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Chapter 16: Anti-planning, anti-design?

Exploring alternative ways of making future urban landscapes

Anna Jorgensen and Lilli Lička

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to show how the characteristics of urban wildscapes can be used to inform planning and design strategies for the urban environment more generally, and to contrast these strategies with some contemporary approaches to the planning and design of urban public open space. It is divided into four sections. This introduction outlines the overall structure and content of the chapter and defines urban wildscapes. Section two critiques some contemporary approaches to the planning and design of urban public space, especially ideas concerning the creation of local distinctiveness and place identity, and proposes that alternative strategies may be derived from the properties of urban wildscapes. In section three, these properties are examined in more detail, and six key characteristics are explored: multiplicity, ambiguity, polyvalence, communality, dynamism, mutability and process. Placed alongside this theoretical commentary are a series of illustrated case studies of completed landscape projects,¹ which demonstrate how these characteristics may inform the planning and design of urban public space.

The final section explores the implications of these characteristics for the planning and design of urban public spaces. A central idea running through this chapter is that there is no dichotomy of regulated versus wild (or unregulated) urban spaces; rather, there is shifting dialectic existing at multiple different scales. Places need not be (and are not) either regulated or wild, but may be shades of both, and it is the tension between these states that gives rise to creative possibilities in urban public space.

For the purposes of this chapter, urban wildscapes are defined as spaces 'between or on the margins of more programmed and controlled urban spaces ... characterized by the opportunities they provide for a diverse range of human and non-human activities and processes' (Jorgensen 2009).² Many of these spaces have developed incrementally over time, as the result of the interactions between officially sanctioned planning and design interventions, more informal changes made by the users and maintainers of these spaces, and natural processes including the aging and degeneration of materials and structures and the overgrowth of vegetation.

RECENT TRENDS IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF URBAN PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

A post-modern dilemma confronting urban planners and designers globally concerns the purposes and forms of city morphologies and spaces, now that they are becoming so far removed from the processes that originally shaped them. Urbanization first occurred to facilitate commercial exchange in specific locations dictated by geographical expedience but as changes in transport and communications have enabled industrial production to move away from urban centres, and commercial transactions are relocating from the market place to the virtual spaces of information and communications technology (Lyster 2006), the functions and meanings of urban spaces have changed. Nowadays, the urban centres of 'developed' countries are given over to leisure activities; especially the consumption of globally-produced goods and cultures, and the flows of people needed to fuel the local economies that depend on these activities.

Whereas once the form and fabric of buildings and spaces were shaped by local resources, crafts and ideologies; great changes in architectural and building technologies, and the global movement of materials, expertise and ideas, mean that the forms, functions and meanings of urban spaces are no longer constrained by their locality. However, this has not generally resulted in greater diversity of urban public spaces. Instead, alongside the dedication of urban centres to consumption and leisure, an approach to urban planning and design has developed that has resulted in an erosion of local identity.

Within these new urban spaces, land uses or activities that compete with or detract from the prescribed ones, such as unlicensed performance or vending, organized gatherings or political demonstrations, children's play, young people hanging out (Worpole 2003), skateboarding and rough sleeping, are generally prohibited. External and internal spaces that facilitate or enable the sanctioned land uses are preferred. In the case of retail, these spaces must provide unambiguously positive experiences that are free from confusion, risk or discomfort; and visitors must be able to move 'seamlessly' from one locality to the next (Edensor 2005).

The city of Sheffield, UK typifies these trends. Faced with the progressive collapse of its steel industry, the erosion of the city centre by decades of car-centred planning and competition from its regional rivals (the cities of Leeds and Manchester), Sheffield City Council's new masterplan envisages a renaissance based on developing the city's retail and cultural provision (Sheffield City Council 2008).

Along with the goods and services that may be purchased there, the city itself is becoming a 'product' to be consumed; thus the fabric of the city, its buildings, streets and open spaces, have to be packaged and commodified (Kwon 1997). As part of its own branding exercise, Sheffield city centre has been divided up into twelve 'quarters', with their own names and distinguishing characteristics, linked by various routes, including the 'gold' and 'steel' routes.

Local identity must be enhanced to offer visitors something distinctive. Attempts to bolster or create local identity include preserving historic fabric and

structures, adding fresh material to maintain the 'look' of a particular historical period (especially paving and street furniture), and creating new landscapes alluding to notable aspects of local history and culture. Sheffield is well-known for its historic role as a centre for the manufacture of steel and cutlery. Hence, Sheaf Square, the new public space that welcomes visitors leaving the railway station, is bounded by the 90-metre long *Cutting Edge* stainless steel sculpture *cum* water feature (Sheffield City Council 2007) (Figure 16.1). This sculpture also exemplifies an approach to the design of urban public space that consists of the assembly of significant objects, rather than the manipulation of landscape elements to make coherent spaces. The presence of objects as symbols of place stands in for the experience of being in place (Baudrillard 1983).

