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## ARTISTIC APPROACH IN URBAN DESIGN PROCESS: EXPERIENCE FROM THE CITYSCAPER-POROSITY WORKSHOP

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper shares the experience from Cityscaper Porosity Studio in Edinburgh, UK. The studio/workshop was undertaken as cooperation between the University of Edinburgh and the University of New South Wales with sponsorship from the British Council. The workshop experiments a new approach in designing cities, using the viewpoint of artist, city planners and architects. Result of this approach may be more appropriate in designing and planning of public spaces for creative expression, as it shed more light on the matter that has rarely been investigated in the traditional urban planning and urban design methods.*

**Keywords:** urban design method, alternative approach

### **CURRENT (CONVENTIONAL/RATIONAL) URBAN DESIGN METHOD**

Hitherto the process of urban design begins with a planning stage, where the structure and the main layout of the city are determined using a rigid method of quantitative analysis and decision making. A traditional urban design process typically begins with accumulation of general information related to the problem. Then it goes on with analysis of the problem and investigation of possible solutions. Developed solutions are later evaluated for selection of the most feasible one. Lastly, urban designers communicate the chosen solution/s to the client. [1]

When the master plan or structure plan is ready, urban designers shapes the city by controlling building shape and height, as well as the network of streets and open spaces. Various mechanisms administrative, legal and financial are available for local government to control the implementation of the urban design [2], so that the envisioned design of the city can be realized as the urban designers plan it.

### **THE INADEQUACY OF THE RATIONAL FUNCTIONAL APPROACH IN URBAN DESIGN**

Such conventional approach might produce an “orderly” built environment that fits the standard of planners and architects. However, other users/stakeholders may find the constructed city does not suit their needs. Part of the city population may be left out in the allocation of

urban space for their daily activities. For instance, the poor are using public space such as street sidewalk illegally for their business. Creative communities may find it difficult to express their creativity in a city, just because there is no building suitable for their kind of art performance. As the result of traditional rational urban planning process, architecture and the urban built environment are not fully capable to support the creative culture due to the application of a building control instrument that is not creative or hinder creativity. [3]

Around the world, cities are merging or being linked in direct proportion to population growth and their respective industrial and commercial demographics and demands. The conventional city planning and design process has produced rational cities and buildings. This phenomenon is often coupled with the engine of their old technologies and redundant buildings in need of transformation rather than elimination. Apparently there is a need for a new approach in designing or transforming our cities.

### **Alternative Approach for Designing the Urban Environment**

An alternative approach for designing the urban environment must not begin with functional planning of land areas within the city, but it can start with understanding the nature of the community that live there. An example of the alternative approach is illustrated by a joint studio: the Cityscaper Studio and the Porosity Studio.

This joint studio uses real sites and projects as armatures for ideas about the body and the city which can be applied to other situations. Both collaboration and adherence to the specific problem always remain optional within the studio. What characterizes the program is its pursuit of innovation at a variety of scales and equal power given to all disciplines. The studio's title this year is "By the Throat". By the Throat is exploring the possible connections between Glasgow city and Edinburgh city at the very neck of the United Kingdom. Whether this is a linear city or complex urban coagulation was explored in conjunction with another existing project for the master plan of Leith Docklands in Edinburgh. Combining these two existing problems creates dual metaphors of neck and mouth insinuating the body into the equation. The choice of macro or micro scales of research was the choice of each student or collaborative groups. Students were encouraged to bring their expertise and lines of enquiry into the project and perhaps test these devices at another scale and with other students. Research questions for this studio are as following: [4]

- ◆ How can we connect two separate entities of the organism of the UK?
- ◆ How can this structure form a model for other connections within the UK?
- ◆ How can these ideas form the basis of a new city structure for Edinburgh?
- ◆ Can this thinking be applied to public space and its structures alone?
- ◆ What role does public art play in this equation?
- ◆ What role does object design play in this equation?
- ◆ What role does engineering play in this equation?

