

Spring 2006
MIT School of Architecture and Planning

11.001J/4.250J: Introduction to Urban Design and Development

Susan Silberberg

Final Paper

Issued: April 13 Topic and Outline Due: April 27 Final Due: May 11 in class
There will be no late papers accepted for this assignment!!

Urban Form and Urban Use

All streets are not created equal. Likewise, city squares, parks, shopping malls, plazas, and other urban environments may take on a wide variety of different forms. These formal configurations may, in turn, afford possibilities for a wide variety of different uses for very different people. For this exercise, you are asked to visit, observe, analyze, and compare a pair of urban environments. You are asked to pick one of the four pairs listed below and to explore the relationship between the urban form and the urban use.

Choose one of the following and answer the questions that follow:

- 1. Residential Streets:**
Beacon Street (Back Bay) vs. Marlborough Street (Back Bay)
- 2. Public Squares:**
Christian Science Center Plaza vs. Copley Square
- 3. Shopping Malls:**
Cambridgeside Galleria vs. Prudential Center Mall
- 4. Public Parks:**
Boston Common vs. Boston Public Garden

Questions:

- a. What are their similarities and differences as urban environments? Please don't limit yourself to the interiors of buildings, especially if you choose to compare Shopping Malls.
- b. What urban design values and principles are inherent in what you see?
- c. How do urban design and form affect the way people use these places? Does the design of these places seem to encourage (or discourage) certain kinds of activities?
- d. What "non-design" factors seem to influence the use of these places?
- e. Which of the two environments, given your answers, do you like better, and why? Be clear about the criteria you are using to assess 'goodness' or 'badness.'

Requirements:

- You may, if you wish, team up with one other person for this assignment – or you may proceed on your own.
- Your response should directly address the questions being posed and should be between five to seven double-spaced typed pages. Graphic material is a very helpful tool to document and convey some of the details of your analysis; visual documentation of your environments **MUST** be included in the form of photographs and/or sketches or maps. These visual materials **DO NOT** count toward the page limit, unless they happen to be very heavily annotated.
- Grammar, spelling, and elegance of expression will count toward the grade of this paper. It is not simply a question of having good ideas; how you write *matters*. Carelessness in spelling, syntax, and word choice all weaken your argument!

Secrets to Success:

- Look back at the assigned readings, especially the excerpts from Grady Clay, Allan Jacobs and William Whyte; identify other selections from the reader that might be relevant to your particular pair of places.
- Carefully record what you see when you visit these environments. Cameras are useful, but do not use them as a crutch: look carefully. Use simple diagramming to help understand the basic spatial relationships of either place. Talk to people and watch what they are doing, or not doing. Keep in mind how the timing and circumstances (weather, day of week, special events) of your visit may affect what you see.
- Visit your environments at least twice if you can. Make these visits at different times (a weekday and weekend, early morning and evening, different weather, etc.)
- Don't rely entirely on your own observation – investigate the history of design and development in each place to help identify key changes. If you need help, ask one of us.
- □
- Some thoughts on paper structure and writing techniques:
 - Ensure that you address all the questions posed in this assignment
 - Write an outline and be specific about the types of logical transitions that will link one section to another. Include word or page counts for each *section*, not for the paper as a whole.
 - Be sure to have an introduction and conclusion. Your paper should have a logical sequence and a clear structure of argumentation. If you are having trouble with this, use subheadings to help the reader understand where you are going.
 - Please cite all sources, including web sources
 - Label all maps, illustrations and sketches with “Fig. 1”, “Fig. 2”, etc.
 - Avoid wordy sentences and imprecise statements i.e. “many, various factors.” Be precise in your descriptions.
 - Edit your work *on paper*, not on the screen, reading it aloud if you can. Are you repeating yourself? Is there a way to say what you have said using fewer words? Are you using jargon? Again: strive always for clarity and *economy* of expression. A clearly argued one-page paper is better than a muddled one of ten pages.
 - Think carefully about how to integrate visual material into your paper so that it helps carry your argument forward. Generally, graphics integrated into the text itself are far more effective than those appended at the end.