The pre-eminence of physical structures as the preferred manifestation of local identity and 'placeness' necessarily limits the number of ways in which those places can be used and interpreted. A particular historical period or cultural perspective is privileged, and differences smoothed over (Hellström 2006). It also privileges tangible objects over less tangible components of place, including space, time, movement, flux, absence, and natural process. Thus, in Sheaf Square, the River Sheaf runs underground in a culvert nearby, whilst the open space is structured around an enormous, artificially powered, water feature that stands in for its namesake.³ Both the scale and form of this water feature typify the use of a rather florid, baroque design language to articulate spaces and functions (Lund 1997).

Furthermore, although manuals of urban design practice purport to celebrate local culture (CABE 2000), social and environmental processes are generally eschewed in favour of static, fixed representations of place. In her critique of the regeneration of UK industrial ruins, Heatherington (2006) refers to Doreen Massey's (1993; 2005) interpretations of place as a temporary crystallization of diverse narratives, ideologies and human and non-human entities in space, rather than a collection of objects with fixed meanings.

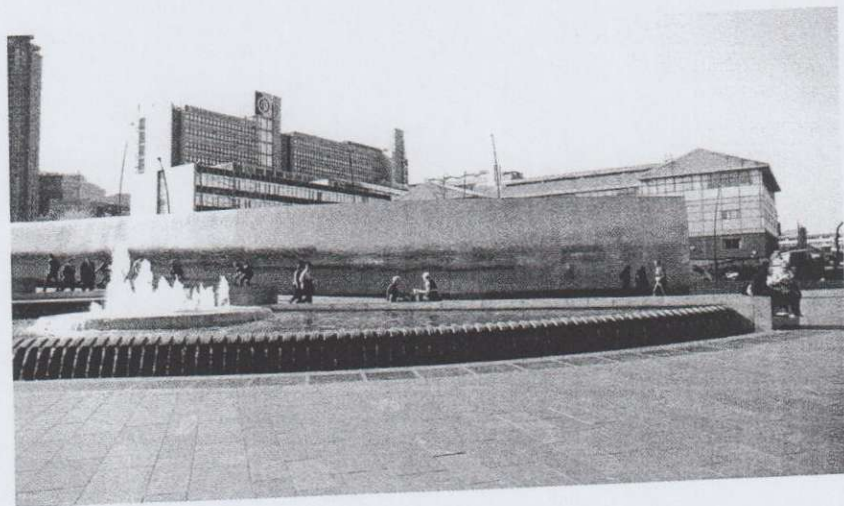


Figure 16.1
The *Cutting Edge*
sculpture and water
feature in Sheaf Square
(2007), designed by Si
Applied and Keiko
Mukaide (photograph:
Anna Jorgensen, 2009)

QUALITIES OF URBAN WILDSCAPES

This section explores how urban wildscapes exhibit certain qualities that can be used to highlight a more rounded conception of place and local identity. The case studies that accompany the text show how these characteristics may be promoted through particular approaches to urban planning and design in urban public open space more generally.

There is a developing literature concerned with the characteristics and meanings of urban wildscapes, though terminology and definitions vary (see Edensor 2005; Doron 2007; Franck and Stevens 2007 for some recent texts). They include derelict sites and indeterminate spaces of all kinds ranging from wilderness-like places such as woodlands, disused post-successional sites (and buildings) and linear sites such as railways, rivers and canals, to more incidental 'loose spaces' (Franck and Stevens 2007) that are close to and sometimes part of more regulated urban spaces such as gap sites, 'leftover' spaces, underpasses, and small liminal spaces around the entrances and exits to buildings (Stevens 2007) (Figure 16.2).

The 'Good Fairy', 15th district of Vienna

The 'Good Fairy' project was implemented by Koselička in the context of a commission by the City of Vienna to enhance the 'playable city' in 1992. In a prototypical area the urban open spaces, consisting of the streetscape and small parks and squares, were analyzed for their potential to form a network of spaces for children to use. Low-key interventions made use of existing physical structures, such as railings, unknown passages and wider pavements as well as the social capital of the area. The aim was to improve children's autonomous mobility in order to impart spatial and social competences.

