

Quality

in Canada's Built Environment:

Roadmaps to Equity, Social Value and Sustainability

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Research Report on the Online Convention

Session #1 - November 7, 2023

Minimum Quality Thresholds

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Conseil de recherches en
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Research Council of Canada

Canada



2023 Online Convention, Session #1 - Minimum Quality Thresholds

Tuesday, November 7, 2023 - from 12:00 to 1:30 PM

Edited by:

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Session agenda:

- *Introduction: 10 mins*
- *Breakout sessions: 30 mins*
- *Student's summary: 4* 5 mins*
- *Plenary: 30 mins*

Keywords:

Affordable and Sustainable Housing, Aesthetics, Beauty, Biodiversity, Community Participatory Design, Cost, Cradle to Cradle, Democratic Design, Energy Efficiency, Good Fit, Habitability, Inclusivity, Integrated Resilience, Integrating Resilience Practices, Livability, Minimum Threshold of Quality, Multiple Forms of Consultation, Open-Ended Spaces, Open-Format Participation, Post-Occupancy Assessments, Quality Watchdogs, Redundancy, Safe-to-Fail Approaches, Spirit of Place, Tactical Urbanism

Note:

This report explores the definition of the minimum quality threshold by examining inclusive design, spatial justice, integrated resilience, and process and policy in four breakout rooms and a subsequent plenary session. The discussions and comments have been collected. Additionally, the reporter synthesizes and summarizes the ideas, drawing conclusions and suggesting future discussions.

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1. Synthesis and Summary

After brainstorming and discussing the minimum threshold of quality, several key ideas emerged. Three fundamental concepts have been identified as essential topics for discussion when it comes to determining the minimum threshold of quality. Livability, Inclusivity, and Integrated Resilience. While these concepts are interconnected with significant intersections and commonalities, each plays a distinct role in ensuring the minimum quality threshold. Firstly, the notion of livability emerged during discussions about aesthetics and beauty in architecture. The emphasis was placed on translating the minimum quality threshold into livability, implying that a place becomes "habitable" when it meets minimum quality threshold. a question can be raised: Does a place need to be beautiful to be "habitable"? It was discussed that while beauty itself is not obligatory to meet the minimum threshold, enhancing aesthetics contributes to the empowerment of livability and the overall quality of the built environment. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted that quality is an advanced democratic concept. To reach the minimum quality threshold, the concept of "Quality Watchdogs" was proposed. These overseers could suggest, encourage, and advise on the necessary quality standards to achieve livability.

The second significant theme concerning the minimum threshold of quality was inclusivity. While acknowledging inclusivity as a crucial aspect, it was recognized that designers might encounter challenges in integrating it into their projects. Inclusivity extends beyond physical accessibility to the built environment; it demands a holistic approach that considers both small and large-scale aspects, as well as qualitative and quantitative components. The discussion delved into the challenges associated with achieving inclusivity and offered practical suggestions for its incorporation into design practices and policymaking.

The third essential concept discussed was integrated resilience and the importance of biodiversity. This concept is indispensable for achieving the minimum quality in the built environment and for preserving nature. Attaining these qualities in the built environment requires a consideration of local needs and an appreciation for specific local requirements in the design process. A more detailed summary of the discussion around these three overarching concepts is provided below.

1.1. Is "Livability" an Accurate Reflection of the Minimum Threshold of Quality?

- **Rethinking beauty: "Livability" as a more appropriate concept for minimum quality.**

The discussion on this topic was ignited by the observation that public space design competitions, especially library designs, have transformed into a type of beauty contest. A pivotal question emerged, fueling the discussion: Is beauty an integral part of the minimum quality threshold? The conversation delved into the argument that "beauty" has phased out of the architect's vocabulary, making way for a more logical and appropriate term – "livability." The rationale behind this shift is that beauty often neglects crucial elements such as building maintenance and the lived experiences of people, relying primarily on flashy architectural renders. However, an opposing viewpoint raised, asserting that while beauty might not be a prominent term in architecture, it still holds relevance in arts and philosophy. Beauty, according to this perspective, extends beyond external aesthetics to encompass internal aspects. Drawing from Alberti's concept of a "good fit," beauty, in this sense, does not strictly adhere to classical

aesthetics. The consensus lies in functionality – accessible spaces are deemed a good fit. These criteria are the primary considerations for labeling a place as livable; a place should be safe, accessible, and well-lit. Therefore, it is discussed that the concept of a "good fit" aligns closely with livability. It was also noted that while livability aims to fulfill the requirements of living in a place, it is inherently intertwined with aesthetics.

- **Unveiling the Role of Quality Watchdogs in Minimum Quality Threshold**

Following the discussion about the importance of livability in ensuring the minimum quality in places, a pivotal question raised: who would ensure that minimum quality is met and maintained in the designing-built environment? Acknowledging quality as an advanced democratic concept, the imperative is to ensure that all voices are heard. Are there representatives of public interest embedded in the design process, and if so, do they guarantee the integration of all public demands into the design?

