Human Needs in Public Spaces

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Human needs are too often ignored in the design, construction, and management of urban spaces. Such spaces include parks of all sizes, public and corporate plazas, rooftop gardens, streetscapes, greenways, and other municipal settings. Suppose that you want to design an urban space that is restorative and provides contact with nature. What people needs must you be aware of that will help to ensure that a space will be popular and well used by urban inhabitants? Perhaps even loved by its users? During the design process, you can refer to the following checklist as a guide to what people desire in urban spaces.

People Needs Checklist

Fundamental people needs in urban spaces involve the following:

A. Comfort
• Seating
• Shelter
• Food and drink
• Safety

B. Relaxation (restoration)
• Contact with nature
• Aesthetically pleasing elements (e.g., plants, water)

C. Passive engagement
• People watching
• Observing performers and physical features

D. Active engagement
• Socializing
• Manipulating elements of a site
• Recreation and play

E. Discovery (mystery)
• Provided by user
• Enhanced by the design or by management

Word of warning!

Of course, a successful urban space that provides a restorative experience cannot be guaranteed even if all of these factors are properly addressed. However, disastrous results can occur if the human perspective is not taken into consideration, either intentionally or through ignorance.