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Seen, Felt, and Lived.
Design Principles for Socially Sustainable Public Spaces

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Abstract
Public spaces are increasingly expected to address complex societal challenges, from climate adaptation to social fragmentation. Yet, while the technical performance of public space has received considerable attention, its social sustainability remains less clearly defined and operationalized. This article, developed within the STEPS project funded by the Dutch Research Council, explores how social sustainability can be translated into design-oriented principles for public space. The contribution focuses on three interrelated dimensions of social life in urban environments: social cohesion, social encounter, and social learning. Social cohesion concerns the ties that connect people to places and to one another through trust, participation, and shared values (Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2018; Asadollahi Asl Zarkhah et al., 2025; Harteveld, 2017, 2020; Lai et al., 2024; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Social encounter addresses the capacity of public spaces to foster meaningful interactions across difference, moving beyond co-presence towards genuine exchange (Askarizad & He, 2022; Ferreira et al., 2021; Horgan & Liinamaa, 2023). Social learning refers to collective processes of reflection, knowledge creation, and problem-solving that enable communities to develop civic literacy and transformative capacities (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Rather than treating these dimensions as isolated categories, the article approaches them as relational qualities that emerge through the immersive experiences in public space. In this perspective, public spaces are more than their physical form or functional assets. They are social infrastructures where belonging, encounter, and collective learning continuously take shape and give live to interactions of bodies in space. Building on a co-creative and interdisciplinary research process, the article proposes a conceptual and design-oriented framework that translates debates on social sustainability into operational principles for analysis and design. In doing so, it challenges approaches centred primarily on technical performance and advocates for a more holistic understanding of public space, towards subjective, symbolic, and culturally embedded dimensions.

Keywords: social cohesion, social encounter, social learning, public space design, design principles, immersive experience

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Public Space as Relational and Sensory Infrastructure

Public space has long been recognised as one of the primary frameworks through which urban societies organise collective *life*. Streets, squares, parks, and promenades are not only tangible components of the city - they are arenas where people move, interact, and give shape to everyday practices (Gehl, 2011; Jacobs, 1961). Yet public space extends far beyond its physical form. It is a relational infrastructure, a living medium where social, cultural, ecological, and political processes are enacted, experienced, and continuously negotiated (Lefebvre, 1991; Low & Iveson, 2016). It is where belonging, difference, and even exclusion become perceptible through interaction and presence (Madanipour, 2004, 2015; Massey, 2005). In this sense, public space is effective. Through bodily presence, sensory perception, and interaction, people construct an understanding of themselves in relation to others and to the broader urban environment (Brislin & Pallasmaa, 2012; Thrift, 2004). The smell of coffee drifting from a café, the rhythm of footsteps on cobblestones, the laughter of children in a park - these are not merely incidental; they shape how individuals perceive safety, connection, and inclusion. Public space, in short, is where the city comes alive as a social and emotional experience (Carmona, 2019, 2023).

Today, the role of public space is more critical - and more precarious - than ever. Rapid urbanisation, socio-economic fragmentation, and rising inequality are reshaping who uses public space and how they use it (Sandercock, 2003; UN-Habitat, 2020). Mass tourism and global mobility introduce temporary rhythms that can enrich or overwhelm local life (Smith & Hetherington, 2013). Climate change threatens to make open spaces inhospitable at times, while environmental degradation undermines the health and vitality of urban ecosystems (Beatley, 2014). Politically, public space is often contested terrain - where protests, surveillance, and privatisation intersect, determining whose presence is welcome and whose is suppressed (Mitchell, 2003). Economically, market pressures can erode inclusivity, privileging consumption over collective life (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

AI is altering the very fabric of urban experience by reshaping what we perceive as real and trustworthy (Crawford, 2022; Floridi, 2019). Deepfakes, hyper-personalised information flows, virtual simulations, and AI-generated environments make it increasingly difficult to distinguish authentic interactions from manufactured ones. In this context, public space has become a rare domain where reality can still be directly experienced and socially validated, allowing humans to negotiate trust, authenticity, and presence in ways that digital interfaces alone cannot provide (Kitchin, 2017; Townsend, 2013).