Following the discussion some participants argued that there are no quality watchdogs that ensure the upholding of a minimum quality threshold in public space design. On the other hand, some participants believe that there are enough quality watchdogs for example the NCC and community groups that review urbanism and design, CCU in Montreal, and in Edmonton a Chief Architect defines the threshold of quality for projects. While these entities may not be flawless, assessing their roles helps identify the ideal quality watchdog characteristics.

Defining the role of quality watchdogs becomes a crucial turning point in the conversation, prompting questions about how to ensure these entities focus on the right criteria. It is emphasized that having the wrong criteria can exacerbate the situation. Quality watchdogs need guidance to concentrate on the essential aspects of minimum quality, underlining the significant role of education. Education not only raises awareness about the minimum quality threshold, referred to as "livability," but also teaches quality watchdogs to prioritize qualities crucial for public design, thus ensuring the right minimum quality threshold.

Education is not the sole matter raised in the discussion. Participants note that while some quality watchdogs exist during public design processes, they often lack sufficient authority and power to halt projects that fall below minimum quality standards. Their roles are limited to being suggestive, encouraging, or advising, rather than soliciting changes and making binding requests.

1.2. "Inclusivity" as a Minimum Quality Threshold

- **Characteristics of inclusive places**

The discussion started with an exploration of the key features defining inclusive places. Inclusive spaces are characterized as open-ended environments that encourage user engagement and transformation. Notable examples include inoperative architecture and tactical urbanism, both involving users taking initiative in shaping urban spaces traditionally managed by urbanists. The discourse emphasizes that designing inclusive spaces should not solely address specific needs but should equally attend to diverse requirements, culminating in the concept of a holistic approach to inclusivity. This entails considerations ranging from physical accessibility enhancements, like large fonts for improved wayfinding, to broader non-physical aspects such as flexible operating hours accommodating diverse working conditions.

Furthermore, the correlation between inclusivity and welcoming environments is discussed. The criteria for inclusivity are intricately linked to a welcoming place, necessitating accessibility, green spaces, ample parking, and transportation access. Architectural elements, such as curved forms, are identified as contributors to a welcoming and, consequently, inclusive place. The discussion underscores the shared characteristics and intersections between what constitutes a welcoming versus an inclusive place.

- **Practical Approaches and Challenges in Achieving Inclusivity**

Following the definition of inclusivity, the conversation transitions to practical approaches, potential forums for implementation, and the associated challenges. Key ideas include:

- **Multiple Forms of Consultation:** Both online and in-person platforms are proposed for diverse input. However, challenges related to online accessibility, language barriers, and necessary equipment are acknowledged. Various formats, including student and architecture competitions, participatory design, open-format participation, walking tours, and media, are suggested as suitable consultation methods.
- **Challenges in Implementation:** Overcoming challenges involves using simple language, avoiding jargon, incorporating multiple languages, and ensuring inclusion of sign language. Flexible time preferences are considered and recognizing diverse work schedules.
- **Structure of Inclusive Practices:** Horizontal structures, marked by transparency, fairness, and empathy, are advocated over top-down approaches. Examples include consultative processes by local authorities and collaboration across government levels.
- **Inclusive Approaches and Cost:** The discourse acknowledges that wealthier individuals often have more influence, leading to potential biases. While ensuring inclusivity may involve additional costs, professionals in the built environment are urged to recognize the intrinsic value of inclusivity in meeting the minimum quality threshold.

1.3. Integrated Resilience as Minimum Quality Threshold:

Following discussions on livability and inclusivity, the third pivotal concept for the minimum quality threshold is "Integrated Resilience." This concept underscores the significant role of biodiversity in fostering resilience within built environments. The discourse highlighted the need to recognize the intricate interplay between nature and the built environment. The integration of both resiliency and redundancy into built projects emerged as a crucial strategy to mitigate the risk of system-wide failure caused by the malfunction of a specialized component.

The participants emphasized that resiliency and redundancy are not just desirable but essential qualities that should be integral to any built environment project. In exploring concrete examples, participants brainstormed strategies such as expanding and diversifying tree cover, incorporating native plants, and implementing innovative integrated systems to recharge groundwater. These measures contribute to enhancing the ecological functionality of waterways.

Furthermore, the discussions showed that there is a lack of appreciation for diverse requirements in Canada. This emphasizes the necessity for context-based design solutions to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented in different regions across the country.

2. Introduction of Session

The session started by requesting participants to reflect on questions, not representing their research sites but themselves. The importance of the multiplicity of voices was highlighted. Participants were also encouraged to consider the pertinence of the questions and share their experiences and cases.

On the question of the minimum quality thresholds, the moderators presented two projects: The Bentway Conservancy in Toronto and "On Generosity" by Francis Kere in Burkina Faso. In the first example, the moderator mentioned that this case study is a brilliant case of radical design thinking, addressing issues in a cost-effective manner and transforming the site with public life. The presenter also highlighted that this project demonstrated how a radical rethinking could bring joy to a free public realm while addressing crumbling infrastructure. The second case presented by the moderators was "On Generosity" by Francis Kere in Burkina Faso. They highlighted that this project emphasizes community-based design and explained that the designer's thesis focused on addressing the question of modesty. They clarified that to fundraise for the Gando school in Burkina Faso, people in Germany sacrificed a second cup of coffee daily for this community-driven project. It underscores the importance of inclusive design, sustainability, and community building.

