

CONDITIONS FOR NEW NEIGHBORHOODS

Zaida Muxí Martínez & Roser Casanovas***

* UPC - DUOT-ETSAB- Professor, PhD in Architecture. Av. Diagonal 649 4º, 08028 Barcelona;
zaida@coac.net

** UPC - ETSAB Candidate Masters Laboratory for 21st Century Housing, ETSAB-FPC;
rosercasanovas@josepmariamontaner.cat

ABSTRACT: Concepts and criteria for creating new neighborhoods based particularly on considering everyday life as prime factor. Analytical and project parameters that introduce the gender perspective in the pursuit of sustainable and inclusive cities.

KEY WORDS: New Neighborhoods. Gender. Everyday life. Housing. Sustainability

1- INTRODUCTION

The criteria for urban organization and assessment of new neighborhoods are based on seeing everyday life as the essential factor for defining and articulating neighborhoods. This means valuing the proximity of a variety of facilities, services and shops; the gender perspective in urbanism; sustainability as a multiple urban, economic, social and cultural criterion; and design elements that make a city friendly, capable of expressing diversity and enhancing dwelling without any sort of discrimination (by gender, age, class, religion, origin or ethnicity).

What do the best neighborhoods we have lived in or been in -as permanent or temporary inhabitants- have? In addition to the affection enveloping all the spaces in which we have lived some part of our lives, there is an outward-looking affection, toward the public side of our experiences, the spaces for sociability. The possibilities for doing and choosing are what distinguish these places: the everyday spots, stores and people who become our support system, our security. A certainty afforded by our recognition of the place and by our knowing how to read its everyday normality, lived and inhabited by a variety of people.

How can we build neighborhoods that afford these possibilities? To create this support for social networks it is not only necessary to create housing, but instead it is equally important to create workplaces, shops, services and facilities so that everyone can have a range of opportunities in terms of work and economic activities in the neighborhood. We are talking about a complex network that involves everyone's life, and thus it is a matter of offering diverse spaces for socialization for both the productive and the reproductive world, to shape a neighborhood.

How can an integrated and egalitarian urban space be created, particularly since urban space is not neutral, but instead assigns priorities, reflects powers and rights? Urban project management has led for a variety of reasons to the simplification of uses, times and users, for the most part reflecting a progression of linear and temporally successive activities, leaving aside the experience of women, who make use of the more diverse and less linear city. As Jane Jacobs would say, in the choreography of the city, women's role is diverse and complex.

Urbanism with a gender vision redefines the objectives of urbanism in line with the needs of a new society that embraces, in addition to gender differences, the diversity of situations of which men and women form part: different cultural and geographical origins, ages with particular capacities and needs, diverse family groups, etc.; incorporating them as urban project data will lead to creation of new types of facilities. New facilities in which it is possible to socialize reproductive tasks. From the gender perspective these facilities are called infrastructures for everyday life.

What are the parameters on which we should base housing quality? For a society that wants to move forward on equality it is key to rethink and get beyond many spatial structures that are part of another era,

another society, and another way of thinking. Space is a representation of the social values that have created it. A society that recognizes the importance of caring for the home and people will generate spaces that are appropriate for those tasks, starting from the basis that they do not have to be hidden but instead are shared responsibilities. Hence, the essential features that all dwellings must provide are: flexibility, adequate volume depending on environment and activities, spatial dehierarchization, space for reproductive and productive work, an own exterior space, natural cross-ventilation, appropriate hours of sunlight, and passive and active energy efficiency.

2- CRITERIA FOR URBAN ORGANIZATION AND ASSESSMENT OF NEW NEIGHBORHOODS

2.1 PRE-PROJECT MANAGEMENT CRITERIA:

1. Knowledge of the physical and social context: territorial data and conditioning factors, type of urban fabric in the intervention area, economic activities, proximity, quantity and quality of facilities and services in the area under analysis, features of the public space, and type of housing prevailing in the area. Insofar as sustainability consists of rational use of the territory and the environment, the physical analysis should be preceded by a justification of the need for a new area of residential development, or absence thereof, given the other formulas for expanding available housing without consuming more territory, for example, acupuncture work in the existing city, policies favoring rentals or rehabilitation of buildings.