'Good fairies' were owners of shops or workshops on the ground floor who committed themselves to helping children by sticking a magic wand on to their shopfront window. Children on their way to school or the playground could pop in to make an urgent phone call home, or get a glass of water or a plaster.

Workshop owners could also express their invitation to children to watch them working by sticking an eye-sticker on their window facing the pavement. Children – as well as adults – could then observe the production going on in the basements or on the ground floor as 'spies' on their way to school. An unexpected variety of handicrafts counted for lost were part of the 'spy' community. The scheme revealed the diversity of activities behind the walls: engravers, glass-chasers, manufacturers of radiator grills for old-timer cars, carpenters, just to name a few. Now, many small creative firms look for shopfront workshops or studios to stay in contact with the city. They enrich the streetscapes; however, production very often stays hidden behind the walls or blinded windows.



Figure 16.2
(Clockwise from top left) The 'Good Fairy': the good fairy sticker at the entrance to a tailor's premises; the good fairy and spy stickers displayed together at another small business; 'I spy a carpenter's workshop'; spy sticker at the entrance to a Landscape Architect's office - all in the 15th district of Vienna (photographs: Ursula Kose and Lilli Lička - Koselička, 1992)

Many factors help create the physical and social conditions that enable a diverse range of activities to take place in urban wildscapes, ranging from large-scale informal occupation and trading (Hellström 2006; Sheridan 2007, Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2007) to activities involving intimate and sometimes challenging engagements with their natural and built surroundings (Edensor 2005). These activities are the result of what Manolopoulou (2007: 63) calls 'the modest simplicity of chance'. This capacity to accommodate diverse activities and experiences is often referred to as multifunctionality, seen as a desirable objective in urban planning and design (CABE 2000), but often incorrectly interpreted as mixed-use. Mixed-use developments are not multifunctional, as each unit of development only has one sanctioned land use (Ling *et al.* 2007). Multifunctionality should also not be confused with flexibility or adaptability, which either risks redundancy, or attempts to control the way in which an environment should change to accommodate anticipated future uses (Manolopoulou 2007). 'Multifunctionality' also privileges function, at the expense of less-instrumental forms of activity. 'Multiplicity', though rather open-ended, seems to embrace a wider range of interactions with place (Figure 16.3).

Schule Rieden (the school car park), Bregenz

Building on previous work on the site by Koselička, an open space of 3,500 m² was redesigned in order to provide more than a car-parking function. Two local secondary schools adjacent to a commercial academy took part in the commissioning process for the new design, instigated by the City Council of Bregenz, a provincial capital in Austria. The project was completed in 2010.

Situated next to the main cycle and pedestrian route leading from the railway station to the school complex and the surrounding neighbourhood, the intention is that this open space will fulfil several functions simultaneously: it will provide a little neighbourhood park as well as acting as the school-yard for the secondary schools, and it will serve as the car park for the sports hall of a successful local handball team.

Existing spatial qualities will be used more effectively including the relationships between open spaces and building facades and a stunning old tree. As part of the previous intervention the canopy of the old *Sophora* tree became a natural roof for the open-air classroom. The rows of benches underneath it also protect the roots of the tree.

The several functions of this small public open space are not expressed by explicit design tools but are offered by making its elements available to everyone. The way of use is decided by the people passing by or by the schoolchildren.