3. Breakout Room Discussions

3.1. Group 1_ Minimum Quality Thresholds _Inclusive Design

Moderator: Jean-Pierre Chupin (Université de Montréal).

Student summarizer: Twylla Soosay (Athabasca University)

Jamboard link: (accessed on December 12, 2023)

https://jamboard.google.com/d/1TdxOLcKfGG_vxECQ7u9aHgkhDIGsuNhrvxvKONMs4/edit?usp=sharing

3.1.1. Discussion questions

This breakout room focus on the following questions ‘How can inclusive design ensure the creation of welcoming places with minimum quality thresholds?’

- ‘Spirit of Place’ rooted in the Land/Soil/Climate and Community is actual
- Indigenous groups often refer to this web of relations as ‘KIN-NECTIONS’
- What are some examples of Inclusive Design?
- What are the qualities of these places?

3.1.2. Discussion

- The first question raised concerns why inclusive design and spatial justice are treated as distinct categories. Could it be that inclusive design is a subset of spatial justice? A participant suggested that perhaps the categorization is preliminary, serving as a means to delve into the complexity of the topic.
- The tension between aesthetics and ethics was highlighted by citing examples from library building design. While libraries are designed to be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing, the question arises: to what extent do they prioritize inclusivity? This consideration extends to museums as well. When seeking rest in these spaces, are the cafe shops affordable and inclusive for everyone, or do they tend to be expensive?
- Regarding the quality of open spaces, the concept of "open-ended spaces" was highlighted, referring to spaces that are open to use, transformation, and appropriation by different individuals based on their needs, making them welcoming and adaptable. Rem Koolhaas argued that while architecture often designs built environments rigidly, urbanism tends to leave spaces open for interpretation and transformation by the people, making them more open and flexible.
- Another example of qualities in inclusive places involves spaces not overly focused on addressing a specific problem or need. If designers concentrate too much on solving a particular issue, it may unintentionally segregate the space for individuals with that specific problem. This approach, akin to palliative design, could paradoxically lead to more segregation rather than fostering inclusivity.
- The discussion has covered the relationship between the form and shape of space and inclusivity. It has been suggested that certain forms, such as curved shapes, may be more accessible than rigid forms.
- The concept of accessibility extends beyond building design; it is also connected to the building's location and the specific needs of the area. For instance, having just one library in a city is insufficient; instead, there is a need for libraries in each neighborhood to ensure that people have this facility in close proximity.

- A holistic approach to accessibility has been argued, implying that while a building may be accessible from the outside, the interior spaces may not be designed with accessibility in mind.