Today's challenges make the role of public space more urgent. It is not enough to design for function or aesthetics; we must cultivate spaces that foster social cohesion, enable meaningful encounters, and support collective learning (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1991; Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 2006; Gehl, 2011). Social cohesion emerges from repeated interactions, rituals, and shared rhythms that give people a sense of belonging. Encounters - whether brief or prolonged - allow differences to be perceived and appreciated, creating the conditions for empathy and mutual recognition (Low & Smith, 2005; Oldenburg, 2023). Learning happens as people navigate these interactions, interpret their environment, and adapt their behaviours in relation to others. These three dimensions - cohesion, encounter, and learning - operate simultaneously, creating the heartbeat of urban life.

Planning and design play a crucial role in enabling these processes. Material interventions such as seating, pathways, lighting, and green infrastructure matter, but only when conceived as part of a broader relational and sensory ecology (Carmona,

2019, 2023; Gehl & Svarre, 2013). Equally important is the social dimension: the design of opportunities for co-presence, improvisation, and interaction; the cultivation of spaces where people feel safe, visible, and included; and the recognition that public life is shaped as much by affective and cultural norms as by physical structures (Low & Iveson, 2016; Low & Smith, 2005; Madanipour, 2004, 2015). When planning accounts for these dimensions, public space becomes more than a stage - it becomes an active participant in urban life, capable of sustaining relationships, generating shared knowledge, and opening possibilities for collective imagination.

Understanding public space in this way shifts the lens of urban design from static form-making to the creation of *conditions for experience*: dynamic, adaptive, and inclusive. The city is meaningful not merely because it exists, but because it supports the continuous interplay of bodies, environments, and feelings in space. By foregrounding cohesion, encounter, and learning, we can design public spaces that respond to contemporary challenges, nurture collective life, and make urban experience not just visible but deeply felt. In experiential terms, these dimensions may be evoked through the city as felt, seen, and lived. These terms are not intended as fixed categories, but as shorthand for broader relational processes: cohesion is *felt* through belonging, comfort, and shared presence; encounter is *seen* through co-presence, visibility, and recognition of others; and learning is *lived* through participation, adaptation, and the continuous exchange of knowledge in everyday space.

Over the past decades, urban design scholarship has developed various quality criteria for the design of public space, identifying valuable conditions that support public life, indicators that assess social performance, and explanations of how design influences human behaviour. (Gehl 2011, Metha 2014, PPS, 2024). Recent UN-Habitat (2020) offer guidance for inclusive, safe, accessible, and sustainable public spaces. Margaret Crawford (2015) and Setha Low and Kurt Iveson (2016) elaborated on the political and cultural aspects of such approaches, emphasising the underlying right to public spaces. While they tend to approach social cohesion, social encounter, and social learning as parallel or partial concerns, this article reframes public space through interconnected social processes linked to experiential dimensions. As such, the originality of the contribution does not lie in introducing entirely new categories, but in reorganising and operationalising existing interdisciplinary debates into an integrated framework for design practice. The proposed triad — cohesion, encounter, and learning - is therefore intended as both an analytical lens and a design framework that connects the experiential, relational, and socio-spatial dimensions of public space. In this sense, the article positions itself between conceptual reflection and actionable design thinking, contributing to ongoing discussions on spatial justice, inclusion, and socially sustainable urban transformation.