This analysis must include another parallel analysis closely related to the social, which has to do with knowledge of the inhabitants and their characteristics, the economic activities they perform, occupancy rates, percentage of formal and informal work, domestic work, economic level, degree of cohesion and social activity according to presence of citizens' associations and entities, the types of groups living together in housing (segregated by sex). Ensuing from this analysis will be further more in-depths ones that have to do specifically with other variables like participation, public space, security, mobility, facilities and housing.

2. Participation processes. Participation is a value that must come into play in all spheres so as to include future inhabitants from different growth sectors, as well as the population already residing in the intervened neighborhoods or cities. Participation is a process that must be present from the diagnosis of urban planning through its evaluation, and it must be the fruit of an interdisciplinary, crosscutting team. New instruments must also be introduced to try to understand and make visible what is happening in a space, to put on paper all the knowledge accrued by a community, specifically women, based on observation of their everyday life, their territory, given that they are the ones who know it best.

2.2 DESIGN CRITERIA

1. Urban morphology and relationship with the existing city: good relationships must be fostered with existing architectural, urban and landscape structures, adapting to both natural and artificial preexisting elements. This implies a strong relationship with the existing urban network, that is, the distinction between new and old must disappear. What is most important in neighborhood morphology is the establishment of relationships between residential buildings, facilities and free spaces, fostering the neighborhood's character as an urban system, rather than the autonomy of objects.

Neighborhoods must be made visible as a space to get to know, to visit in order to do something.

New centralities must be created in cities where new growth takes place, either through facilities, workplaces, public spaces or other agglutinating strategies for a new neighborhood, strengthening multiple uses and mixtures.

2. Typological grouping: if we want a neighborhood with a lot of social life, capable of fostering the creation of networks among its inhabitants, the typological grouping must provide spaces for meeting and intermediary spaces. Hence, according to the grouping of housing proposed, these relationships will be favored or not. A gradual and secure transition between public and private is essential, to generate different scales of encounters and recognition. Another quality we must seek in dwellings is natural cross-ventilation. Attached houses are not acceptable insofar as they are not sustainable. Among other reasons, because suburban and low-density mono-functional urban developments, with isolated houses, hinder implementation of public transportation facilitating the activities of everyday life.

3. Densities and mixed uses: an in-depth study must be made of the most appropriate ratios of dwellings per hectare, the relationship between built and free spaces, grouping of constructions or dispersion, taking

into account that before creating new urban zones there must be an assessment of redensification of existing areas and of the possibility of densifying created areas, if necessary.

We must ask if the proposed densities are appropriate (from 50 to 200 dwellings per hectare) in relation to the natural and urban environment and in relation to morphologies that are stepped up.

Densities must also permit construction and maintenance of services, facilities and public transportation; hence, whenever possible densities permitting a sufficient critical mass to provide efficient and quality services should be taken into account.

4. Mobility: supply of means of transportation and features of access spaces determine ways of living and quality of life. All persons plan and modify their behavior to a greater or lesser extent according to the possibilities afforded by the means available to them. The diversity of everyday needs and obligations related to work, daily purchases, walks, parents' duties, and any other type of task determine a relationship with the surroundings and thus imply displacements, characterized by not being linear or uniform.

Existence of a multifunctional fabric, equipped with all types of facilities and infrastructures at neighborhood scale, enhances the possibilities for short displacements that can be made on foot. Existence of sustainable, integrated, adapted, diverse and frequent transportation allows for increasing distances, broadening possibilities, and cutting times in getting from one place to another.

When the priority for new growth are the people who move on foot, the urban physical solutions must adapt to their situation: sidewalk dimensions must be provided the necessary width; corners must be widened to improve visibility among pedestrians and automobiles; architectural obstacles and barriers must be eliminated; protection must be provided for inclement weather; differentiation between levels or functions must be designed using different textured and colored materials, etc.

5. Facilities: facilities supplied are enriched when society promotes real values of equality, justice, inclusion and solidarity, and when it recognizes, assumes and values the work deriving from gender roles. Facilities complement the urban structure of cities and make the public-private, interior-exterior, housing-city duality richer by providing specific spaces for health, learning, service, commerce, cultural dissemination, youth centers, etc. Their distribution in the territory in relation to their uses and mobility networks guarantees the quality of life, so that they become strategies for fostering social networks, generating exchanges of services, and allowing for different hours of use, bringing their functioning closer to the complexity of everyday life.

