Vancouver’s Public Realm – Sustaining Livability

Course Overview

The City of Vancouver is known to be a livable and sustainable city, which aims to be the world’s Greenest City by 2020. An important and significant aspect of the city’s livability is the intentionally developed public realm - parks, greenways, waterfronts, streets and squares. The public realm provides places for people to gather, socialize and recreate, encourages active transportation, maintains spaces for the urban forest and vegetation to thrive and contributes other environmental services to the city. In this course students will learn how a well-planned and designed public realm supports livable neighbourhoods and provides important social and environmental services to the city. Students will gain insight into both the theoretical and practical considerations that have led to the creation and transformation of many remarkable public spaces. They will also learn how to document and assess public spaces in the city and will visit some of the City’s best examples including False Creek North/Yaletown, Southeast False Creek/Olympic Village and Robson Square.

Learning Objectives

- Learn how Vancouver’s context, geography and planning policies have shaped the layout and making of the city and its public spaces in a unique way
- Understand the core concepts of neighbourhood and public space planning
- Understand how the concepts of active transportation, transit oriented development, and multi-modalism help create vibrant, livable, sustainable communities
- Learn how to conduct site analysis and assess the qualities of a successful public space using a series of urban design methodologies
- Understand how a well-planned and designed public realm increases livability and provides important social and environmental services to a city

Teaching Methodologies and Learning Techniques

Each of the study areas will be explored through lectures from the faculty instructor and invited experts, in-class discussions and engagement exercises, and a series of walking study tours through Vancouver’s significant neighbourhoods and public spaces. Guest speakers, such as landscape architects, urban designers and planners who are/were involved in the shaping of Vancouver’s public space, will join our group at certain points on location.

Students will complete one analysis assignment and participate in a mini design charrette for the public open space spatially defined by the Frederic Lasserre Building, Frederic Wood Theatre and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. The analysis will be multi-layered and focus on the plaza and its context. The mini design charrette will be conducted in groups and will serve to elaborate design ideas and future scenarios for the improvement of “Lasserre Plaza” using various media, applying course content and student’s insights and findings from the first assignment.

Evaluation

10% Class Participation
20% Course Journal & Photographic Observations
25% Analysis Assignment
30% Mini Design Charrette

Course Website

http://vsp.sala.ubc.ca/vancouvers-public-realm.html
Topics and Subtopics

Class 1  June 19 - Introduction to Vancouver’s Public Realm

- Course Overview and Introductions
- Lecture (Isabel Kunigk) | Vancouver’s Public Realm: characteristics, challenges & opportunities
- Think – Pair – Share – Exercise
- Lecture (Isabel Kunigk) | Robson Square Complex: Urban Design, Architecture and Public Space
- **Walking Tour:** Robson Square Complex and Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza
  Guest Speaker for Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza: Joseph Fry, Landscape Architect, Hapa Collaborative

Reference:
Greenest City 2020 Action Plan
Block 51: The 800-block of Robson Street and Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza projects
*Arthur Erickson: Provincial Law Courts*
Clip: Cornelia Hahn Oberlander describes Robson Square

Class 2  June 20 - From Industrial Land to High Density Living: False Creek North and Yaletown Edge

- Overview of False Creek North/East History and Planning
- Lecture (Isabel Kunigk) | What Makes A Great Public Space? Gehl: 12 quality criteria; Jacobs: Great Streets,
- **Social Distance** Exercise with mobile furniture at Student Union Building/East Mall
- **Walking Tour:** From Creekside and Andy Livingstone playgrounds via Roundhouse Plaza to David Lam Park. Guest Speaker: Debra Barnes, Landscape Architect with Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

Reference:
Gehl, Jan. *The 12 quality criteria*
*Concord Pacific Place*
False Creek North Backgrounder
False Creek North study in “Price Tags” Issue 104, June 30, 2008 (p.1-15)
*Roundhouse Neighbourhood*
“Mirage Metropolis: Vancouver’s Suburban Urbanism” Roehr D., Soules M. and Burger D., Topos Nr.58, 2007

Class 3  June 22 - High Density Living with Green Infrastructure: Southeast False Creek and Olympic Village

- Overview of SEFC/Olympic Village Planning History
- Lecture: Jillian Glover, Urbanist, Blog: *This City Life* | Livability, Inner City Density tbc
- Lecture: Isabel Kunigk | Green Neighbourhoods and Intentionally Designed Public Spaces
- **Walking Tour:** Southeast False Creek Neighbourhood and Waterfront
  Guest Speaker: Derek Lee, Landscape Architect, *PWL Partnership*

Class 4  
June 26 – Designing Community around Landscape: Wesbrook Place Neighbourhood UBC
- Introduction to UBC’s Wesbrook Village Neighbourhood/Plaza Design Principles & Guidelines
- Now – How - Wow – Exercise
- Lecture: TA Patrick Beech | Introduction to Urban Site Analysis & Assignment 1, Group formation


Reference:
- Wesbrook Village video featuring Kim Perry
- Wesbrook Parks & Recreation map
- Wesbrook Place Neighbourhood Plan, UBC (Amended April 2016)
- City of Vancouver Plaza Design Guidelines, 1992
- Hapa VAG North Plaza Site Analysis