STEPS towards Experiential, Relational, and Socio-Spatial Dimensions of Public Space

The article builds on a co-creative and interdisciplinary research process developed within the STEPS project.[1] The project produces practical design guidelines through

[1] The STEPS (Sustaining the Social: Design Guidelines for Sustainable Public Space) project, funded by the Dutch Research Council NWO, is a collaboration between TU Delft, Arttenders and Smartland. It aims

literature review, cross-disciplinary research, guideline development, and the co-creation of a design catalogue for urban designers, architects, and policymakers. The narrative review of academic literature (2015–2025) has focused on person–environment relationships, particularly examining how public space design influences social cohesion, social encounter, and social learning, across 200 articles available through Worldcat. Search strings were developed by combining these three key concepts with the primary search concept of 'public space'. Literature has varied across disciplinary and scholarly settings. Through an inductive thematic synthesis and a cross-disciplinary analysis, we identify recurring themes, concepts, and design-relevant patterns. As design thinking addresses complex, open-ended problems by reframing them and using abductive reasoning to develop actionable solutions (Dorst, 2011), the guidelines were developed abductively, through a preliminary derivation of design principles via thematic coding and conceptual clustering of recurrent findings across the multidisciplinary evidence base. Across urban design, architecture, and policymaking, 8 professionals in training and 22 established practitioners in the Netherlands tested the translation and validation of design principles through two collaborative workshops. The participants contributed iterative feedback, enabling the refinement and contextualisation of the design principles. The refinement workshop took place in the academic setting of Delft, and the contextualisation workshop took place at the design firm Arttenders, co-creating the guide's effectiveness in a specific context provided by the Rotterdam municipality and a commissioned consultant

The second workshop used the Sportcampus Rotterdam, a 12-hectare planned redevelopment adjacent to De Kuip football stadium, as a case study in public space design. The municipal brief combined a work-living environment and multimodal mobility infrastructure, with recreational amenities and event-related facilities at the intersection of urban and social design. Rather than treating social cohesion, social encounter, and social learning as separate objectives, participants explored how these dimensions can reinforce one another through everyday spatial experiences and design interventions. A central finding was that movement can connect social cohesion, encounter, and learning. Inviting walking and cycling routes, playful elements, visible facilities, and other subtle design nudges encourage physical activity while creating opportunities for people to meet, observe, and interact, as can also be onboarded from the established quality criteria. Yet, through drawing and discussing, movement was understood not simply as mobility in and through the neighbourhood but as an experiential process that fosters the three dimensions of social sustainability. With this, participants highlighted the value of relatively simple design interventions that make public space accessible, engaging, and open to appropriation.

The workshop emphasised that social sustainability emerges through the lived experience of everyday public life. Active ground floors, inviting routes, flexibility, and spaces for diverse users were reaffirmed as mutually reinforcing elements of a vibrant public realm. In addition, the participants highlighted how everyday sensory and social experiences - being among others, encountering familiar faces, and participating in shared routines - contribute to comfort, safety, belonging, and collective identity. Participants also stressed that public space should be an adaptive social environment

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to integrate social sustainability with the social value of public spaces - https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/kdemp89433

responsive to daily rhythms. Through an open and inclusive design, public spaces can answer the brief, while the atmosphere of the place, shaped by movement, visibility, openness, greenery, and activity, would influence how people experience, interpret, and value public space. These cognitive angles reinforced findings from the narrative review and underscored the interconnectedness of social cohesion, encounter, and learning. The case demonstrated how modest spatial interventions can create richer experiences that strengthen socially sustainable public space.

Social Cohesion: Public Space as a Field of Embodied Intimacy, Belonging, and Coexistence

Although public space is collective by definition, it is fundamentally experienced through the body (Alami Fariman, Lee, Hakiminejad, & Mehan, 2025). In this sense, cohesion may be understood in terms of what is *felt*: the sensory and affective dimensions of belonging, emotional attachment, and the everyday comfort of sharing space with others. The presence of others is mediated through proximity, movement, and caring. Everyday actions - walking, sitting, observing, waiting - generate subtle forms of interaction and experiences that shape how individuals relate to one another and within space.