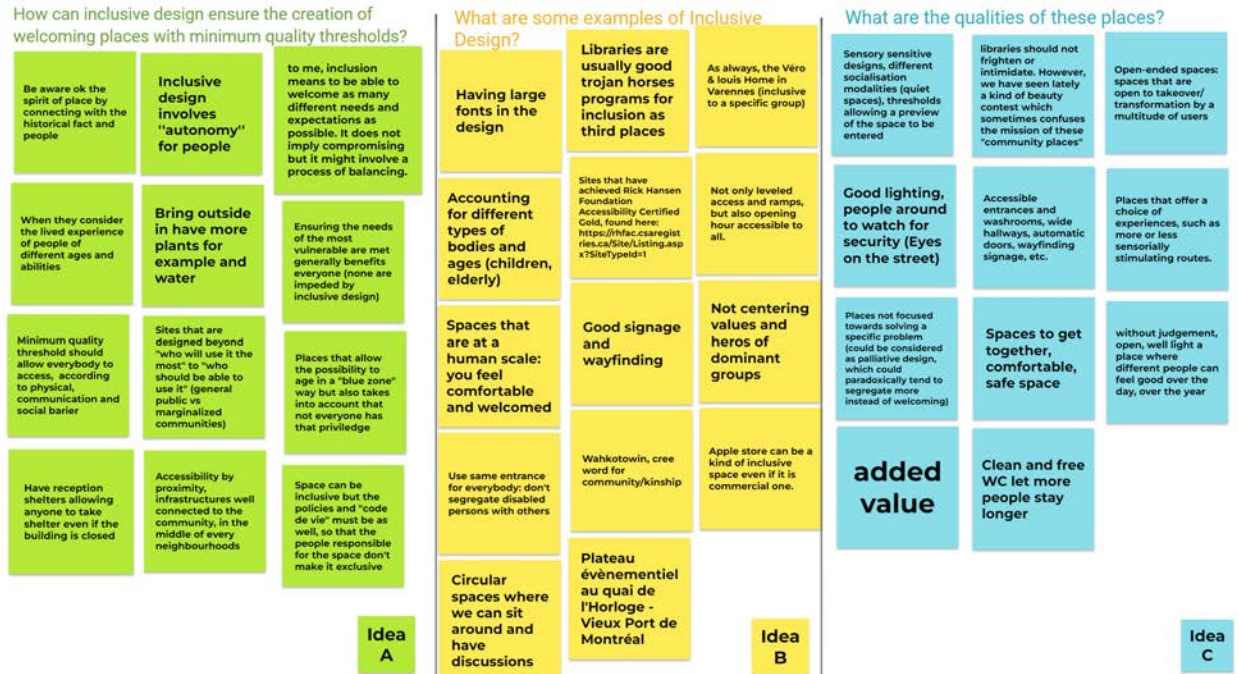


Figure 1. Jamboard screenshot for the first breakout room

3.1.3. Jamboard key points

- Inclusive design extends beyond determining "who will use it the most" to considering "who should be able to use it," encompassing both the general public and marginalized communities.
- Examples of inclusive design can range from small-scale initiatives, such as implementing large fonts in signage for improved wayfinding, to broader, non-physical concepts like offering flexible opening hours to accommodate individuals with diverse working conditions.
- Regarding the quality of inclusive spaces, they should be open-ended environments that invite space takeover and transformation by a multitude of users. Additionally, these places should provide a variety of experiential choices, offering routes that vary in sensory stimulation.

3.1.4. Student summary

By Twylla Soosay (Athabasca University)

- The example of a library is increasingly considered as inclusive, epitomizing the expansion of public spaces. However, at the same time, what we observe in Quebec is a

tendency to design them through a kind of beauty contest. This way of designing libraries jeopardizes inclusivity.

- The idea of architectural forms has been discussed. For instance, certain shapes, like circular spaces, are considered more welcoming. Does it align or contradict with the 19th-century principle of "form follows function"? another question arises: Do the shapes of a place have any effect on its welcoming nature or inclusivity?
- Regarding inclusion as the ability to address as many needs as possible, it is not easy for designers to be as inclusive in their design projects as they aim to be.
- Sometimes, places do not seem inclusive in the first glance, like an Apple Store, can be inclusive and welcoming for various reasons. These reasons may extend beyond the boundaries of the programs and the place itself. There are some basic inclusivity features, such as a connection to parks and green spaces, sufficient parking, and accessibility to transportation.

3.2. Group 2_ Minimum Quality Thresholds _Spatial Justice

Moderator: Morteza Hazbei (Concordia University)

Student summarizer: Firdous Nizar (Concordia University)

Jamboard link: (accessed on December 12, 2023)

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1JrdYbxJ6ZzIRAi0XxPRYiG-grw0gEMKs7rVwTID4c94/viewer>

3.2.1. Discussion questions

- What are potential forums that allow input from various groups to be listened to and have an impact on decision makers?
- What are some examples of diverse Spatial Justice processes?
- Describe the qualities embedded in these processes?

3.2.2. Discussion

[the first ~ 10 minutes has not been recorded]

- In discussing examples of spatial justice, instances of Inoperative architecture and tactical urbanism are mentioned. Urbanism is seen as being against spatial justice due to its imposition of limitations on how space is utilized, aligning the two concepts. The first example, Inoperative architecture, pertains to the activation of any form of apparatus or control within a space. Tactical urbanism involves individuals taking urban matters into their own hands, effectively assuming the role typically held by urbanists.
- The effects of languages, time, and signs on spatial justice are crucial considerations. To enhance accessibility for a broader audience, it is essential to use simple language, avoiding jargon, and potentially incorporating multiple languages based on the location. The inclusion of sign language is also vital. Additionally, accommodating different time preferences, acknowledging that some people work during the day and others in the evening, and considering various time zones further contributes to fostering spatial justice.
- Implementing multiple forms of consultation that enable people to provide input in various ways, both online and in person, is essential for fostering inclusivity. However, it is important to note that online consultations may pose accessibility challenges in terms of language or required equipment. As a negative example, a public consultation on the role of heritage buildings in Montreal city was limited to in-person sessions during working hours, with no alternative forms for providing comments afterward. This approach excluded many individuals, highlighting the need for more accessible and inclusive consultation methods.



Figure 2. Jamboard screenshot for the second breakout room

3.2.3. Jamboard key points

- Potential forums for gathering input from various groups include student competitions, architecture competitions with a well-composed jury and brief, as well as media and online forums and consultations.
- Examples of diverse spatial justice processes include community participatory design, open-format participation such as walking tours, outdoor screenings, collective activities, and post-occupancy assessments.
- In discussing the embedded quality within inclusive processes, it has been noted that these processes possess a horizontal structure, as opposed to a top-down approach. They are characterized by transparency, fairness, and the promotion of empathy.

