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FOR THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE

Rethinking the community participatory design process and if it can effectively lead to better Public spaces

Introduction

Cities and their public spaces are key places that encourage human interactions, they are catalysts for human experiences and connections.

Unfortunately, in the present day, cities are rapidly growing at an unprecedented rate and the strive for innovation is causing a decrease in human interaction due to the priority placed on cars and the control of its traffic, high rise buildings and dense city living. This research explores the public participatory design process in architectural development and if it can effectively lead to better public spaces for people. Applying the human centric approach to examine the built environment industry, will shift the focus to citizens of cities, and further show how they could contribute to design development.

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody only because and only when they are created by everybody" (Jacobs, 1961).

Methodology

Two public space case studies; Superkilen in Copenhagen and Peckham Square in London were chosen and studied. The two case studies were chosen because one was designed using the public participation design approach and one without.

1. The case studies were observed and analysed using Carmona and Wunderlich's universal positive qualities for public space.
2. People were surveyed in Peckham square to gather their thoughts and opinions on the space.
3. Comparisons on the primary observations of Peckham square and secondary observations of Supekilen in Copenhagen were analysed.
4. The conventional architectural process and the public participatory process was compared and studied and then applied to both case studies.
5. Further researching the design process of both case studies through literature, illustrated the complex process of the participatory design approach

Table 1.2 Universal positive qualities for public space

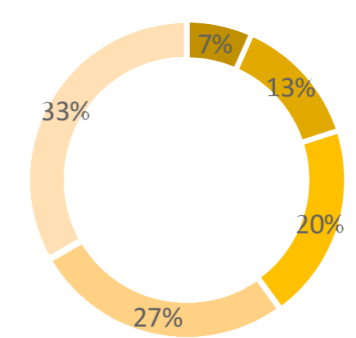|	
Clean and tidy	Well cared for
Accessible	Easy to get to and move around
Attractive	Visually pleasing
Comfortable	Comfortable to spend time in
Inclusive	Welcoming to all, free, open and tolerant
Vital and viable	Well-used and thriving
Functional	Functions without conflict
Distinctive	A positive, identifiable character
Safe and secure	Feels and is safe and secure
Robust	Stands up to the pressures of everyday use
Green and unpolluted	Healthy and natural
Fulfilling	A sense of ownership and belonging

Research Findings

The research findings from the people surveyed in Peckham showed without prompting and people didnt know what to expect of a postive public space.

Even though most people perceived the space as a 'okay' space, most users simply pass through the square. This is because nothing is in the space to engage and hold people's attention for people to linger and stay.
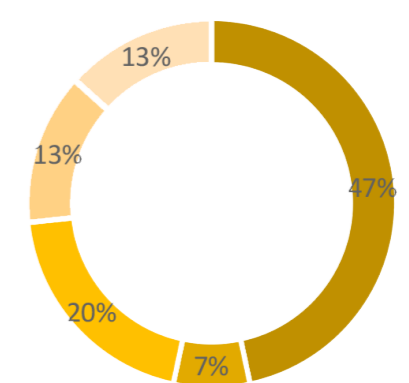
Pecham square has been through a number of redevelopments and a much limited participatory design process, which reflects in the responses from users.

The Superkilen project illustrates how the public and user have more of a say in decision making and consultation at all stages of the architectural process. Therefore creating an enjoyable space for all.
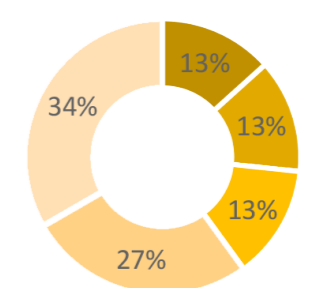
WOULD YOU WANT TO CHANGE ANYTHING IN THE SPACE TO MAKE IT BETTER?

7% / 13% / 20% / 27% / 33%

Provide toilets   More trees and flowers   Provide more seating   Cafe   Nothing

WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF THIS SPACE?

13% / 13% / 20% / 7% / 47%

Okay   Relaxing space   Relaxing space   Nice   Engaging space

WHAT PARTICULAR QUALITIES DO YOU LIKE IN THIS SPACE?

13% / 13% / 13% / 27% / 34%

Nothing   The paving pattern   The design of the space   Mural sculptures   The library

Figures 1 and 2: Superkilen, Copenhagen

Figures 3 and 4: Peckham Square

Conclusion

People do not know what they truly want - without direction. Observations showed even if a single public space where to possess all the 'universal qualities' to create a desirable public space and if it further used a user participatory design approach, people would still find fault with it.

Cities are growing multi-culturally causing the public to consist of many social groups. Designers and planners simply cannot cater to everyone's needs and desires. With a limited study of this process it is too much of a big claim to say that the user participatory design process leads to better designs, however according to Forsyth (2010) the process can result in quality buildings satisfying clients and users.

References:
Carmona, M. and Wunderlich, F. (2012). Capital spaces. New York: Routledge.
Jenkins, P. and Forsyth, L. (2009). Architecture, participation, and society. 1st ed. Routledge.
Figure 1 and 2: Sorkin, M. (1992). Variations on a theme park. 1st ed. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.