

City making in times of transition

Sustainable, resilient, inclusive and attractive public spaces as stepping stone for a future-proof built environment

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CHANGING CITIES VI
Spatial, Design, Landscape, Heritage & Socio-economic Dimensions



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City making in Times of Transition – Sustainable, resilient, inclusive and attractive public spaces as stepping stone for a future-proof built environment.

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Extended abstract

The paper discusses the necessary integrated approaches and design actions aimed at fostering a future-proof built environment through the (re)design, retrofitting, and transformation of public spaces into sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and attractive areas for inhabitants and visitors. It emphasizes the importance of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change, as well as addressing spatial advantage and quality, social well-being, and ecological balance. Can we leverage climate adaptation and the urge for the energy and mobility transition as catalysts for spatial transformation to benefit inhabitants? Can this lead to improving attractiveness and use of public space within their neighbourhood? Can design thinking, with a focus on societal values, overcome governance's preoccupation with costs?

The City x Space design study demonstrate that an integrated design approach from different perspectives and disciplines can tackle the multitude of transitions in diverse urban settings, with public space -including its subsurface- playing a pivotal role in improvement or even transformation. Six design cases in different Dutch and Flemish cities, spanning historical, post-war reconstruction, and post-industrial contexts, showcase tailored solutions that contribute significantly to creating a more attractive and inviting future-proof built environment. The combination of a more formal set-up, a clear *Research-by-Design* approach with included assessment criteria, and the involvement of multidisciplinary design teams from practice provides both directions from a policy perspective and freedom from a design viewpoint to explore and envision plausible futures for selected locations.

The main conclusion is that policy makers, architects, urban designers, and landscape architects must deal with new and shifting conditions with a focus on societal, spatial, and ecological values. For policy makers, it is relevant to translate insights from designs produced by Research-by-Design into their policy processes for developing a prospect for action. Both professional practices and education need to foster innovative and interdisciplinary design strategies in a more holistic and integrative approach within their cultural-historical architectural and urban contexts. For both current and future spatial designers, the task -but above all the opportunity- is to position themselves more as integrators and agents of change contributing to a paradigm shift that can drive tangible adaptation and improvement in our living environment at the local scale.

Keywords: *built environment, public space, climate change, shifting conditions, paradigm shift, holistic and integrative approaches, research by design, design actions, multidisciplinary collaboration.*