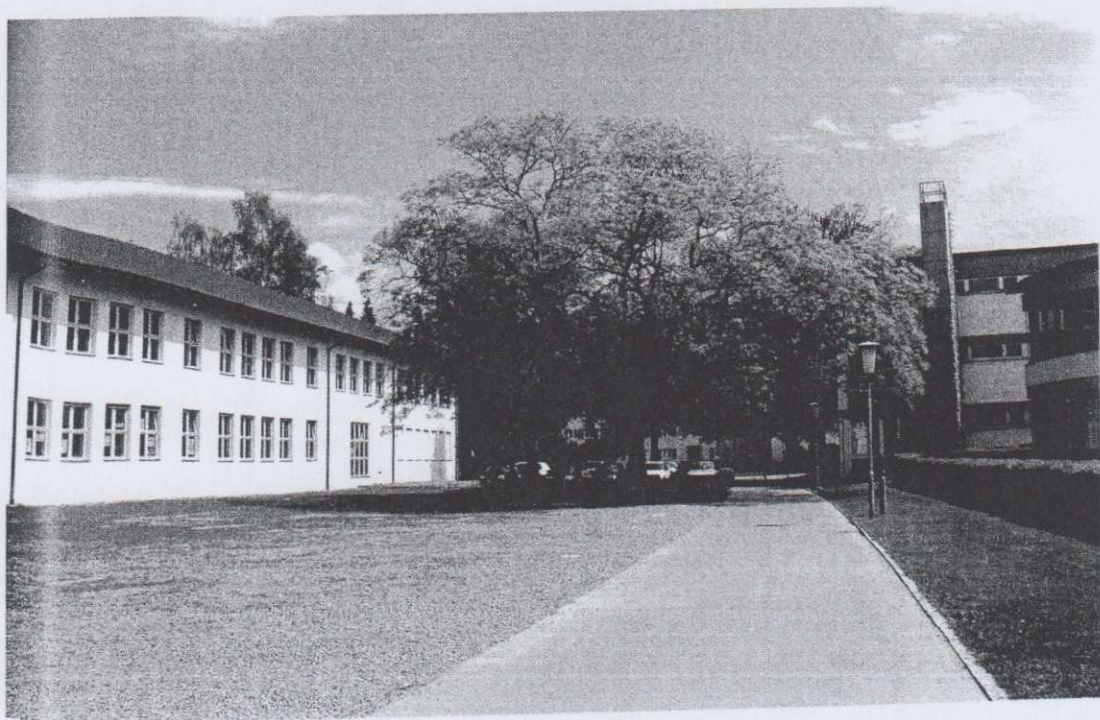
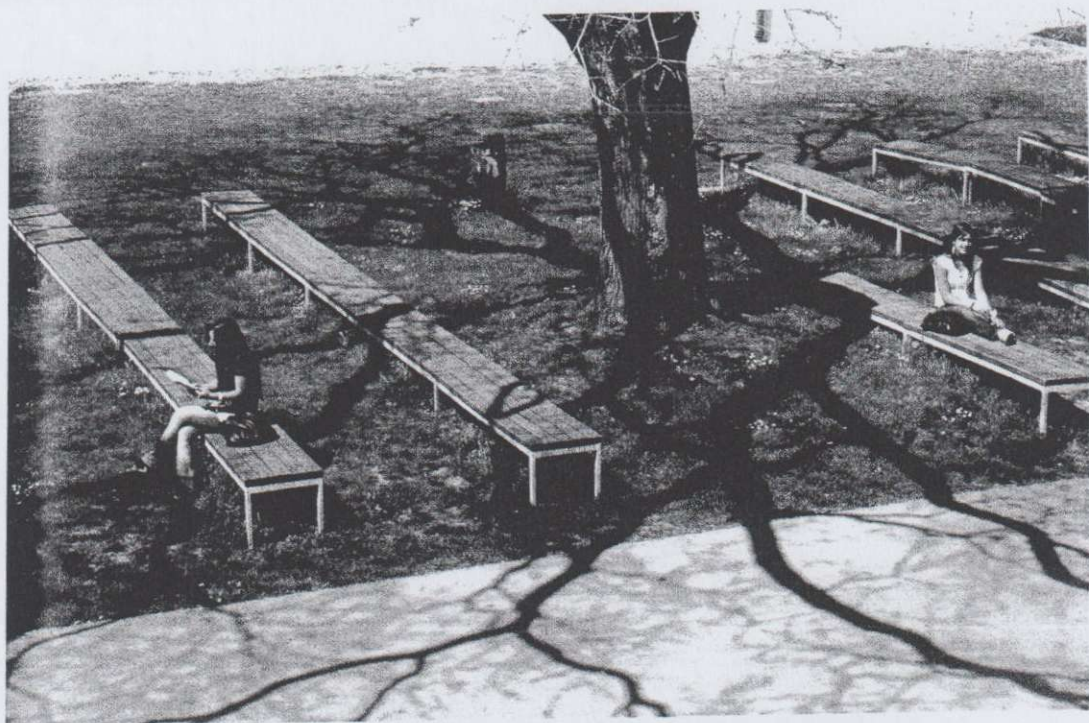


Figure 16.3
Schule Rieden (the school car park), Bregenz (photographs – from top: Gisela Erlacher, Lilli Lička, 2009)

The uses of a place are closely related to its meaning (Blundell Jones 2007), emphasizing that meaning is not something to be passively absorbed from one's surroundings, but is part of an active and individual engagement with place. In contrast to the partial, simplified and sanitized meanings encoded in so many of today's urban public spaces, urban wildscapes contain multiple, often contradictory, meanings, including insecurity, disorder, decay, waste, confusion, freedom, possibility, discovery, adventure and enchantment (Jorgensen and Tylecote 2007). Grappling with the ambiguity and 'polyvalence' (Hellström 2006) of these spaces involves intellectual effort, which is in itself an act of engagement with place.

