



# I

*This project is a hybrid between a scientific and an artistic approach to the subject. I am aware that this narrow path between them might be speculative and perhaps not 100% accurate, but the objective is to have more freedom in interpreting the facts.*

## 2

### *The history of urban squares:*

- *The first urban formations appeared 6000 years ago*
- *City squares were established at the crossroads of important trade routes*
- *Over time, squares acquired many more functions*
- *They served as an opportunity to exercise the power of rulers with military processions and parades*

### Additional talk:

The first urban formations started appearing at least 6000 years ago. Within urban areas, open public space always existed and it served a very important purpose. Along with the development of human society and the development of cities, the squares acquired many more functions. At first, the squares were established at the crossroads of important trade routes, where exchange of goods as well as ideas took place. For example, Phoenician trades-people invented numerical and linguistic pictographic inscriptions out of the need to record market transactions. Another very important function of the public square was that it served as an opportunity to exercise the power of rulers with military processions and parades.

### Image:

**Gouda** was made famous by its cheese. This quintessential town has a large, unusual, triangular square with a beautiful 15th century town hall sitting in the center.

This would be an example of a ceremonial square with a social and market functions added.

# 3

## *The history of urban squares:*

- *Cities were often surrounded by thick walls and elaborate systems of defense; these became very densely populated*
- *Major places of worship were placed on the squares, they were also used as permanent or temporary markets*
- *Other uses were: races, bull fights, executions, or even just to collect rain water in large underground cisterns.*

## Additional talk:

Wars and inventions of dangerous weapons, where the ambition was not only to capture women and goods, but to destroy enemies, led to cities surrounded by thick walls and elaborate systems of defense. These became very densely populated, but even under these conditions there was always room for an open public space. Its functions were expanding too. Major places of worship were placed there, squares were used as permanent or temporary markets, monuments to important predecessors were erected and revolutions or contra-revolutions were staged. The squares became the location of royal courts, government buildings and city halls as manifestations of wealth and power. They were also used for races, like the Palio Race in Siena, bull fights, executions, or even just to collect rain water in large underground cisterns. For example all squares in Venezia were used to collect rain water, as the only water source.

## Image:

The Grote Markt in **Antwerpen** is beautifully surrounded by the Stadhuis Gijdenhuizen (town hall) and the so-called houses of the guilds or corporations. In the background the tower of O.L. Vrouwe Kathedraal (in the connected Handschoenmarkt) completes the view. A large part of the Grote Markt burned down in 1576. Most of the houses were rebuilt afterwards by H. Vredeman, the town architect, in Flemish Renaissance style. An example of a large ceremonial square.

# 4

## *The history of urban squares:*

- *Cities themselves are become museums, collections of human experiences that preserve numerous cultural values*
- *Human proportions and distances are less important*
- *Vehicles have almost destroyed most of the open public spaces*
- *Squares serve as embodiments of human inheritance: cooperation, technological processes, architectural and urban planning*

### Additional talk:

In recent times, theaters, restaurants and museums also find their place on public squares. Cities themselves, actually become museums, collections of human experiences that preserve numerous cultural values.

Particularly since the invention of motorized traffic, the individual vehicle has almost destroyed most of the open public spaces. Suddenly, human proportions and distances are less important. A car parking sometimes has more value than the accumulated historical inheritance – human cooperation, technological processes, architectural and urban planning – that a square embodies.

### Image:

**Campidoglio** was designed by Michelangelo Buonaroti, the famous Renaissance architect, sculptor and painter, on the Palatine, one of the seven Roman hills. This is a public gathering place which provides access to a couple of art museums. It is a magnificent place to visit, especially near the end of the day, with an unbelievable sunset and a view of the whole city.

The two of the buildings existed before the Michelangelo intervention, but facades were redesigned to match the third (the one on the left), designed and built by him. An extremely pleasant space, designed with human proportions and perspectives in mind. By far, the best existing public square today, recommended to be used as a perfect example of what a square should be, particularly with the problems that cities all over the world are facing today.

Carlo Argan, the long-time Mayor of Rome, architectural historian and author, said in one of his interviews:

“The substance of the urban environment is quickly perishing”.