3.2.4. Student summary

By Firdous Nizar (Concordia University)

- The discussion began by noting the similarity between the two first questions posed. Participants thought that the question about potential forums and the one regarding examples of processes seemed interchangeable initially. However, it finally became apparent that different responses were provided for these two questions.
- Regarding potential forums allowing multiple inputs from various groups, media was mentioned, and the discussion proceeded to explore whether media could facilitate such interactions. It was emphasized that the effectiveness depends on the leadership of these media outlets and the engagement of stakeholders. The conversation also touched on online movements where individuals share their frustrations regarding specific projects.

- Architecture competitions have also been mentioned as a potential form, questioning whether they enable diverse groups to participate in productive discussions. Well-composed juries and clear project briefs, for example, can facilitate such inclusivity.
- Regarding spatial justice questions, examples of tactical urbanism and inoperative architecture were mentioned.
- In discussing inclusive processes, it was emphasized that many of these processes need to be much more accessible in terms of timing and language. Public consultations, for instance, are not always conducted at the right time or in the right language to involve everyone.

3.3. Group 3_ Minimum Quality Thresholds _Integrated Resilience

Moderator: Terrance Galvin (Laurentian University)

Student summarizer: Andrée-Ann Langevin (Carleton University)

Jamboard link: (accessed on December 12, 2023)

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1JrdYbxJ6ZzIRAi0XxPRYiG-grw0gEMKs7rVwTID4c94/viewer>

3.3.1. Discussion questions

- In what ways can building environments be more inclusive of integrated resilience?
- Using the example of food production in urban gardens or other 'productive landscapes, how should resilience such as food security or other sustainable practices be embedded as an integral component of the design?

3.3.2. Discussion

[No recording is available for this breakout room]

Note by Andrée-Ann L. 9

- We need to go beyond the propriety line. Adaptation on a big scale should aim to be more resilient.
- Learning opportunities in and on the environment. Creation of communal opportunities.
- Prioritizing not only the construct, but also the nature outside, the unconstruct, park, place, etc. *Me fait penser au nom "Les non-lieu"*.

All the comments need a certain change of mentality and policies. Some of the things we start to see become more common.

Two clusters

A- Environnement

- *Solutions* need to go beyond the property line. Implementation of a solution to help.
- Design to FAIL - Park made to be flooded at certain times of the year.
- Integration of biodiversity as a component of projects (resilience before aesthetics).

B- Social

- Age segregation - Needs to be addressed.
- More research.
- Focus on context.
- Promote social interaction, directly with people but also with their environment.

The jamboard is divided into three main sections, each with a title and a collection of sticky notes.

Idea A: In what ways can building environments be more inclusive of integrated resilience?

- Allowing stormwater to cross property lines and create integrated systems that recharge groundwater and improve ecological function of waterways.
- Prioritizing the outdoor spaces of a project/development as integral parts of the built environment, and working closely with experts in this realm to design these components
- Considering urban Nature-based Solutions to address resilience to climate change impacts (e.g. increased and diversified tree cover, native plants)
- Nature: Trees for temperature management, water garden for stormwater retention-filtration...
- Planning opportunities of transformation through time.
- By adapting existing spaces into more resilient ones
- Provide for energy transfer within urban environments-waste heat conversion - (CIRS Building UBC)
- Consideration for where materials are sourced from and the social and ecological impact on the places from which we draw resources
- Resilience could be supported by functional redundancy in buildings.
- Allowing community participation
- Focused on context, directed to users, performative
- Having a proper community-based approach to understand their needs and find ways to implement them in the project

Idea B: Using the example of food production in urban gardens or other "productive landscapes, how should resilience such as food security or other sustainable practices be embedded as an integral component of the design?

- Providing opportunities for people to actually engage with gardens and landscapes to learn and benefit from them
- Integrating work and learning opportunities into community gardens (inspired by Metroworks in Halifax)
- Creative and risk-taking (research-informed) strategies can push designers to think about building elements that perform beyond their mechanical properties
- Balancing function and aesthetics (the most resilient option may not always be the traditional design choice) - requires shifting mindsets, especially re: outdoor spaces
- Increased tree cover on site to reduce climate impacts (flooding, heat, energy costs...), along with co-benefits (e.g. mental health improvement)
- Focus on local biodiversity
- BIODIVERSITY

Idea C: Name examples of different kinds of integrated resilience?

- Intergeneration housing
- Cradle to Cradle
- Adaptable spaces in public buildings
- "Safe to fail" instead of "failsafe" infrastructure

Figure 3. Jamboard screenshot for the third breakout room

3.3.3. Jamboard key points

- In addressing the question of building environments that are more inclusive of integrated resilience, urban nature-based solutions have been highlighted. For instance, strategies include expanding and diversifying tree cover, incorporating native plants, and implementing innovative integrated systems to recharge groundwater, thereby enhancing the ecological functionality of waterways.
- Addressing the question of integrating resilience practices, particularly in the context of food production in urban gardens, several key points have been highlighted. For instance, creating opportunities for individuals to actively participate in community gardens and landscapes serves to educate them on the benefits of green spaces in their built environment. Additionally, augmenting the tree canopy is emphasized to mitigate climate impacts, such as reducing flooding, addressing heat islands, and promoting improvements in mental health.
- Regarding examples of integrated resilience, two practices have been cited: "Cradle to Cradle" methodology and the adoption of "safe to fail" approaches rather than traditional "failsafe" infrastructure.