This introduces a critical dimension: intimacy within public space. Intimacy is often associated with private environments, yet it emerges wherever bodies negotiate visibility and proximity. Public space becomes intimate when individuals feel able to exist among others without discomfort, when they can just be there, observe, or participate without being excluded or overexposed (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008; Hahn, 2024).

As Patnaik (2019) suggests, public space becomes meaningful when individuals, particularly those historically marginalised, claim visibility within shared environments (Patnaik, 2019). These acts of presence challenge spatial norms and reveal how public space is continuously produced through use. This resonates with Foucault's (1977) understanding of space as a field for the materialisation of power, where norms are imposed but also reinterpreted through alternative practices (Schumann, 1980). Intimacy is therefore not a fixed condition but a negotiation, shaped by spatial atmospheres. Royfee (2017) emphasises that public intimacy emerges through multisensory engagement between body and environment (Royfee, 2026). Elements such as material textures, soundscapes, lighting conditions, and microclimates influence how individuals position themselves in space and relate to others.

Pallasmaa (2012) argues that architecture is experienced through the full spectrum of the senses, yet contemporary design often privileges visual form over embodied experience (Brislin & Pallasmaa, 2012). Spence (2020) further demonstrates that sensory environments directly influence emotional and physiological responses, affecting how long individuals remain in space and how they interact with others (Spence, 2020). These conditions operate through spatial affordances - invitations to act embedded within the environment (Rathod & Wagner, 2021). Benches, edges, thresholds, and open surfaces create opportunities for sitting, observing, gathering, or retreating. When these affordances align with human-scale design principles (Gehl, 2011), they encourage lingering and repeated co-presence. It is through this repetition that social cohesion begins to emerge. The success of public space is often measured through simple

indicators: people staying, interacting, and sharing space comfortably (Silverman, 1982). Repeated encounters generate familiarity, and familiarity fosters trust. Cohesion, therefore, is not imposed but gradually constructed through those processes of interactions.

Belonging extends these processes over time. It emerges when individuals perceive themselves as legitimate participants in a shared environment and develop emotional connections to a place. Haim-Litevsky, Komemi, and Lipskaya-Velikovsky (2023) show that belonging is closely linked to meaningful daily participation, while Cankurt Semiz and Özsoy (2024) highlight the role of memory in sustaining these relationships (Cankurt Semiz & Özsoy, 2024; Haim-Litevsky, Komemi, & Lipskaya-Velikovsky, 2023). Public spaces accumulate memories, becoming repositories of collective stories. As Corboz (1983) describes, urban landscapes function as palimpsests - layered surfaces shaped by successive uses, adaptations and re-interpretations. Braudel's (2017) notion of the longue durée further emphasises the importance of temporal depth in shaping spatial attachment (Braudel, 2017; Corboz, 1983).

These temporal dimensions are particularly evident in environments shaped by environmental dynamics, such as water landscapes, in port cities. Russo (2016) and Krause (2017; 2022) show how these territories are structured by rhythms of water, in which space is not permanently fixed but continuously transformed by changes in water dynamics. In such contexts, belonging is both spatial and temporal, emerging through repeated encounters across changing conditions (F. Krause, 2017; Franz Krause, 2022; Russo, 2016).

In contemporary cities characterised by hyper-diversity (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013), public space becomes the arena where differences are also negotiated. Diversity today extends beyond socio-economic or cultural categories to include varied lifestyles, mobility patterns, and spatial practices (Tasan-Kok, Kempen, Raco, & Bolt, 2013). Cohesion, therefore, cannot rely on homogeneity; it must accommodate multiplicity.

Aparici and Harteveld (2025) argue that this requires engaging with everyday and tacit knowledge, recognising that users actively shape space through practice (Aparici & Harteveld, 2025). Public space becomes a negotiated commons, where identities are expressed, and differences are held in productive tension.