# 5

*The system of classification was developed in order to examine the role of squares in cities and to help in the process of planning them.*

*The types of squares:*

1. *Ceremonial*
2. *Cathedral*
3. *Social*
4. *Residential*
5. *Court*
6. *Park*
7. *Street extension.*

Additional talk:

## Types of Square:

[cer] - Ceremonial (Central location; designed to specification; location of monuments, government, courts or other important state buildings, sometimes theaters and museum; used occasionally for public demonstrations, strikes, revolutions. Example: Rossio (Praça Dom Pedro IV), Lisboa, Portugal.)

[cat] - Cathedral, church (Developed around a cathedral, church or another religious structure; at the beginning, mainly used for religious ceremonies, often other content and usage are added later. Example: Place Royale, Ville de Québec, Canada.)

[soc] - Social (A mostly pedestrian square or with very limited car traffic; sometimes a market place, cisterna, small church, etc. is located there. Example: Campo San Martin, Venezia, Italy.)

[res] - Residential (Social spaces in residential area; sometimes with some commercial uses etc. Example: Oberblaak, Rotterdam, Nederland.)

[cor] - Court yards (Public spaces within built structures; in contemporary times converted to public usage, originally developed as private. Example: Elm Court, London, England.)

[par] - With parks (Squares originally developed in England, in residential areas with a public or private park in the middle; in other cultures parks are very often incorporated into the main city square, with important public building around the perimeter, in a similar way as in the ceremonial category. Example: Plaza Mayor, Trinidad, Cuba.)

[str] - Street shopping (Squares developed in mainly pedestrianized shopping areas, usually with lot of tourist amenities. Example: Lijnbaan, Rotterdam, Nederland.)

The square classifications were developed over time, with the purpose to better understand the role of the squares within the cities in today's world. These will definitely change and expand as we explore further. We are aware that some of the squares belong to more than one category, but there are some that do not belong to any of those!

Image:

**Soho Square** -this square was laid out in 1681 and enjoyed a brief reign as the most fashionable address in London. It was originally called King Square after Charles II, whose statue stands in the middle.

# 6

*The evaluation method:*

*1. Sociability*

*2. Uses & Activities*

*3. Access & Linkages*

*4. Comfort*

*5. Image*

*6. Tourist Value*

Additional talk:

The evaluation method

**Sociability**

Welcoming, cooperative, diverse, friendly, neighbourly, interactive; Considering street life, social networks, evening use...

**Uses & Activities**

Useful, special, vital, fun, real, sustainable, celebratory, active; Considering land use, property values...

**Access & Linkages**

Walkable, convenient, accessible, proximity to traffic, pedestrian activities, parking...

**Comfort**

Safe, clean, walkable, green, sittable; Considering crime statistics, sanitation rating, environmental value, building conditions ...

**Image**

Attractive, charming, historic, preserved, spiritual, impressive, unforgettable...

**Tourist value**

Well-liked, enjoyed, usefull, recomended, a tourist magnet, attractive, unforgettable, historic, preserved...

The first five evaluations were observations based on my professional knowledge but, there was always something else, some value that was not easy to define. Finally last year (2005) I visited the Biennale of Architecture in Rotterdam, Nederland and the answer was found. Presented in the "Mare Nostrum" exhibit and accompanying papers, the role of the tourism industry in urban life was examined. The influence of tourism on the sustainable environmental, cultural and economic development of the city proved to be extremely important. In order to reflect this, the "Tourist Value" was added to the evaluation method.

Image:

Place Poyale, **Ville de Québec**, Canada.

The square is the location where the city was founded by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. It is called "cradle" of French civilization in North America. On the square is the oldest stone church in North America, Notre Dame des Victoires, built in 1688. The site was a center of business for merchants, shipowners and shipbuilders until the 1860 when it started to decline and the main settlement was moved up to the hill above it, where it was easier to defend. Today this beautifully restored square, is one of the main tourist attractions in Quebec City.

# 7

*A city, especially a metropolis or ecumenopolis of tomorrow, can be compared to a living organism. All the organs are represented in the form of streets, buildings and inhabitants, while the square is definitely a city's heart and soul. As any other living being, the city needs attention, protection and nourishment.*

Additional talk:

The main purpose for treating the city as a living organism is to establish a connection and stress the importance of communication with existing space. The most important element is language, understanding that there is one in the first place, is what we should be familiar with.