As Heatherington (Chapter 13 in this book) demonstrates, the overt use of symbol as an expression of local identity renders urban landscapes into riddles that are easily solved. Alternative approaches range from using abstraction in the manipulation of form to capture the essential qualities of a site or its context (Dee 2010), to using physical or cultural traces within the site as a starting point for the introduction of fresh layers or interventions (Figure 16.4).

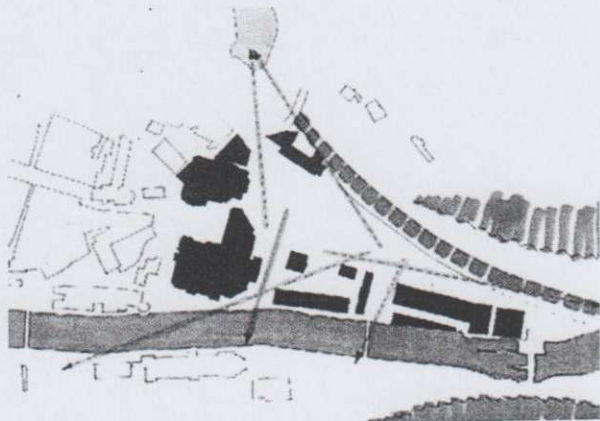
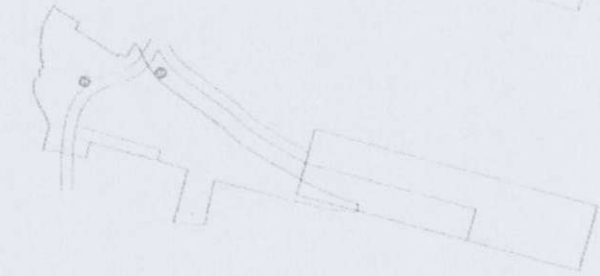
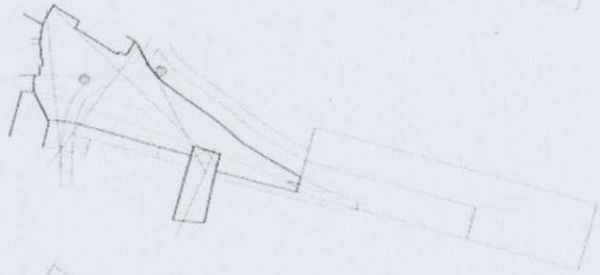
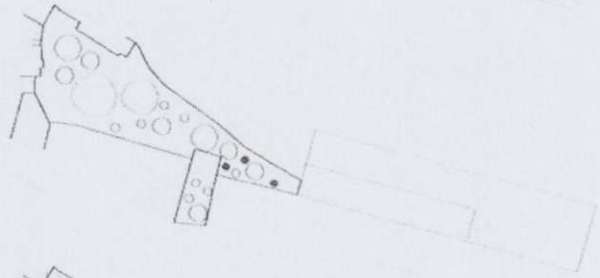
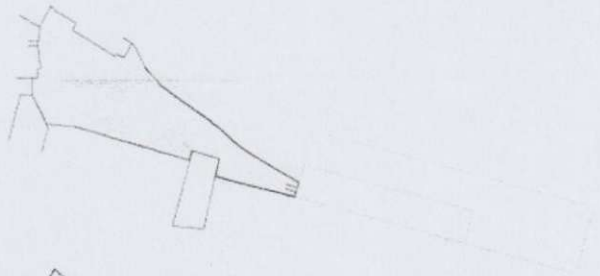
Tschavoll-Park: a narrow park with garden-pearls, Feldkirch

Adjacent to the medieval centre of Feldkirch, a small town in the west of Austria, a narrow triangular piece of land had been left over by the street and some industrial buildings making use of the stream in the gorge. The city of Feldkirch held a competition to solve the problem of this rather uncanny degenerated space, where drug abuse and other unwanted behaviour occurred. The enclosed location between the steep sides of the gorge makes the park of 5,000 m² look smaller.

Koselička's competition entry involved the creation of a bright 'surface' by allowing more natural light to enter the space, providing good views into and out of the space and allowing for a multiplicity of crossings. The idea was that the number of pedestrians would increase, and deserted corners would disappear, resulting in a change of image for the space. Referencing the medieval *hortus conclusus*, round-hedged enclosures were dropped onto the plain surface. These grassy garden pearls provided a soft quality, whilst still enabling informal supervision of the space. The retention of the mature existing trees would also provide changes in the atmosphere through variations in colour and light. The space would become a soft square with a number of garden elements in it, rather than a park with areas of hard surface.