Social Encounter: Public Space as a Space of Possibilities

Encounter lies at the heart of public space. The presence of others, experiences of co-presence, and the recognition of difference make collective life perceptible and open to negotiation. In this dimension, what is *seen* serves as a metonym for the social visibility of urban life. Encounter is a spatially and socially produced condition that emerges through the interaction of design, behaviour, and environment. Public space functions as the fundamental layer of urban life. As Aelbrecht and Stevens (2023) emphasise, public space operates as social infrastructure, enabling interaction across differences while maintaining openness to unpredictability (Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2018, 2023).

Moments of crisis reveal the essential nature of this role. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, public spaces became extensions of domestic life, supporting social interaction despite restrictions. Streets and parks functioned as "urban living rooms," demonstrating that encounter is fundamental to collective well-being (Askarizad & J. He, 2022; Harteveld, 2020).

Yet most encounters are not intentional. They occur through routines, rituals and weak ties. Ferreira, Ferreira, and Bos (2021) describe how repeated co-presence in spaces such as cafés creates familiarity without requiring direct engagement (Ferreira et al., 2021). These weak ties are essential for social cohesion, as they foster recognition across differences.

Spatial conditions strongly influence these dynamics. Visibility, porosity, and permeability encourage people to remain in space, increasing the likelihood of encounter. When individuals feel comfortable lingering, they become part of a shared environment of observation and interaction. Play and improvisation further activate these spaces. As Isik, Reicher, and Sezer (2023) note, public space is continuously reshaped through activities such as playing, performing, or gathering that transform space into playgrounds, revealing their openness to reinterpretation by their users (Isik, Reicher, & Sezer, 2023).

Hybrid spaces - where multiple functions coexist - enhance this condition (Abdullah Ali, 2018). By overlapping uses and temporalities, they attract diverse groups and increase the probability of interaction. Conversely, overly regulated environments restrict spontaneity and limit encounters. Ambiguity is equally important. Open-ended spatial configurations allow multiple interpretations and uses, encouraging collective negotiation (Gaver, Beaver, & Benford, 2003). Historical urban forms such as porticoes and courtyards exemplify this condition while contemporary interventions reintroduce similar principles.

The concept of porosity further expands this understanding. Several authors have used the concept in urban studies to refer to the permeability of urban systems, allowing flows of people, activities, and ecological processes to pass through and interact (Hein, 2021; Stevens, Daly, & Dovey, 2024; Viganò & Secchi, 2009; Viganò, 2018). Porous environments generate thresholds where different worlds intersect, fostering encounter and exchange. More than a spatial condition, porosity also speaks to ways of living - a certain theatricality of urban life - where individuals move through, occupy, and reinterpret unexpected cavities within the layered palimpsest of the city.

In the context of climate change and multi-risk, encounter is also shaped by environmental conditions (Libera Amenta & De Martino, 2026; Belland, Kausan, Kooy, & Zwarteveen, 2025; De Martino, Ferraioli, Maragno, & Musco, 2026; Maragno, 2025). Climate-responsive public spaces - incorporating shade, water, and vegetation - support both ecological resilience and social interaction (Forczek-Brataniec & Jamioł, 2024; Krebs, Boutin, & Boonstra, 2025). These spaces demonstrate that encounter is not only social but also environmentally mediated.

Social Learning: Public Space as Living Laboratory

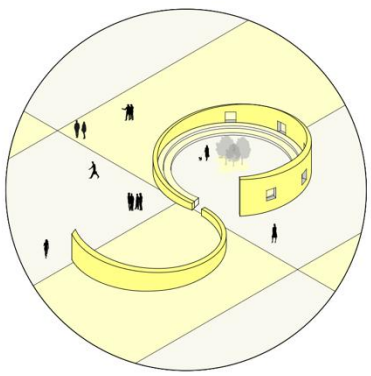
Beyond encounter, public space functions as a distributed learning environment in which knowledge is produced through collective learning. *Lived* captures the practical and experiential dimension of collective life: the ways people participate in, interpret, and adapt to shared conditions in their everyday activities. Learning in this context is not formal or institutional but emerges through observation, participation, and shared experience.

