

## **Culture and Context in Public Space Design**

### **Symbolic ornamentation, local craftsmanship and public participation as a way to enable meaning and affordance**

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# Culture and Context in Public Space Design

## Symbolic ornamentation, local craftsmanship and public participation as a way to enable meaning and affordance

### Authors' Bio

**Ayesha Mahiira Hussain** is a second year Landscape Architecture masters student at the Delft University of Technology. She received a Bachelor in Architecture from Virginia Tech University in 2013.

**Dr. Fransje Hooimeijer** is specialized in system integration of technical conditions in urban design and interdisciplinary design. In her research and teaching she takes the perspective on the city as technical construction and investigates how these conditions can be utilized better in urban design and how the systems can adapt to new technologies.

**Bieke Cattoor** is an Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the TU Delft Department of Urbanism. Her research programme on The Landscape Imagination has a dual orientation: innovating critical mapping methods and studying everyday urban landscape transformations.

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Rapid urbanization and increasing globalization of urban development strategies are resulting in a lack of connection between people and places, and places and their context. Nevertheless, cultural embedding and sense of place have a direct impact on the quality of public space. The purpose of this research is to explore culture and context specific design strategies that enable the production of situated meaning, in turn augmenting the quality of public space. First, an extended framework for the evaluation of public space quality is presented, incorporating Gehl's Twelve Quality Criteria, as well as aspects from Stobbelaar and Pedrolí's Landscape Identity Circle. Subsequently, three case studies by West 8, located in culturally and spatially diverse contexts and are evaluated against this framework. As a result from this analysis, symbolic ornamentation appears as West 8's primary design strategy to embed these projects into their cultural and spatial contexts. With the term symbolic ornamentation, we refer to the abstraction of elements from the landscape – history, ecology or culture related – into design elements as a way to incorporate them within a design project. To this, the office deploys three specific strategies: analysis as a parallel and iterative process through the various phases of design, engagement of native collaborators and craftsmanship for local know-how and the facilitation of public participation for various purposes during the design process. The research concludes that cultural meaning is not independent of affordance and that functionality in a project can also evoke a sense of place through appropriate design strategies.