The design responded to the constraints of the situation in two ways: the space was opened for general use and the sight lines into and over the space to the impressive rocks of the gorge were re-established. Though this radical interpretation of a park achieved some recognition by the competition judges, another entry was chosen for realization.

Figure 16.4
Tschavoll-Park: a narrow park with garden-pearls, Feldkirch. (From top) existing trees; the garden-pearls; views in and out of the site; existing paths; the site in context including surrounding buildings and river (plans: Ursula Kose and Lilli Lička – koselička)



Human engagements with urban wildscapes often involve the temporary or permanent modification of their physical fabric in ways that are impossible in more closely regulated urban environments. Fruits and objects may be harvested, acquired or discarded, structures built or destroyed (Edensor 2005). Such spaces are communal in the sense that anyone seems entitled to appropriate them, provided they still remain open to appropriation by others. By contrast, in many contemporary urban spaces, unauthorized modifications are prohibited, and even temporary signs of use or occupation are positively discouraged. The detritus generated by users is routinely removed, and worn or damaged landscape components are replaced in order to maintain these places in their pristine condition. However, where less intensively regulated and maintained urban landscapes are permitted to evolve, the results are arguably more interesting, and more expressive of their locality.

Urban regeneration strategies frequently call for the wholesale renewal of urban spaces; but there are numerous low-intervention landscape architectural approaches that utilize existing landscape layers within a site. These include revealing what is already present – whether that be established trees and plants or hard landscape structures – or reframing, by placing such elements within a new spatial or material context, as well as editing an existing landscape by removing elements that are deemed to have lost their value or purpose (Figure 16.5).

Augustinplatz: a small public open space, Vienna

In a narrow intersection two small triangular open spaces are formed by two residential blocks set back from the street. Sunlight in the square of 1,300 m² is reduced by the high facades dating from the turn of the last century. Over recent decades this space has been filled up with a statue of Augustin, a character from a Viennese folk song, a fountain, shrub planting, benches, a service road, and bus shelters. The City of Vienna commissioned the redesign of this small public space in order to establish a pleasant place to linger in or to pass through. In a public consultation process pursuant to Agenda 21 the requirements for the renovation of the space were defined.

Rather than radically reconfiguring and renewing the space the new design followed a simple strategy of providing space for multiple functions by renovating and simplifying the space, reducing traffic by removing the service road, connecting different areas and providing more generous seating options. The result is a space which feels lighter and more open but still contains its historical elements as reminders of the past in the new landscape.