Image:

**Kbooms**lot Square is in a close proximity to downtown Amsterdam, close to the Waterloo Plain market.

An excellent example of a residential square, with all the necessary functions and amenities.

# 8

*The language of urban squares.*

*Squares talk to us. Their vocabulary is a part of a complex language of art; it is a dialect with very specific characteristics. Elements have their individual meanings, but when combined create new messages.*

# 9

*The language of urban squares.*

*Squares talk to us. Their vocabulary is a part of a complex language of art; it is a dialect with very specific characteristics. Elements have their individual meanings, but when combined create new messages.*

*Architectural elements, signage systems, graffiti and many other forms of urban art follow each other in a continuous stream, they surround us and direct our movements, they are given to us in a form on which we, as an individuals, have very little effect.*

Additional talk:

We can use these messages in the planning process of revitalization of existing squares or any other public space and of course in the creative process of establishing new public urban spaces.

Even the most experienced and educated people understand very few of these messages.

Image:

Let's try to interpret this image in the bottom left corner. It is in front of a small apartment building in Amsterdam and it is used for tying bicycles over night, (notice the chain). Obviously it makes an impact with another message too.

# IO

*The language of urban squares.*

*The level on which squares communicate transcends every day life. Careful observation and a lot of passion are necessary in order to interpret/translate their messages.*

## II

*The language of urban squares.*

*The level on which squares communicate transcends every day life. Careful observation and a lot of passion are necessary in order to interpret/translate their messages.*

*Still, we are the only ones that can attempt to interpret them and use their messages in order to understand and create more sustainable and habitable cities.*

# I2

*Many urban experts write and lecture on the topic of cities. In my work, I try to match those thoughts with my interpretation of the urban square.*

Additional talk (not to be displayed):

Image:

**St. Jans Vliet**, Antwerpen, Belgium, 2005;

Quote: "The city has its own feelings, in the same way as a complex organism", by B. Bogdanovic, *Urbs & Logos*, Beograd, 1972

# I3

*The intention of this project is to inspire a new age of urban art that will be engaged in promoting improvements in urban life.*

Additional talk (not to be displayed):

Rossio is one of the main downtown squares in Lisbon.

The quote used is by Nigel Coats, from the book *Guide to Ecstasy*, published in London in 2004. It is a guide through a virtual city combined from Rome, Cairo, Mumbai, Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, New York and London. It is a very interesting book about the sensual side of a city.

Some more interesting ideas: the city as art, the city is theater...

Image:

**ROSSIO** (Praça Dom Pedro IV), Lisboa, Portugal, 2002;

Quote: "The city is nothing if you do not interpret it with passion"  
by Nigel Coats, *Guide to Ecstasy*, London, 2004

# I4

*I see this project as a forum for free expression, exchange of ideas, and a contribution to the process of the healthy urbanization of our cities.*

Additional talk:

This square is in Belgrade, my birth place, a rare jewel from the end of 18th century, remains in almost its original form, presently in very bad shape.

Image:

Kopitareva Gradina, Belgrade, Serbia & Montenegro, 2005;

Quote:

“In the cities choked with advertising, urban art provides an important forum for social commentary and free expression”,

by Tristian Manco, Street Logos, London, 2005.

*I hope that the project will be an inspiration for you as future planners and educators. Further work on this project and documentation (including this presentation) are available at: <http://www.urbansquares.com>.*

Additional talk:

A controversial square, with a lot of differing opinions, good sides and bad sides. I call it a hybrid between real and cyberspace. I had an opportunity to meet some of the square's designers, they talk about the square not being finished. We have to respect that, but the space will not be alive and healthy (loved and used), until people make their own impact. They are doing it even now, notice everybody pulling the chairs to the middle of the space and facing the big screens that surround them, as if at a movie theater. They bring their habits from the living room to the public square.

Image:

Dundas Square, Toronto, Canada, 2005;

Quote:

“The artist permanently faces the decision of whether to advance against the public as a warlord of innovation”,  
by Iconoclash exhibition papers, Karlsruhe, 2002.

Additional talk:

I had a chance to visit a graffiti alley in the Richmond and West Queen area, an open air gallery of screaming new artists. They jump to the opportunity to display their way of thinking and their way of life.

Instead of bringing more police to the streets we might get someone involved in interpreting the urban messages that young people are sending us and then maybe try to do something to solve the existing social problems?