The space for facilities must be linked to the city's public space, with a view to maximizing permeability, flexibilizing their use, so as to maximize utilization of the spaces. That is to say, the school playground, a civic center's multifunction room, a library's newspaper reading room, or a student residence laundry room are spaces that we can incorporate in all the neighborhood's everyday life and that will aid in public sharing of reproduction tasks.

The idea of facilities for everyday life implies incorporating a new generation of indispensable facilities, favoring equal opportunities for women and men, which aid performance of reproductive tasks and caretaking, starting with the essential element, the childcare center, in addition to daytime centers for older and younger people, education support spaces, etc.

6. Shops and other services: as important as good accessibility to facilities is having shops nearby, with the greatest possible diversity in terms of volume, set in the fabric of everyday activities. It is especially important to foster the existence of small premises appropriate for sole-proprietorships or family businesses, which are sometimes started up with the aid of micro-loans. Under the concept of proximity of facilities, workplaces for cooperatives providing labor insertion can also be fostered. The diversity and variety of shops ultimately helps to strengthen local economies, the basis for the vitality and vigor of communities. Hence, any proposal must start by taking into account the diversity and typologies of shops, hours and users, and situations.

7. Facilities and services provided by residential buildings themselves: the services that residential buildings themselves provide, for use both by residents and by neighbors, are key in connection with the quality of public spaces and facilities. Community facilities are even more necessary when dwellings are small and need to be complemented by the spaces and features of collective services, strengthening extension from the household. It is a way of fostering community living, by sharing many household activities.

8. Public space is key in each city: it is where the city's society becomes visible. The quality of living, working and relating in a neighborhood has much to do with the qualities of the public space available. Public space conceived for equal opportunities fosters people's autonomy and socialization, since it

prioritizes design and adaptability for the needs of women and men. The public space is the connector for activities where we individually or collectively live our everyday lives and establish social and cultural links. Consequently, from a gender perspective, public space is not understood merely as functional space, but instead as a space for life experience, and thus it must guarantee equal opportunities and equity of use. Mixed uses must be sought, providing activity, sustainable mobility that values proximity and prioritizes pedestrian movements, accessibility without discrimination, a positive perception of security, and an active and interlinked relationship with facilities, shops and buildings in general.

9. Transition between public and private spaces: the key to the social success of new residential neighborhoods rests in the emphasis each project places on the quality of the visual and functional relationship between housing space and public space. The relationship of sidewalks and public spaces with the vertical plane of façades is the meeting point of two ecological systems, where lies the potential for maximum activity and variety. But likewise important is the quality of the building's interior communal spaces planned for fostering interaction between neighbors of the same community. Moreover, the quality of housing has much to do with the relationships with the exterior and views, orientation, sunlight, participation in community life and childcare, which are fostered by houses with terraces, galleries, balconies and gardens.

10. Aesthetic dimension and architectural quality: beyond these urban, environmental and social values, the quality of neighborhoods also has to do with the aesthetic values of architecture that is friendly and expressive, that uses pleasant materials, textures and colors, and that ultimately favors appropriation and identification by its inhabitants, and the pride and satisfaction from living in the neighborhood. Buildings must have clear forms, signaling accesses and façades, and encouraging people to put up their own personalized signs.

The most important issue, which is totally related to sustainability and quality of life, is that each of the façades should be different based on orientation, making use of the most appropriate architectural elements: windows, balconies, open terraces, protected terraces, galleries, etc.

11. Vegetation and water: appropriate use of vegetation has positive effects, since it absorbs solar radiation and mitigates human heat, thereby decreasing the demand for energy. Hence it impacts on cooling, and water cycle, favors drainage, and ultimately increases production of biomass thanks to its absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere, creating a positive effect for combating climate change. It is advisable to include green façades and garden spaces in neighborhoods, which can be own gardens.

In relation to public space, design of green areas must be a priority issue in projects, along with urban equipment and presence of water. Special care must be taken with pavements moving from one level to another; surfaces should be diverse and soft, to avoid concentration of heat. A visible and efficient water cycle should be planned from the outset, with fountains, canals, tanks and other elements that enhance the water cycle, provide humidity and drainage, with good management of rainwater and natural resources, returning cleaned water to the natural cycle.

12. Sustainability and resources: the eleven criteria presented thus far deal with sustainability from a social and urban standpoint. Reference must also be made to all construction aspects that have major repercussions on the good use of energy, selective waste collection, management of green areas, separation of graywater and rainwater, reusable/recyclable construction, vegetation, decreasing CO₂ emissions.