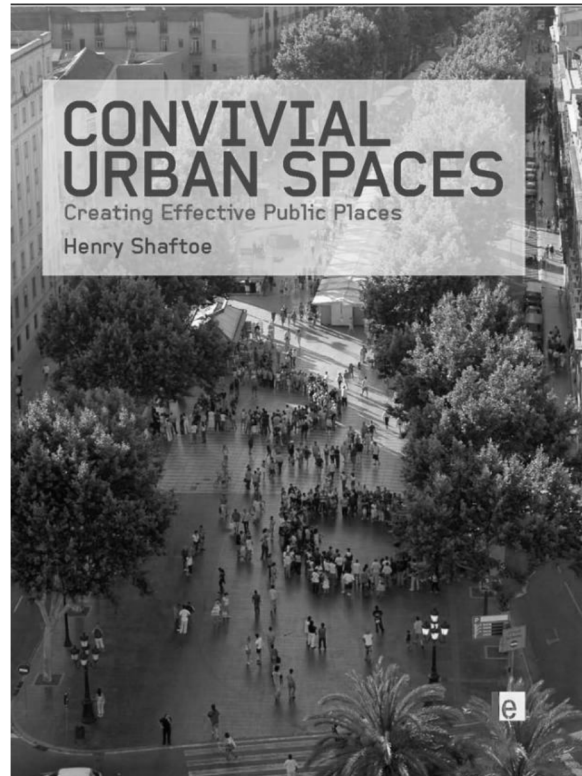




Book Review

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Convivial Urban Spaces: Creating Effective Public Places

Author: Henry Shaftoe

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ABSTRACT

This book deals with Creating Effective Public Places and contains 4 chapters plus a conclusion about constituents of conviviality. The book ends up with reference, bibliography and indexes.

In terms of structure, the book aims to flow from the theoretical and general to the practical and specific. However, with such a multifaceted subject, there is bound to be some overlapping and arbitrary ordering of information and discussion. One thing that will become immediately apparent is the sheer number of photographs.

Obviously, there is a deliberate ploy, on the basis that photographs can often tell you much more about public space than any amount of text could.

In chapter 1, the author begins with an introductory which covers an Overview, discussion for defining Convivial Spaces. In this part he says that, he has undertaken the rather daunting task of straddling several disciplines, because he feels that only by taking this multifaceted approach will we succeed in producing more convivial spaces.

This little volume discusses and raises various questions in each chapter of the book.

This book aims to understand that: What kind of public spaces do people prefer to be in? And, what gives some places 'personality' and 'conviviality', so that we can learn from the past and present to design, maintain

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and manage better quality built environments in future.

Actually, the main body of the book is divided into three sections. The first section argues the case for having public space and discusses the social policies that affect the kind of

Public spaces we have. The second section covers the theories and principles that influence the way we design and manage public spaces. The third section aims to be a more practical one, suggesting how we might apply our knowledge to create or maintain 'convivial urban spaces'. The five case studies aim to illustrate many of the points raised in the various sections.

Chapter 2 discusses public spaces and asks: why have them and who are they for?

In this part of the book, securing an inclusive or exclusive urban realm, children and public space are discussed and then, addresses the use of public space by young people.

Chapter 3, questions that: what makes a space convivial?

Principles and underpinnings, the psychology of public space, aesthetics – sensing the character of an area, important influences on the use of public space and size, shapes and types of public space are the subjects dealt in this chapter.

Chapter 4, is about, how can one create and sustain successful public spaces? In this chapter the subject of comfort that whether designed or evolved? Is studied through the case of: Ciutat Vela, Barcelona. Similarly, joy studied through case studies: Berlin and, Bristol.

Managing and Maintaining Public Spaces are discussed through cases of: Padua and York.

The author pulls together and summarizes many of the points raised earlier in the book, and concludes that: there is no single blueprint for a convivial space, but successful spaces do seem to share some common elements. These may be broadly categorized under the headings of physical (including design and practical issues), geographical, managerial, psychological and sensual (how the space affects our mind, spirit and senses).

Henry Shaftoe believes street-drinkers are citizens too and, as long

as they are causing no harm to others, they should have a legitimate right to frequent public space. But as far as street drinkers are concerned they are usually abnormal and there is no guarantee that they don't harm the inhabitants. Therefore the imposition of by-laws to prohibit the consumption of alcohol in designated public spaces is necessary. This not only does not harm the conviviality but also it creates a kind of physical and mental security.

Finally, the author pointed out some very practical and specific things that the designers and maintainers of public spaces can do and avoid doing, in order to achieve the best possible spaces.

These points are basically concerned with design of the open spaces at the same time as you design or redesign the buildings and other structures, rather than regarding the space as what are left over after the buildings have gone up.

The author also emphasizes on : keeping safety and security in mind, respecting all kinds of senses, all age groups participation (What do they like and dislike?), segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, a variety of sitting opportunities (not just fixed benches), microclimate, providing opportunities and facilities for people to eat and drink and proper plantation, pedestrian-friendly lighting, (mounted not too high and incorporating full color spectrum luminaries), having litter bins adjacent to benches, picnic tables and shelters, and ensuring that they are emptied regularly, having public toilet facilities on site or accessible nearby.

Avoiding low density locations, poor surveillance, using low-cost or high-maintenance materials and features (such as public art) that will rapidly deteriorate or break down, are the other important aspects noted by the author to create convivial urban spaces.

He believes that, there is no standard formula for creating convivial spaces. He says that: it is important to remember that although design is important, the size and location of the space along with the way it is managed and animated are equally important factors.

He continues that: we have much to learn from the successful places of the past. Although we have many new technologies and the world has changed spectacularly in the last 100 years, the basic human need for conviviality has endured. It is no coincidence that most of the world's most popular public spaces have been there for hundreds of years (with some adaptation over time).

At last he added that: it should be possible to create new convivial urban spaces for our expanding cities, as well as improving those which haven't quite worked, by respecting the experience of history, yet not slavishly imitating what has gone before.

It although short in pages, but covers a wide specific area concerning: public spaces, city planning, social aspects, architecture and human factors. Its author believes that, this is not just an urban design book, nor is it a social policy book or management guide; in fact it is a bit of all three plus some more.