Urban learning begins at the scale of spatial interfaces. Edges, thresholds, and ground-floor conditions shape how individuals engage with their environment. Active and

permeable edges encourage interaction, while inactive boundaries limit engagement (L. Amenta & De Martino, 2018; Libera Amenta & De Martino, 2026; Libera Amenta & Van Timmeren, 2018; Castigliano, De Martino, Amenta, & Russo, 2020; De Martino, 2022; Gehl, 1986). Through these interfaces, individuals observe urban life and develop an understanding of social norms and practices. Proximity-based planning reinforces these dynamics (Guzman, Oviedo, & Cantillo-Garcia, 2024). By organising daily activities within walkable distances, cities foster repeated encounters and localised knowledge (Alberti & Radicchi, 2022). Public space becomes an urban classroom, embedded in people's routines.

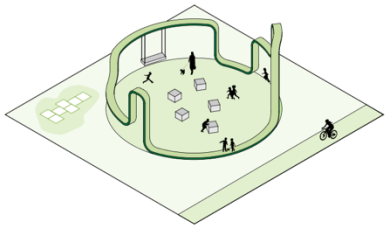
Learning also occurs through experimentation and cultural expression. Public art, performances, and participatory interventions transform public space into a platform for reflection and dialogue (Balug, 2019; Lee, 2021). Museums and cultural institutions increasingly extend into the urban realm, functioning as open environments for collective interpretation (Redaelli, Hansen, & Djupdræt, 2025). Observation plays a critical role in this process. Public space acts as a social laboratory, where patterns of inclusion and exclusion become visible (Gouvea & Mont'Alvão, 2013). Gendered behaviours, for example, reveal differences in safety and access, highlighting the need for inclusive design (Valera & Casakin, 2022).

Technological developments further expand the scope of learning. Digital platforms and augmented environments create hybrid spaces where physical and virtual interactions intersect (Abella, Fruttero, Tas, & Taj, 2020; Yacoub & Alkinani, 2024; Đurić, Righetti, Zoppolat, Saura, & Schneider, 2025). These environments enable new forms of engagement but also introduce challenges related to equity and access (Rösner, Winter, & Krämer, 2016). Through these processes, public space becomes a civic ecology - a system through which knowledge circulates, communities evolve, and societies learn to navigate complex challenges together.



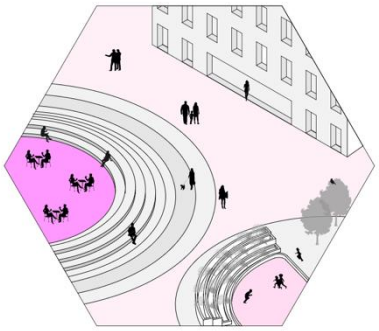
BELONGING

Belonging is emotional: it's about who feels welcome, who feels seen, and who senses that a place speaks to them. Public space becomes meaningful when it invites people in—when it allows presence, recognition, and shared ownership. Public space is both a "learning and living lab", where values are negotiated through everyday life. Designing for belonging means creating conditions for encounters, embracing ambiguity and plurality. It also means protecting what matters, community identities, fragile ecosystems, and cultural practices, so that places remain home rather than becoming sites of displacement or gentrification. Belonging is also tied to power. Social, cultural, economic, and institutional forces shape who controls space, whose voices count, and who feels allowed to participate. These dynamics determine how resources are distributed and whether public space strengthens or weakens social cohesion. Design for belonging means listening to people, their emotions, memories, and ways of living.