The student or student groups can attack these provocations and this particular site as a laboratory at any scale they wish and with any medium. This studio embraces all approaches and scales of operation in respect to the governing problem. From urban infrastructure to object making and the body, Cityscapers: By the Throat is in the business of finding new ideas and approaches via individual actions, conversation and collaboration. The studio is also hoping to attract some practitioners in all fields who are already experimenting with digital modelling and within software modes which combine this modelling with architectural documentation and engineering resolution simultaneously. Data modelling software is at the forefront of transforming design within certain disciplines. However it is also in the nature of this studio to at all times combine this modelling and thinking with the act of physical model making and drawing. Cityscapers: By the Throat is essentially a studio whose ideas are accelerated by model making. Fundamental to the overall philosophy of the studio are the principals of transformation, sustainability of design, a commitment to understanding and questioning public space in relation to private space and the primacy of art or poetic thinking.

The Porosity Studio/By The Throat is seeking ideas for a connection between Edinburgh and Glasgow which builds on their existing entanglement and which might serve as a model for other

“polycentric urban regions” around the world. These ideas need not be formalized as a traditional master plan or architectural interventions and strategies but then again they can. The outcomes and scale of operation of this studio are completely open to participants.

The Cityscaper-Porosity Studio places all the disciplines within the spectrum of art. Contradicting the Bauhaus dictum of “architecture as the mother of the arts”, the studio sees art as the mother of the arts, within an enormous spectrum of practice. Within this spectrum, which extends from the mud cup to Marcel Duchamp, falls architecture, urban planning, sculpture, painting, digital media, design, etc. The boundaries remain between each specialty but are now more permeable and porous.

This studio blurs the boundaries as much as possible in order to find solutions or situations of interest. Multi-disciplinary practice is of course nothing new, however the degree of equality given to the participating disciplines within the Porosity studio has been noted as unique. The art spectrum is linear, lateral and non-hierarchical. The Porosity Studio is looking for a more diverse range of solutions to the problem of connection, identity and place. Porosity is looking to re-program what is already there in a series of strategies which transform. [5]

Spectrum of the studio participants reflects the broad approach of this studio: students representing nine countries and currently are pursuing degrees in architecture, urban planning and fine art (including visual art, graphic design, music and so on). Lecturers in this studio come with a diverse background too. They represent five nationalities and are specializing in visual arts, interpretation and expression of the human figure (including anatomy), landscape architecture, psychology of perception/cognition, urban design, and architecture. The lecturers are academician as well as professional practitioners and even anti government activist. They hold modern as well as post modernist thinking. With such diverse mixture of participant and view points, the Cityscaper-Porosity studio intends to simulate a wide-ranging approach in designing our built environment.

## EXAMPLES FROM THE CITYSCAPER-POROSITY STUDIO



Figure 1 Map of the region

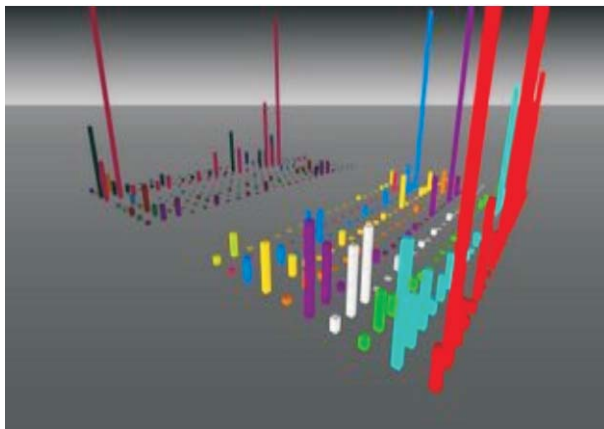


Figure 2 Emotional landscape of the region

### **FeliCity: "What if a city is built on a foundation of happiness?" by Paskalis Khrisno Ayodyantoro, David Lee, Adib Jalal**

The FeliCity [6] project is based on the idea of developing a poly-centric urban region based on the Gross National Happiness concept. Through an Internet search of expressed feelings by inhabitants of each City in the Belt, [7] the Happiness Index of each city is calculated. This index is then mapped on the region, creating an emotional landscape of the region. This emotional landscape shows a range of peaks and troughs which is not analogous to the physical size of the city, nor its economic prowess.

The project proposes that the key strategy in developing this region is to regulate the levels of happiness so as to maintain a state of 'emotional equilibrium' across it. The concept of 'emotional equilibrium' is deeply embedded in the idea that a region is able to develop at its maximum potential when it has a high Happiness Index. Thus, through regulating and transferring the emotional energy of happiness from one city to another, this ideal state can be achieved.

