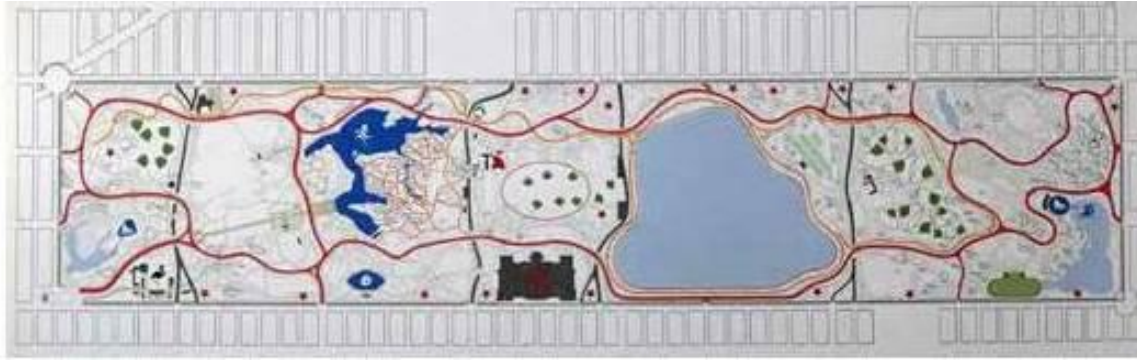


Figure 05: Various circulation system. (Source: Clemens Steenberg, Wouter Reh, “Metropolitan Landscape Architecture: Urban Parks and Landscapes”, The Netherlands, 2011, p. 217)

The Central Park creates an array of natural settings with a number of hills, gardens, large open spaces and some seven lakes and water bodies. These elements are given a certain character, expressed in their names, such as Conservatory water, the Great Lawn, Turtle Pond, Harlem Meer, Onassis reservoir, Sheep Meadow etc. The Park is home to over 25000 trees - a great collection of native and exotic trees and flowers. There are around 235 species of birds, common animals such as raccoons, squirrels, chipmunks, opossums etc. and many insects and microorganisms. Interestingly, the park incorporates large urban activities within or outside built structures. It has theaters, forts, open air concert grounds, skating rink, ‘the Mall’, Metropolitan Museum of Art, zoo and aquarium, indoor and outdoor restaurants etc. It also has running tracks, sport arenas and 21 playgrounds for children located throughout the park - the largest one is 3 acres.³⁰

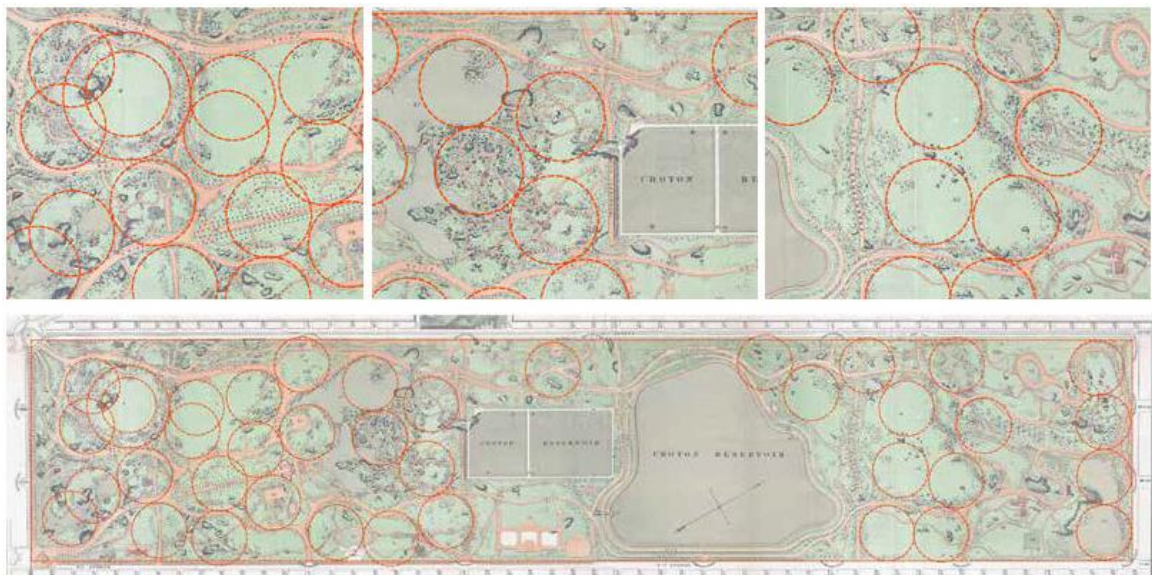


Figure 06: The organizing principal of Central Park. (Source: Author)

³⁰ Wikipedia contributors. “Central Park.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 6 Oct. 2018. Web. 8 Oct. 2018.

STUDY 04: Garer Maath, Kolkata, India.

The Garer Math is located in the Maidan (meaning, open field) area and considered as a heritage of Kolkata [Web-source: <http://www.oursamyatra.com/maidan-kolkata-gorer-math-heritage-of-calcutta/>]. It is part of the largest urban park of Kolkata, consisting a dimension of 913m x 588m and has an area of 135 acres. The speciality of the place that it is considered as a breathing place for the city dwellers as the area is simply a vast open space covered in grass, without any trees or any built structure. The area is not bounded by any fencing, therefore people are free to come and occupy the place in any manner they wish³¹.