3.3.4. Student summary

By Andrée-Ann Langevin (Carleton University)

- Biodiversity played a significant role in the discussion about relationships in the built environment, encompassing not only the built aspects but also the intricate role of nature. This discussion led us to contemplate a series of thoughts on resiliency. It was emphasized that both resiliency and redundancy should be integrated into projects to avoid a single point of failure when a specialized component malfunctions.

- Two other examples discussed were property lines and stormwater. The idea is to move beyond rigid property lines and allow stormwater to cross boundaries, creating integrated systems that recharge groundwater and enhance the ecological function of waterways. This involves considering stormwater collection strategies across different locations.
- Another excellent example that was mentioned is the Metro Works Park in Halifax. It goes beyond being just a typical community garden and proves to be a successful site on multiple levels when assessed as a resilience model.

3.4. Group 4_ Minimum Quality Thresholds _Process + Policies

Moderator: Susan Spiegel (OAA)

Student summarizer: Mak Ekoue (Université de Montréal)

Jamboard link: (accessed on December 12, 2023)

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1xLfRwtfBLXZHbryITVqnp1ocPY1yGe-Swxg1CF7174s/viewer?f=1>

3.4.1. Discussion questions

- Given the gap between the ‘Letter of the Law’ and the ‘Spirit of the Law,’ how can processes and policies move beyond minimum quality thresholds, by ‘thinking outside of the box’?
- Name examples of interpreting the program by questioning norms to achieve greater than minimum qualities in design?
- Are voices being listened to and responded to locally?

3.4.2. Discussion

- Local authorities should implement consultative processes to address stakeholder concerns beyond the explicit scope of the law. In Quebec, a participant shared a practice of combining the letter and spirit of the law in consultation processes. This innovative approach, leading to a composite of quality, encourages a broader understanding of norms by integrating multiple criteria. Instead of analyzing specific elements in isolation, they are considered collectively. This holistic approach compels a more nuanced interpretation and unique perspectives, fostering a better grasp of complex issues and gaining wider acceptance.
- Understanding the spirit and letter of the law can be challenging for many, and effective communication is crucial. To enhance our impact on the spirit of the law, we must improve communication with the public, practitioners, and city councillors.
- A participant mentioned it is crucial to acknowledge the reality which is the cost. Discussions about energy efficiency and sustainability often hinge on return on investment. Similarly, in policy and urban planning, developers must recognize the inherent value—monetarily, socially, and environmentally—of high-quality development.
- Policies lack the strength to mandate beyond the minimum requirements and struggle to provide adequate incentives or encouragement for the outcomes desired by the City.
- A participant from the city of Montreal shared an instance of creating the Quality Compass. Through workshops, they collectively determined which aspect of the built environment are exemplar. Despite the constraints of budget and project schedule, they acknowledged the necessity of meeting minimum standards. The Quality Compass was introduced to incorporate various values like cultural, social, and economic considerations and feedback was actively sought from both internal and external stakeholders in Montreal. Here is the link to Quality Compass: <https://designmontreal.com/en/toolkit/compass>
- In response to the first question, a participant emphasized the importance of participatory design approaches. They stressed the need for these processes to be horizontally structured, acknowledging our societal divides. It is crucial to grasp the comprehensive nature of quality thresholds, especially when dealing with minimum standards, as these

thresholds can affect diverse groups differently. Therefore, embracing participatory design and empowering voices that may not have been part of the process ensures that quality considerations extend beyond minimal standards.

- An OAQ participant highlighted the challenge with rules and policies primarily relying on metrics and quantitative data. The suggestion is to incorporate more qualitative measures into policies and regulations.
- Collaboration across various levels of government ensures a comprehensive perspective on public projects. While municipal entities operate within their specific domains, cooperation among different government levels fosters a holistic view.
- A participant from the Manitoba research group focusing on affordable and sustainable housing in First Nations communities emphasized the limitations of a prescribed approach to housing design. They highlighted the importance of considering local needs, such as the significance of porches for food security, health, and energy efficiency in First Nation houses. The participant pointed out the lack of appreciation for specific local requirements across Canada. For instance, when it comes to hydroelectric power, sustainable and net-zero design principles may have specific guidelines, but in regions where hydro is produced by coal, different considerations apply. Advocating for a more flexible and innovative approach to design, the participant stressed the drawbacks of overly prescriptive methods.



Figure 4. Jamboard screenshot for the fourth breakout room

3.4.3. Jamboard key points

- In addressing the disparity between the 'letter of the law' and the 'spirit of the law,' it has been suggested that the use of performance-based building codes is more appropriate than relying on prescriptive building codes. It has also been suggested that including post-

occupancy evaluation as part of design delivery processes assures that designs deliver on their quality promises.