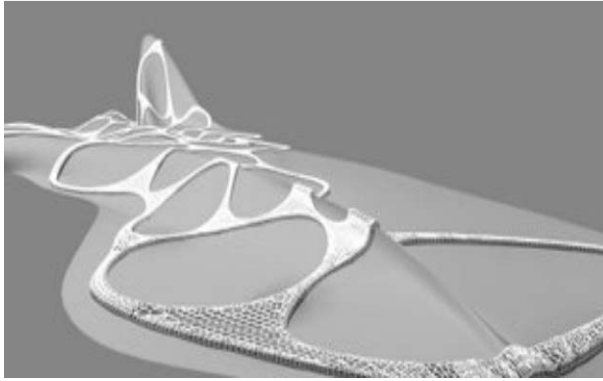


Figure 3 New transportation network

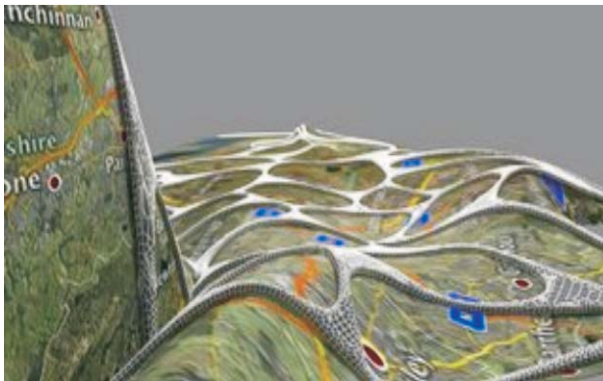


Figure 4 The Plutchik network on region map

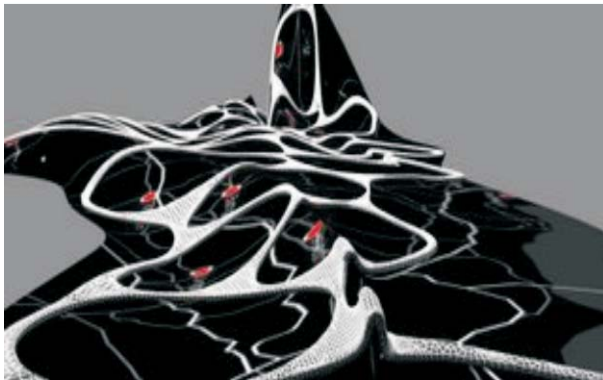


Figure 5 The Plutchik system with stations



Figure 6 Model of the M8H Heterotopia  
Other Examples

In order to achieve this, it is proposed that the M8 be replaced by a new transport system, named Plutchik [8], which other than being a mass rapid transit system is also a means to regulate the emotions of commuters from one city to another.

The Plutchik system is based on the metaphor of a roller coaster which represents the emotional journey of humans up and down the track. The system is made up of stations along a common track, much like a conventional mass transit system but, beyond that, every aspect of it will be based on the emotional landscape map. Each Plutchik station will be located in response to how it fares in the happiness index study. For instance, a town with a low score will find its station located at high altitudes in order to evoke a strong emotional response; probably a cocktail of fear, happiness and anticipation of going down a slope. The opposite will be true for a city with a high index score.

In all, this project aims to ask the stakeholders in the built environment, "What if a city is built on the concepts of happiness?"

**Artiandi Akbar: Transforming the M8+ landscape by changing its framework M8H/M8-EDGE/M8-HETEROTOPIA**

M8 is the code number of Motorway between Edinburgh-Glasgow. In this project, M8H can be read as "M Edge". Regarding to the theories of Michael Foucault and Vichenzo Richeri, Akbar proposed the notion of the shifts in motorways scheme system on it very basic framework. The changes encompass shifting of motorway lanes pattern, thus ignite a new arrangement of emergency lane - slow lane - fast lane inverted combination as a new motorway's body. In the present practice, the emergency lane is on the left, on the border of the road. The fast lane is on the right, just separated by 3-4 meters median, adjacent to the opposite fast lane.