Figure 07: Garer Maath, Kolkata, India. (Source: Author)

Analysis & Discussion:

Parc Villette, as a built project (design by Bernard Tschumi Architects), remain quite dissociative and abrupt. Painted in bright red, the points of Folies create intensified and specific experience. In reality, when moving through the pathways of the park, the Folies, create an overpowering presence with their bright red color and create an obvious sense of continuity. This continuity almost submerges other nuances that were intended. The programmed nature is also dominated by the strict authority of the Folies, thus always remain in the background. This is reflected in the words of the architect as well: "In the end, the whole project was really about considering that there is nothing greater than the city and its activities. I actually don't like nature very much."³² In the Cinematic Promenade, the term programmed nature become quite literal as the nature become tamed by the authority of the pathway, sequences and the Folies as well. Moreover, the experience of the thematic gardens can be subjective and may be never explored if someone skipped the Cinematic Promenade.

The proposal for Park Villette by OMA (Rem koolhaas), however, bring forward this idea of continuity as well, but with much more meaning. An intense exercise of 'direction' and 'path' can be observed as the drama unfolds with the continuity and collision of the boulevard and the promenade. This relates to Kevin Lynch - "Paths with clear and well known origins and

³¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Maidan (Kolkata)." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 12 Aug. 2018. Web. 8 Oct. 2018

³² Samantha Hardingham, 2012, "Bernard Tschumi: Supercrit #4, Parc de La Villette", p. 63.

destinations and stronger identities, helped tie the city together, and gave the observer a sense of his bearings whenever he crossed them.”³³

It can be anticipated that the superimposition will create unexpected experience and the dominating order of the bands can create a path too compelling and dictated –far from the idea of wandering and getting lost in the landscape. The superimposition and programming somewhat marginalizes nature as a showcase element, as can be seen in the ‘Circular Forrest’. However, the design revolves around idea of space, place and experiential variety & continuity. As per Sebastian Marot, “Rather than a ‘design’, it is therefore ‘the proposition of a ‘method’ that combines architectural specificity with programmatic indeterminacy....a tactical proposal to derive maximum benefit from the implantation of a number of activities on the site – incorporating the use of nature – in the most efficient and explosive manner, while at the same time offering a (relatively) stable aesthetic experience’ “³⁴.

The Central Park brings nature close to the urban man, creates a sense of belonging within the nature. Because of its vastness the park somehow manages to remove the scent of the city, but remain coherent to human experience – which brings the question, if the central park is just a romantic representation or it has an ordering system hidden behind the plain sight –an order that communicates and creates the sense of belonging. However, upon close observation and analysis (Figure 06), it becomes evident that the park uses a salient system of dimension. The circulation network, in a discreet way, divides the park in zones of 200 meters diameter—from the size of the open grounds to the size of lakes (except for the great reservoir). The boundary of this 200 meter zones are deliberately marked with significant elements such as wide pathways, or the edge of the water or large pieces of rocks. This dimensioning system create a sense of territory in the subconscious of the user and with its repeated use throughout the park it forms a hidden order for the design of the park. As discussed before, the ‘human dimension of senses’ can be distinctly observed in the Central park, where there is apparently no strict geometry, the whole park is organized around a hidden measurement of 100m radius areas. Unfortunately, similarities in physical dimension can also be seen when in the Parc de La Villette but without full effect –the folies are placed in a grid of 120m, or in case of project by OMA, the width of the band is 50m. Along with the dimension, in Central Park, the qualities for perceiving any space as place are clearly identifiable, such as, the presence of a centre and the edge –the perception of ‘being inside and outside’, the varied pathways that connect many centers, large domains (of water, open fields & trees) in contrast with smaller centers. The identity & perception of space is more significant than the activity assigned to these centers or domains.

The Garer Maath stands in stark contrast with all the discussion above. Its immense vastness has taken it to a monumental scale. The name of the place has become proverbial, perhaps legendary and even coined as a literary term. Any large open space, in its appraisal, is readily compared with the Garer Maath. The expression ‘Garer Maath’ has gone beyond its physical monumentality and moved into a psychological domain. One of the reason behind this may be the capacity of this vast unobstructed open space to produce the magnitude of feelings and sense of liberation in the minds of the people. Similar to the Central Park, the key element here is space and its recognition. Even without any significant used assigned to this vas open space, it accommodates almost every one’s needs and can create a sense of belonging –a sense of place attachment.

³³ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, 1960, p. 54

³⁴ Marot, Sébastien. "Sub-Urbanism / Super-Urbanism: From Central Park to La Villette." AA Files, no. 53 (2006): 20-37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29544815>. p.34

Conclusion

The park is a void itself integrated into the urban network. But often parks are identified through elements of use and their qualities. The Park Villette is built focusing on program and its distribution in a grid, but the Garer Maath remain an anomaly in this line of thought. Park Villette establishes an order using program and use, and perhaps the Central Park establishes an order of space and place. The spatial order with its perceivable and recognizable qualities can immediately resonate with the human soul. The void becomes the key instrument to create a collective consensus –a collective attachment to place, as Schulz mentions -“Only when man has defined what is inside and what is outside, can we really say that he ‘dwells’.”³⁵. The void becomes a place to dwell, the use thus becomes secondary –providing a liberated and diversified scope for the user, yet they are unified with the sense of belonging to the place.

This paper is an preliminary attempt to find a relation between spatial identity and urban park. It is also an attempt to search for design strategies that can resolves questions such as– even after resolving the balance between urban and nature, can a park engage the existential spirit of a society that it appeals to individual and collective as a whole and become synonymous to cultural identity? In other words, can a park become a unifying element for the collective and individual spirit of the people? Can space theories become a tool in park design?

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