- In addressing the question about examples of programs that challenge norms to achieve higher-than-minimum qualities in design, it has been suggested that, particularly in public projects, enhanced collaboration across multiple levels of government before scoping, budgeting, and project approval can yield significant benefits.
- In response to the question of whether voices are being locally heard and responded, it has been emphasized that wealthier individuals and communities often wield greater influence, resulting in their perspectives receiving more attention compared to those of lower-income communities.

3.4.4. Student summary

By Mak Ekoue (Université de Montréal)

- A composite concept of quality encourages a re-evaluation of norms by combining multiple elements. The notion is that applying each criterion individually is not enough complex, and the act of combining them allow us to think differently.
- Also, developers need to recognize that there is an inherent value beyond social aspects when pursuing better quality in the built environment.
- We need to seek opportunities to integrate research and new findings so that the entire process does not become static, allowing for the infusion of new ideas to drive progress.
- Concerning the question about naming examples of programs that aim for qualities and designs more than the minimum, one notable tool is the Quality Compass introduced by Design Montreal team. This tool highlights a set of values and assists a team in establishing a shared vision of quality for a project.
- Also, the idea is that we need to incorporate qualitative components; however, in procurement processes for portfolios and main designers, only quantitative criteria are currently utilized.
- There is a lack of appreciation for diverse requirements in different regions of Canada. For example, the porch in a First Nations home in Northern Manitoba is not funded, but it holds significant importance for that specific region.
- An idea was to integrate participatory design horizontally, allowing us to listen to and empower voices that are sometimes not heard. Typically, the more powerful and wealthier voices are the ones that are heard, while lower-income communities and residents are often forgotten.

4. Plenary of Session 1_ Minimum Quality Thresholds

- In the discussion about public buildings and competitions, the question arises: Is quality better determined through online votes or by a designer jury? This revolves around the complexity of recognizing quality as an advanced democratic concept, dedicated to addressing diverse needs. Could design juries be the quality watchdogs for minimum quality thresholds, even beyond competitions? Currently, in many situations, there is no representative of public interest. Reflecting on extending and generalizing the role of design juries is crucial, as relying solely on online likes may lead to a visual-centric approach.
- However, there is no quality watchdog with authority—an issue raised by a participant from the city of Calgary. They mentioned the creation of systems like the Urban Design Panel, but without the power to stop projects. The language in policy and procurement documents is often suggestive, encouraging, or advising, but it tends to be overshadowed by the push for affordability and other current pressures. The sustainability conversation is deemed shallow, primarily benefiting expensive projects rather than reaching lower-income communities in need of affordable housing. Getting quality into policies and processes faces challenges, as they may not be robust enough to achieve desired outcomes.
- There is often an emphasis on design, but factors like maintenance and the management of a place, including accessibility, significantly influence quality of life but do these qualities are considered in architectural awards? For instance, in the Agha Khan Award, the focus is on the project's impact on users and immediate environments, rather than just evaluating the design.
- It is essential to have a jury to ensure equity in the decision-making process and understanding the choices that hold significance for people. This inclusivity aligns with the concept of equality, emphasizing the importance of representation to ensure a fair and equitable process.
- There were some disagreements with the comment that there is no quality watchdog for minimum quality thresholds. Instead, the participant believes that there are sufficient watchdog entities, emphasizing the need to define the concept of a watchdog. Examples include the NCC and community groups that review urbanism and design. In Montreal, the CCU also plays a role. Although these entities are not perfect, cities like Edmonton have a Chief Architect who defines the threshold of quality for realized projects. Therefore, examining these imperfect yet existing entities can help identify what the watchdog should be.
- In the UK, the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment served as the mentioned watchdog, leading discussions on urban renewal and regeneration in major cities. However, it was defunded with a change in government and transformed into the Design Council, with diminished powers.
- We must ensure that quality watchdogs focus on the right criteria, as having the wrong ones can exacerbate the situation. For instance, in a municipal jury for architectural awards, there was a debate. Some jurors favored a beautifully designed house in the suburbs, as opposed to a downtown shelter for homeless people with budget constraints and various issues which had social and equality value. The participant believes we need to prioritize and guide watchdogs to focus on the essential aspects.