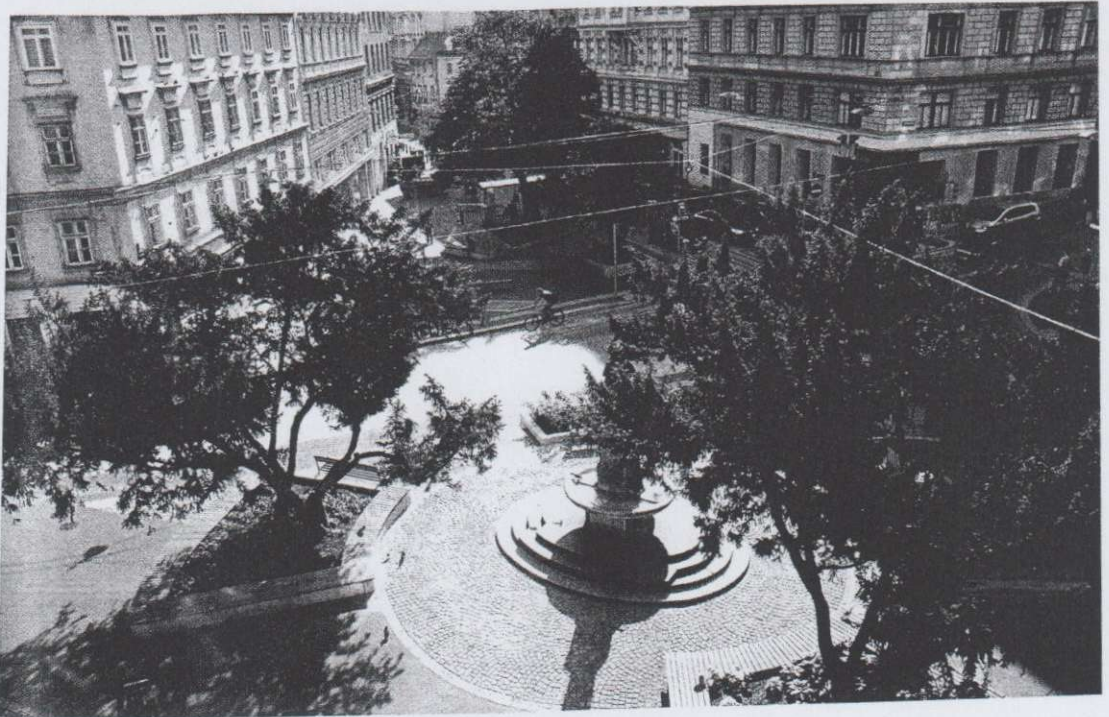


Figure 16.5
Augustinplatz: the small public open space, Vienna (photographs: Martina Kremmel, 2010)

Urban wildscapes are dynamic: continually changing as part of larger social and environmental cycles and processes. Langer (Chapter 11 in this book) has demonstrated how the Nature-Park Südgelände in Berlin owes its whole existence and ecology to a coalescence of natural, social, political and economic forces. They are also mutable: liable to sudden, unplanned or unexpected change. A tree falls, a building is demolished, or a development elsewhere alters public access to a site, setting off a whole new chain of landscape consequences.

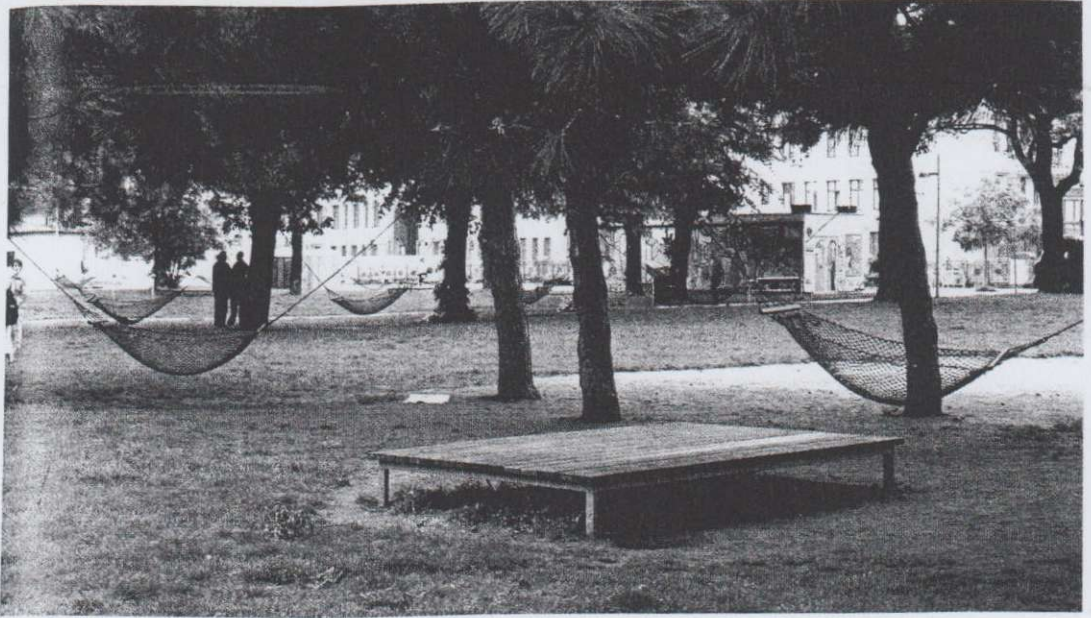
Urban spaces that are susceptible to appropriation, adaptation or change are likely to be more usable by a greater diversity of users, and by extension, more durable in the long term. If additions or adaptations can be made to an existing scheme to meet changing user needs, then wholesale renewal will not be necessary (Figure 16.6).

Bruno Kreisky Park: an old park in Vienna

This park of 10,300 m² has existed at Vienna's 'outer ring' since the city's fortification was built in the eighteenth century. It had been changed and adapted over time and was due for refurbishment in 2000. The City Council of Vienna, encouraged by its own Department of Gender-Sensitive Planning and Building and Quality of Everyday Life to promote gender equality in its public open spaces, announced a competition for a gender sensitive redesign of the park. Koselička's winning competition entry was based on the aim of reducing the definition of spaces as much as possible, in order to allow for everyone to do everything in the park.