The new concept is all about uncovering heterotopias [9], the other place of in between, by the following changes of the motorway's pattern shifting. Other space that supposed to be functional in the body of motorway by shifting the emergency lane from the border of the track to the very side of the right (inverted). Thus the fast lane shifted to the left side, to the

border of the body. It will automatically embrace a slow hub in the median of the motorway, a place safer for human activity. This newly constructed linear area can be fulfilled with activities of "other thing", that we could ever met before in both cities (Edinburgh/Glasgow), something so magnetic, place to move to, it could be like anything for tourism, such as local cultural entertainment, or even wildest spaces like "the enclosed smoking room" (for those Scottish who are bored of smoking outside of their offices), name it. Somehow, it's not only connecting Edinburgh and Glasgow, but also re-links the rest of the city life's in central belt.

This frame demands a lot of serious changes: the reconstruction requires landscapes transformation (cut and fill), structural deconstruction, and many other mega structural comprehensive changes. By the design, this proposition creates a slow hub beneath the body of the motorway, and a lot of possible changes for spaces of human activity, the central of the motorway then might be a human economic hub, sauna/spa, hot water pool, tourism, entertainment, etc, instead of barrier of grass and signs.

The arrangement shows another interesting improvements like:

- ◆ maximum distance between fast vehicles;
- ◆ access from both sides to the point where an emergency or an accident has occurred;
- ◆ central position of SOS line, service, counter, rest area, etc., with full and two-way utilization;
- ◆ more fluid exits and ingresses to the lanes.
- ◆ An opportunity to varying motorway's design itself to a higher level of articulating, new emergences, new experiences.

The spaces in between, could be various as well, at the same time as activities will be placed onto the site.

In the studio exercise, Akbar pointed four areas, the so-called chosen shifted area, there are around Ratho, Livingston, Whitburn and finally around Saltsburg. Places chosen due to the physical condition and opportunities of site potency itself. Each site has a different articulation, various localities to be exposed, various 'other' activities to do. This just a simple brief about the notion of heterotopia in M8, which hopefully could spawn a lot of advantages especially in innovation of spaces, and so on.

The studio is model driven. This means that from the first concept to the final solution ideas are expressed as physical models as well as drawings and 3D computer graphics etc. Of course a model for a performance artist may take the form of a performance. It may be film for the filmmaker, a song for the singer and so on. The outcome of this studio

We have run out of time to completely rebuild the city and are now forced to adapt and re-use buildings or part of the city. It can easily be argued that we need to re-tune what exists in order to sustain and be sustainable. Examples in this approach during the workshop for instance the use of trash to build a column, or redefining a place with turf, or by erecting a shack in the countryside etc.

## **LESSON LEARNED**

From the Studio it is apparent that urban designers should not rely exclusively on the traditional method that they have been using for decades, but also on other alternative methods. An urban design method developed / adapted from community psychological research or artistic conception may come out with entirely different result that warrants further exploration and elaboration.

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## ENDNOTES

- [1] RIBA practice in Moughtin et.al. p. 6
- [2] See Shirvani pp. 167-197 and Punter (1999)
- [3] Poerbo, Heru (2006). "Coping with the Commodification of Culture in Bandung: An Urban Design Control Approach" *Artepolis 1* proceeding. ITB.
- [4] Stephen Cairns, Head of the Department of Architecture, Univ. of Edinburgh
- [5] Professor Richard Goodwin, Director of Porosity Studio.
- [6] Felicity (n): happiness: state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy (Merriam Webster English Dictionary).
- [7] A Google search was done with the key word "I Feel + 'Name of emotion' + 'Name of city' " and the results tabulated.
- [8] The system is named after Robert Plutchik whose psychoevolutionary theory of emotion is probably one of the most influential classification approaches for general emotional responses. He considered there to be eight primary emotions - anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, curiosity, acceptance and joy. Plutchik proposed that these 'basic' emotions are biologically primitive and have evolved in order to increase the reproductive fitness of the animal. Plutchik argues for the primacy of these emotions by showing each to be the trigger of behaviour with high survival value, such as the way fear inspires the fight-or-flight response.
- [9] According to the theory by French structuralist philosopher Michael Foucault, Heterotopia simply means "other spaces"

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