



Qatar University
Architecture and Urban Planning
Introduction to Urban Design and Planning
ARCT421

Mid Term Paper 1

Spring 2014

Dr. Anna Grichting

23rd of April 2013

An Insight into Camillo Sitte's Writings

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CAMILLO SITTE

“The relationship between buildings, monuments and public squares,” and “The Enclosed Character of the Public Square”

from The Art of Building Cities (1889)

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Glossary

Grille (noun) A grating or screen of metal bars or wires, placed in front of something as protection or to allow ventilation or discreet observation.

Principal room the master bedroom or the private suite in a house (most important room)

Plateau an area of relatively level high ground.

Loggia (noun), a gallery or room with one or more open sides, esp. one that forms part of a house and has one side open to the garden. An open-sided extension to a house.

Introduction

The origins of urban planning, which is mainly concerned with ensuring the systematic development of the communities, lies on the movement of urban transformation that started as a reaction against the industrial city's chaotic and disordered atmosphere during the middle of the 19th century. Modernization can be called "urban renewal" since one of its main approaches is to renew or erase all of the historical principals and atmospheres that were felt in the ancient cities. This approach lead some architects such as Camillio Sitte to start studying ways on how to preserve what remained from the ancient cities and to implement the principals of old ancient cities when designing or planning a space.

Camillio Sitte (1843-1903), a nineteenth-century Austrian Architect, painter, head of the art academy of Vienna and city planning theoretician. (Civismandcities, 2014) His history in Urban Planning started when he felt nostalgic for the oddly and unusually shaped squares and narrow streets of his old city and other European cities. The author's approach is reflected in the title of his book that was written in 1889, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*. (Language Learning Resource Center, 2014)

He mourned and grieved the loss of the structures built to human scale and many other principals that are not used anymore. What exactly were the qualities of the cities that he has always admired that modern-day architects did not incorporate through their designs? Sitte equipped himself with a sketchbook and went on a careful study of these built environments and the outcome was a little book named "The Art of Building Cities." (Sitte, 1889) The result of his study is a list of principals

he thought had an effect on creating the proper atmosphere in public squares and streets before the modern era, which will be briefly discussed through this paper.

Although Sitte and most urban designers used simple observation as their research method, they were sharp and perceptive observers of people's behavior in spaces. (Sitte, 1889)

One can straightforwardly notice the connection between Sitte's approach and other urban designers and theoreticians, such as: Lewis Mumford, William Whyte and Jane Jacobs. On the other hand, Sitte disapproved of Le Corbusier's and some other young architects who were against cities that grow organically and described them as "obsolete cities". (Sitte, 1889) Despite all of the controversy, Sitte's publications were translated to many languages and published around the world and are still used as "student's bible" in some Architecture schools. (Sitte, 1889)

Planning Theories and Concepts

Sitte's study suggests the following practical principals: free the modern system of buildings aligned regularly beside each other. Plus, he believes in and always tries to keep and preserve as much as possible of what remained from the ancient cities as he cherished what is left of history. Finally, implement the principals of old ancient cities when designing or planning a space. (Sitte, 1889)

Locating buildings

The cathedral place in Pisa was designed in a way that there aren't any clichés or non-religious surroundings, not even the noise from markets that might

distract you from freely observing and enjoying the unparalleled splendid artwork of the space. (Sitte, 1889)

Local identities have been removed from spaces designed and built during the modern era. Styles are being mixed as much as people have been interchanged. (Sitte, 1889)

The author does not only feel nostalgic to the aesthetic views of old cities as one might think; instead, he pointed out that modern public squares are not only lacking a harmonic style or local identity, but also, the functionality that was present in old squares. For example, nowadays the public space in front of buildings is used to park vehicles, which clearly lacks the peaceful atmosphere. (Sitte, 1889)

Sculptures

Sitte used the story of Michelangelo's David, a sculpture that was made and erected in a place chosen by the Michelangelo himself. It was first standing close to the principal entrance and the walls of Palazzo Vicchio. Sitte thinks this is the perfect place for the statue to stand out, and showed his sorrow for the sculpture being placed now under glass planes to be photographed and reproduced. *"The morbid influence of an art prison that we call museum."* Sitte (Sitte, 1889)

At the end, he sums his comments by explaining why they chose to place their artworks by the sides of public spaces rather than in the middle of them. This way they could erect as many artworks as possible without interfering with the traffic, and each of them would have a special background. (Sitte, 1889)



The *Statue of David*, completed by Michelangelo in 1504 (Chanpory, 2014)

The enclosed character of a public square

The public square was the principal room (or the way we call it nowadays: master bedroom) of the city. The ancients were able to create an enclosed space using the most diverse methods under the most diverse circumstances to do so. Sitte noticed the number of breaches in an ancient square compared to that in modern ones. (Sitte, 1889)

An effort was made to have only one street at each angle of the square. Not only that, but also Sitte noticed that when one is standing at any point of the square, there aren't more than one infinite view to the streets. (Sitte, 1889)



(Civismandcities, 2014)

Relevance Today and to The City of Doha

The city of Doha is a city that is undergoing quick developments and changes. Like many other cities, some of its areas had been modernized. Luckily, our Sheikhs and planners noticed the great impact of modernization on Old Doha. For some

areas it was too late to save Doha’s heritage, but for some others they were able to reserve and renovate what was still remaining.

Musheirb Properties

In the case of Msheirb properties in Old Doha, the site was completely demolished and a new project took over. The new project does not aim to modernize the area. Instead, they applied as much principals as possible from Old Doha. Some of which will be discussed further.

Sitte observed the way ancient broke the infinite views of streets, which in result forms enclosed spaces. This was applied in The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, (Sitte’s favorite city) through placing a portico. While in Msheirb, a bridge connecting two buildings and shading devices were used to cut through vast spaces. Through the three-dimensional views of Msheirb properties, one can see that planners and designers are expecting these spaces to be filled with life. According to Telegraph Qatar Foundation, Msheirb project’s public square is the largest square in the gulf. (Telegraph, 2013). Unlike the way it is in modernized area such as the spaces between high-rise buildings in West Bay.



The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy (Karen,2013)



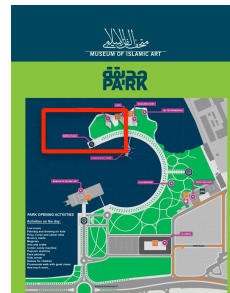
Msheireb Properties, Doha, Qatar (Fact Sheet,2014)

Seven, Richard Serra's Sculpture

America's most gifted sculptor's work is erected in the Museum of Islamic Art's Park in Doha. The sculptor Richard Serra chose to place his sculpture in the water, even though the site did not even exist at that time. (Esman, 2011) This scene contradicts one of Sitte's principals of placing artworks at the sides of public squares, as mentioned earlier in this paper. In my opinion, the location does give fewer opportunities for other artists to show their work, but for such panoramic locations I wouldn't think of any other space better than this that would give an end to the infinite park, and it sure did attract visitors to go further and explore the other side of the mini Courniche.



MIA Park and Serra's Sculpture (Wahyu, 2014)



Map of MIA Park (Wahyu, 2014)



Map of MIA Park Zoomed in (Serra's Sculpture) (Wahyu, 2014)

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