In addition to removing the soccer cage, a simple structure was introduced into the space as a whole by placing wooden platforms of 4 × 2 metres on the grass. These platforms create islands of appropriation, and by situating them carefully between the existing mature trees they also define centres for spatial units within the park. These units may change in size and shape depending on how the platforms and surrounding spaces are used. Apart from these crystallization points the park is kept rather open, since it contains an important path connection from the residential quarter to the underground station. In 2009, Michael Kienzer, a Vienna-based artist, added a large number of red hammocks as an art installation. These proved so popular with park users that the Garden Department re-installed the hammocks the following year.

Urban wildscapes have not had 'local identity' imposed on them, they are just themselves: the palpable result of a set of interactions and processes over a period of time, though an appreciation of their qualities requires a radical redefinition of our values and aesthetics.



IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

Figure 16.6
The hammocks in Bruno
Kreisky Park, an old park
in Vienna (photograph:
Anna Jorgensen, 2010)

This brief review of the failings of some current approaches to urban planning and design and the corresponding qualities of urban wildscapes reveals six key characteristics that can be used to inform urban planning and design: multiplicity, ambiguity and polyvalence, communality, dynamism, mutability and process. The case studies that form part of this chapter demonstrate that these characteristics do not need to be restricted to extreme or challenging urban localities but can inform the planning and design of accessible, inclusive and usable urban public open spaces. What are the implications for the planning and design of urban areas more generally?

First, the values and meanings underpinning planning and design decisions and aesthetics need to be subject to more rigorous examination. Where do they come from, what do they signify and whom do they benefit? Landscape architectural practice and education needs to become more aware of, and more critical of the aesthetic, cultural, social and political assumptions on which they are based. The core purposes and values of urban planning and design need to be re-examined. Urban planners and designers need to have a wider remit, beyond making places profitable, which embraces a wider range of objectives, including social justice and environmental equity. This has many implications, including the need to find new ways of funding urban development projects that do not place so much reliance on private finance. Urban public open space should be seen as a form of indispensable public infrastructure, and should be publicly funded. Landscape interventions should not have the imposition of meaning as their primary objective (Hallal 2006). Treib (2002) has suggested that facilitating

pleasure is an end in itself, though it is questionable as to whether 'pleasure' includes a wide-enough range of responses to landscape. Does it, for example, include the exigencies of negotiating risk in landscape (CABE Space 2005)?

Next, these characteristics imply an acceptance and even a celebration of the materiality of the existing fabric of the city in all its diversity and imperfection. Critiquing the idea of masterplanning the perfect, sustainable city, the architect Alexandre Chemetoff (2009: 82) asserts:

This purist ecology, that of oblivion and segregation, leads to a mode of production of our cities which would thus escape from their history, their necessary filth, their diversity and their ambiguity, all of which are fundamentally necessary. I rather like diversity, I like impurity and like the popular side to the production of cities and territories.

They also reassert the value of the everyday 'make do and mend' landscapes that have been shaped by numerous different makers over time: planners, designers, the people who maintain these sites, and last but not least, their users. They demonstrate that all human actors have a role to play in making the spaces of the city either by means of physical interventions, what Chemetoff calls 'the popular side to the production of cities and territories', or by the usage and experience that renders urban space meaningful.

Next, they reaffirm that urban areas are the product of numerous processes, globalizing forces that make buildings and structures redundant or useful, human activities stimulated by the available opportunities and non-human, natural processes responding to the flux of human occupation, and challenge us to find ways of working more creatively with these processes. Urban design and planning strategies will need to integrate these processes and ecologies (Mostafavi and Najle 2003; Waldheim 2006); which necessitates finding methodologies sophisticated enough to take account of the complexities of all the data involved (Corner 2006); and may also require a widening of the scope of landscape architectural practice.

Thus, they suggest that change is inevitable, that attempts to create stasis are mostly if not always doomed to failure and that instead of aiming for the steady state we should aim to create urban spaces that accommodate change.

Finally, the idea that regeneration necessitates wholesale renewal should be challenged. If landscapes that have evolved incrementally through time are more expressive of local identity, then 'small scale interventions that have the potential for large scale impact' should always be considered (Corbin 2003); an approach to landscape design informed by what Dee (2010) has called 'the aesthetics of thrift'. Urban planning and landscape architecture needs to learn when to stand back: doing nothing, or doing as little as possible may often be preferable to a *tabula rasa* approach.

NOTES

- 1 The landscape projects that are used to illustrate this chapter are the work of the landscape architectural practice koselička in Vienna, www.koselicka.at.
- 2 This chapter is based on a paper given at the *Landscape – Great Idea!* conference, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, April 2009.
- 3 The authors are indebted to Catherine Dee, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield, for these observations, and for her generous advice, and the time devoted to many discussions that have helped shape the ideas expressed in this paper.

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