- In the role of education, there was a belief that if the quality watchdogs are not focusing on the aspects we desire and viewing things from various perspectives, it will not sustain the quality we seek. To achieve this, we need clear criteria and must educate people to recognize barriers. Once identified, these barriers become apparent, allowing individuals to understand the criteria used for evaluation from diverse perspectives and experiences.
- The challenges of balancing beauty with functionality and inclusivity value were acknowledged, and it has been stressed that the necessity of regulations, like the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in Ontario, is crucial to ensure critical aspects are prioritized in projects.
- The word "livability" was recommended to use instead of term "beauty". Architects often assert that people make a building livable after construction. The participant argues that awards are effective at recognizing excellence but fall short in evaluating livability for everyone. They emphasize the need for measures of livability that consider the lived experience of buildings or places. The participant also criticizes prioritizing education for enhancing livability and questions where people can voice concerns or express dissatisfaction with a building or place. Do people need education for that? They highlight the absence of a forum to address issues falling below the threshold of quality.
- How do we create inclusive schools and classrooms for indigenous learners, considering important aspects like culture, language, and way of life? Livability is crucial, often overlooked for vulnerable communities. Equity in jury panels is vital, respecting democratic principles while demonstrating honor and care for those facing challenges in daily life.
- Although beauty is no longer a prominent term in architecture, it remains relevant in arts and philosophy. Beauty extends beyond external aesthetics, encompassing internal aspects. The shift in beauty arts, particularly towards the sublime, emphasizes giving voice to the unheard and providing justice, going beyond visual appeal. These criteria could be reintroduced in future discussions on the true essence of beauty. Meanwhile, focusing on experience and livability provides effective tools for ongoing exploration and development.
- The connection between beauty and livability has been discussed, emphasizing that the minimum quality threshold is essential to ensure livability—being suitable and conducive to living. The participant suggests that connectivity with the minimum threshold of quality involves factors like safety, public transportation, and lighting. Meeting these criteria designates a space as livable. However, beauty might be considered at another level beyond these fundamental elements.
- Returning to Alberti's concept of a "good fit," beauty, in this sense, does not strictly adhere to classical aesthetics. The agreement lies in functionality—accessible spaces are considered a good fit. Contrasting a classical view of tree beauty, biodiversity is prioritized to prevent monoculture issues. Francis Kere's buildings may not align with classical beauty, yet they are beautiful in their functionality, constructed by local hands. In situations of scarcity, engaging people becomes essential, aligning with discussions on resiliency, redundancy, and biodiversity.
- We have rankings for everything. Why not have rankings for livable public places, indicating the minimum threshold of quality we should expect? This assessment should encompass collective voices, not just architects' voices.

- The lack of consideration for the beauty of Francis Kere's work has been criticized. They assert that Kere's work undeniably possesses a strong aesthetic dimension, making it beautiful, and aesthetics is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of the designer's concern during the creative process. The participant emphasizes that aesthetics and beauty are integral to livability, acknowledging potential challenges but highlighting their importance in thoughtful design.
- It has been noted that there is an absence of livability criteria for the Canadian context. It is highlighted that while there are some criteria for American cities, it is crucial to examine livability within specific contexts and demographics.
- It has been mentioned that livability is the basic criteria. meaning that the place might be livable with basic feature. However, adding some value such as beauty will increase the quality of the place and beauty may not be the necessary factor for a place to be livable.
- It has been highlighted that livability is the fundamental criterion, indicating that a place can be livable with basic features. However, enhancing the quality of the place with elements like beauty is optional, as beauty may not be a necessary factor for a place to be considered livable.
- Consistent language is crucial because it helps people collectively understand the meanings of terms such as resiliency and threshold. The threshold is not merely the minimum bar; it spans a spectrum, providing the ability to redefine.
- It has been observed that although each breakout room had different questions, the answers shared numerous similarities and intersections. This suggests that the questions in each breakout room, while distinct, ultimately converge in their responses at different levels.
- In this project, there is a necessity to pinpoint words that hold more power than the conventional ones used in daily educational professions. The goal of this research is to identify impactful words that are interconnected and can contribute significantly.

5. Conclusion by Reporters

In summary, this session has shed light on three core concepts that define the minimum quality threshold: livability, inclusivity, and integrated resilience. Meeting these concepts would ensure the attainment of the minimum quality standard. To establish this standard, a consensus is needed on the minimum levels of for each of these concepts. In case of livability, determining when a place becomes "habitable." Similarly, defining the minimum levels of inclusivity and resilience establishes the baseline for the built environment's overall quality.

These qualitative concepts operate on a spectrum, and it is crucial to comprehend each criterion and aspect within these three terms. This understanding is essential to establish the minimum and fundamental levels required for overall quality, given that quality is a multifaceted concept relying on the integration of various elements. In addition to understanding and analyzing each component of these three concepts, it is important to investigate the level of their impact. For instance, if an electronics store offers free cell phone charging, can we classify it as an improvement in inclusivity, or is it merely a form of advertising? Similarly, providing inclusive parking spaces, including those for individuals with disabilities, prompts the question of whether this is a fundamental quality or an inclusive feature. These questions underscore the complexity of these concepts, underscoring the necessity for thorough discussions and investigations to precisely define the minimum quality standards. Once the minimum quality threshold is accurately defined, the next step involves raising the bar for the overall minimum quality.

Future discussions:

- There was a discussion about the role of media and its impact on inclusivity. Given the imperative and inevitable role of media in our lives, a future discussion could explore the extent to which media can empower inclusivity in the built environment and how it can do so.
- What constitutes a livable building? While there is abundant literature on livable neighborhoods or cities, there has not been a proper definition of what it means for a building to be considered livable.
- What is the relationship between "beauty" and "livability"? In fine arts and philosophy, we have the concept of beauty, which extends beyond external beauty to include internal beauty and social and cultural value. How can these definitions of beauty connect with the definition of livability?