Class 5  
- Group Assignment 1: Site Analysis for Lasserre Plaza
- Lecture (Isabel Kunigk) | Introduction to Transit Oriented Development and place making

Walking Tour: Marine Gateway at SW Marine Drive/Canada Line

Reference:
- Perkins+Will: Marine Gateway: A New Era of Transit-Oriented Development - Vimeo
- “Why Translink is a Leader in Transit-Oriented Development”, BC Business article
- Sean Ruthen “New TOD in Town”, Canadian Architect, March 9, 2017 article
- Transit Oriented Development 10 Principles, TOD Institute

Class 6  
June 28 – Mini Design Charrette | Lasserre Plaza
- Lecture (Isabel Kunigk) | What is a Design Charrette?
- Introduction of assignment & agenda for the day
- Production & Presentation (see agenda)
- Course wrap up

Reference:
- What’s a Charrette? Summary from charretteinstitute.org
- Mini Charrette Agenda
- SALA movie on Design Charrettes
Assignments

COURSE JOURNAL

This course includes site tours of significant and representative public spaces around the Vancouver Lower Mainland. Students are expected to keep a journal of site observations, sketches and notes throughout the course. Each day students are required to complete a 1-2 paragraph summary of their observations and experience during the day. Some questions to consider in preparing daily summary journal entries:

- Reflect on sense of place, experience and human use
- What was unexpected or particularly intriguing about the site I visited today?
- Why is this public space meaningful for the city?
- How does this urban space compare to others visited during this course, or others I am familiar with?
- What have I learned from this experience?
- What could be better improved to the site visited today? What was missing?

PHOTOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

In addition to the journal, students are also expected to keep photographic observations on the various forms and uses of the public realm encountered in the course. Each day students are required to upload one photo into a shared Google Photos album: “VSP 2017 – Vancouver’s Public Realm.” The app may be used on phones or personal computers. To access the album, use the link https://goo.gl/photos/DJX6KdGtULRwY9W9. In the description of your images please leave your name and the concept(s) your image illustrates. Uploaded images should relate to course content, with a focus on the following themes:

- People + play
- People + movement
- People + plants
- People + seating

ASSIGNMENT 1 Site Analysis (Context, Inventory, Everyday Uses, Potential Program, Adjacent Uses)

Part 1 – Inventory and Analysis (on site and in class)

Working in groups of 3-4, the students will analyze Lassere Plaza’s strengths and weaknesses as a space for people in support of the programs in the adjacent buildings. Each group will be responsible for exploring a topic from the list below. Using methods and information learnt from the lecture, online resources, and maps, students will develop their site analysis. Depending on the theme, this could be an overlay on the provided aerial site photo and/or photographs of the site, movies, soundscapes, materials found on site, text and so on. Drawings could include notes, plans, sections, elevations, perspectives, diagrams and collages.

- Greater Context (Group 1)
  How does this site relate to the wider Campus context?
  How does it relate to other spaces and public hubs in the area? Looking at the characteristic (physical + functional) of the context and the surrounding campus areas, what is the importance of this site?
  What other elements of the larger context influence this site, and how so?

- Human Engagement (Group 2)
  How do people experience the site? How does an individual versus a group of people use the site? What time of day is the site used most or least? What time of year is the site used most or least? What type of people are using the site? (What age, interests, etc?) Is there a part of the site used
more than other parts of the site? Where are resting places versus thoroughfares?

• Natural Site Conditions (Group 3)
  What natural conditions impact this site such as sun, shade, wind, sounds, or smell? What types of natural vegetation or other natural elements can be observed within and around the site? How does water move through the site? (Consider rain fall, rainwater runoff, drainage). Is there any topography to the site? How do the natural site conditions work together to affect the site?

• Edge Condition & Views (Group 4)
  What happens at the edge of the site? What is the importance of views on the site? How do the various edges of the site different? How do these changing views affect the quality of the space? How do these changing edges affect the use of the space? What impact do the adjacent buildings and their uses have on the site?

• Access / Circulation (Group 5)
  How do people move through the site? How many people move through the site? Is it a short cut for some routes? Consider pedestrians, bicycles, wheelchairs, delivery vehicles. Upon arriving at the site, how does one know they have ‘arrived’? How do you arrive here from father away using bus & car.

Part 2 - Presentation and Discussion (in class – after completion of the assignment)
Working in the same groups from Part 1 & 2, students will refine their findings and present their conclusions to the class in the form of a graphic, digital PDF slideshow. Each group will have 10 minutes to present, followed up a 2-minute group discussion.

ASSIGNMENT 2 Design Charrette for “Lasserre Plaza” (public open space to north of Lasserre building, spatially defined by the edges of the Frederic Lasserre Building, Frederic Wood Theatre and Belkin Art Gallery)

Students will be introduced to the design charrette as a particularly efficient planning tool for collaboration, co-creation and immediate feedback to designers. The significance of public engagement and working with larger stakeholder groups will be outlined within the framework of planning practices used in Canada/North America. Working in 5 new groups of 3-4, students will be given base plans, tracing paper, pens and other materials to develop ideas and concepts that could improve “Lasserre Plaza”.

Students will go through an abbreviated charrette process that includes a review of the analysis and outcomes, and exercises around the productions of:

• vision
• design principles
• design directions & “Big Moves”
• preliminary concept designs