A New Perspective on the Design of Pedestrian Bridges, Inspired by Baudelaire's Flaneur

Ksenia Nikolaeva (Queensland University of Technology), Mirko Guaralda (Queensland University of Technology), Marcus Foth (Queensland University of Technology), Markus Rittenbruch (Queensland University of Technology)

Introduction

Walkability is today more than ever a relevant topic within the urban discourse. Public spaces are more relevant than ever because of the current COVID-19 pandemic; pedestrian zones can play a leading role in the spatial organization of our cities, in order to make them more sustainable, inclusive and resilient. In addition to classical methods of segregation walkers from transports and vehicular traffic (e.g., sidewalks, public places, squares, parks), cities have explored also underground ways and pedestrian bridges.

Bridges these days are much more than just engineered constructs to cross over obstacles; bridges today facilitate active placemaking and they are often destinations in their own right for recreation, leisure, events, retail and commerce, and socialising. Bridges also structure our cities on multiple layers connecting buildings, public space, communities, and the built environment. However, despite the variety of bridges nowadays, the approach to their design is often still based on the direct purpose as a connector, focusing on the location, structure, and aesthetic features rather than the human experiences they can afford.

As a result, there is a lack of understanding of how bridges can be used regardless of programmed scenarios or design elements. This knowledge gap is further corroborated by a lack of understanding of the human experience bridges enable, which has not been sufficiently analysed yet. It is this interaction that allows the development of new practices and innovative approaches for the design of bridges.

Strolling in Pandemic Cities

The tendency towards pedestrian-oriented cities and a compact city development (UN-Habitat, n.d.) require a reflection on new models of a bridge. Along with the primary purpose of pedestrian bridges for a fast, safe, and comfortable connection between spaces, many designers also promote such structures as public places. The result is the emergence of a new bridge concept – boulevard bridges.

One of the most frequently mentioned examples of Boulevard Bridge is the High Line Park in New York. This bridge has a linear park, with trees and leisure facilities. These refinements in the concept of bridges clearly emphasize them as not just infrastructure but also offer to consider them for everyday social interaction (Russell, 2012). The typical configuration of bridges, an elongated shape, reveals their

potential as a new type of public spaces for a purposeless walking and privileged position for the Flâneur to experience the city.

The Flâneur is a nineteenth-century figure, first described in poetry by French poet Charles Baudelaire as an observer of the city and city life (Benjamin, 1999). His experience is based on perception and understanding of a city. The Flâneur understands the surrounding by non-verbal communication with an object or other people. Observation allows him to form the image of the object. Strolling, the Flâneur is opposed to the crowd. Moreover, the Flâneur is the opposite figure to capitalism (Buck- Morss, 1989). He does not walk to spend money, which is a complementary aspect of our time. Baudelaire's Flâneur walks to contemplate, wonder, and do not rush from one place to another.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of non-verbalised interaction and walking alone has become the main activity of big megapolises. During the pandemic, limited access to commercial establishments has increased the number of public spaces visitors despite limitation for walking and accessing open spaces. Unlike previous scenarios for developing public spaces concentrated in the city centre, the question arises of how to distribute public spaces in each corner of the city and create a continuous network of public spaces to provide access for citizens.

A pedestrian bridge is an excellent tool for creating such connections between public spaces. The pandemic also gave birth to a trend for hybrid formats of public spaces. After being in self-isolation, people have realised how critical are the infrastructures that are in close proximity to their homes. This is especially relevant for large megapolises, where the trend for remote work will continue to develop in the future.
People have realised how important public spaces are, so the demand for public spaces will increase. In the conditions of a modern city, representatives of different cultural worlds come into contact with each other: these are representatives of various subcultures as well as creators and consumers of cultural forms. Along with the other elements of urban structures, bridges built for people. However, pedestrian bridges designed for pedestrians. The role of a bridge designer is to design a bridge that satisfies walkers needs for pleasant activities on bridges.

Conclusion

So, how do we design a pedestrian bridge for a pleasant human experience? To answer this question, we focus on human interaction with and on bridges, we investigated how people use bridges and bridge elements by analysing visual data from social media. This set of data allows us to understand different groups of individuals, their needs, values, and abilities to use bridge elements differently. We unfold the potential of pedestrian bridges as a new form of open public spaces that will be a part of the pedestrian network for both targeted and purposeless movements.

The article aims to create a fundamentally new design framework that will pioneer the experiential design of bridges and unfold their unique opportunities as a place for urban experiences and social interactions.

References

Benjamin Walter Tiedemann, R(1999). *The Arcades Project.* Mass: Belknap Press

Buck-Morss, S (1989). *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Ben-jamin and the Arcades Project.* Mass: MIT Press

Russell, S (2012). *The high line: new directions In public space*.UN- Habitat. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (n.d.). url:https://unhabitat.org/