PLAYING-HAPPENING

Understanding the city as a playground—or through the activity of play grounding—can invite new ways interventions that acknowledge the uneven and multisensorial ways we inhabit the world." Playing in public spaces is not only for children; it is a form of happening together. It is about recreation, delight, and spontaneity that emerge alongside the city's functions. Design interventions become invitations: invitations to notice textures, sounds, smells, and rhythms; invitations to stumble into encounters with others; invitations to play collectively. A space for the homo ludens supports social learning by providing a shared space where children, people of all ages, develop communication, cooperation, and conflict-resolution skills through play and interaction.



BORDERS - EDGES

Social learning deals with designing the boundaries where different types of spaces, activities, and social groups meet, interact, or conflict. Edges often serve as transitional zones between different functional areas. The edge can be a place of tension but also a social arena, where different groups collaborate and share experiences. To foster social learning through everyday interaction, designers can create soft borders, or transitions that encourage social encounters while maintaining a level of comfort or safety. These soft borders could be designed in different ways: Spacing and buffers introduce zones between uses, like planting strips between a playground and café seating. Overlaps for dynamic use create flexible areas for multiple groups at different times, such as plazas that host markets, seating, or performances throughout the day. Zones for neutral behaviour are transitional spaces—spillover areas in front of shops, stoops, widened sidewalks, or front yards—that invite informal encounters without privileging any group.

Figure 1. From the catalogue of principles, Belonging, Playing-Happening, and Borders-Edges were selected as illustrative examples, because they exemplify the framework's three core dimensions and also different social mechanisms and design foci: Belonging fosters social cohesion through mechanisms of recognition, inclusion, and ownership, which translates into a design focus on meaning, representation, and stewardship. Playing-Happening promotes social encounter through participation, spontaneity, and enjoyment, challenging design foci on invitations, affordances, and multisensory engagement. Lastly, Borders-Edges support social learning through negotiation, exchange, and adaptation, whereas in design interfaces, thresholds, overlaps, buffers, and alike should matter.

Experiencing Design as a Next Step

The resulting catalogue presents a flexible design support framework that can be adapted to different socio-political, cultural, and environmental contexts. The principles are therefore not isolated design solutions, but as relational strategies that require contextual interpretation. Particular attention was given to tensions and trade-offs between dimensions. For instance, spaces that foster social cohesion through familiarity

and belonging may simultaneously risk reducing openness to diversity and encounters. Similarly, highly programmed spaces designed for learning and participation may unintentionally limit spontaneity or informal appropriation. Recognising these tensions is essential to understanding social sustainability not as a fixed condition, but as a continuous process of negotiation between competing spatial, social, and environmental dynamics.[2]

Still, the interconnection of the three dimensions discussed is not merely where the city happens - it is where life is *seen, felt, and lived*. It might be the gentle hum of conversation drifting across a sunlit square, the thrill of a spontaneous moment of connection along a winding path, and the quiet comfort of knowing you share a place with others. Such an atmospheric vignette, serving as an evocative description of an imaginative experience, weaves invisible threads of connection that nurture cohesion, spark encounters, and open minds to learning through living together. Hence, to design for this is above all to design for *experience*: to create places that invite people to linger, to stumble upon each other, to feel curiosity and care in equal measure. It's about creating nooks that cradle intimate conversations, wide avenues that host collective energy, and moments of surprise that awaken empathy. Here, differences are not barriers but invitations to understanding, and every gesture - sharing a bench, pausing at a fountain, watching life unfold - is a building block of social life.

In a world frayed by isolation and uncertainty, public spaces are rare sanctuaries where collective life can be experienced. Their power lies in their ability to make shared feeling tangible: to let people sense that they belong, that their presence matters, and that together, they shape the rhythms and stories of the city. The next steps are straightforward: to test the catalogue across a wide range of design contexts and to validate its principles against users' in-situ experiences. By designing for cohesion, encounter, and learning, we can transform urban spaces into living, breathing canvases - cocreated places where relationships spark, differences dance, and the future is imagined together

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