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## The usability of architectural spaces: objective and subjective qualities of built environment as multidisciplinary construction.

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### Abstract

"Usability" is present in all interactions between user and object. As well as a product, for the built environment this concept has been presented throughout history by different classifications, such as functional, technical, aesthetic and economic architectural qualities. Architecture expresses its three-dimensional condition through the man possibility of entering the interior and moving to perform daily activities. Ergonomics in architecture arises by the possibility of knowing the users, their biological, social and psychological aspects, and contributes to planning, design, evaluation of tasks, jobs, products, environments and systems. In several areas of knowledge, "usability" is a research object, named "ease of use" in response to the trinity "user - task - physical environment". Since the lack of specific measurement techniques, was perceived, this article introduces the concept of "usability of architectural spaces" as a multidisciplinary construction. Held through the literature review in "architecture, ergonomics, environmental psychology, engineering, interior design, accessibility and universal design". This work presents the analysis, selects and organizes the main dimensions (objective and subjective) and spatial categories of the built environments. Aims to contribute to usability assessments, as support for new environment projects and readjustment of existing ones, such as theoretical and technical grant to scientific research.

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## 1. Introduction

Usability is present in everything that requires the interaction between user and object, in order to adapt projects and perform adjustments, which can be anything from an internet site or the built environment occupied by human being. Their roots are in cognitive science, psychology and ergonomics and the human-computer interaction study. In the '80, the term "usability" replaced the "use-friendly" expression. Nielsen [68] points that "usability and usefulness" are complementary to compose the "quality of use". Bevan (1995) [1] defines as "the highest interactivity level afforded to a product with respect to the user", which attributes can be verified in the project stage, was summarized as "the ease in using particular product", or defined as "the measure in which a product can be used by specific users in order to achieve the specific goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use" [68, 67]. Currently, "usability" is inserted into different contexts, as socio-political issues, trade and production quality standards, consumer satisfaction and responsibility of the supplier; the user interaction with desktop environments, education, health, leisure and community and technological context [3].

Within the framework of the architectural space, the concept is not unknown, and came throughout history as architectural qualities, functional, technical, aesthetic and economic boundaries of the built environment [4,5,6,7,8,9,10]. However, researches involves mostly working environments, information engineering dimensions, interaction design, product evaluation and ergonomic analysis [11,12,13,10]. Given the lack of specific measurement instruments, new usability precepts could be transported to architectural scale in order to suit the in response to individuals needs and skills [13,11,10,14].

## 2. Usability and architectural space: a multidisciplinary construction

The space is one of the architectural properties and the architectural space expresses the condition of this three-dimensional, through the man possibility of entering and moving himself in this interior [44]. Vitruvian architectural thought based on multidisciplinary was considered universal during different approaches and epochs [5]. The usability concept of built environment, was first discussed in the treatise entitled "De Architectura", at the beginning of the Roman Empire, in which Vitruvius describes on three qualities served by architecture systems: "firmitas, venustas and utilitas" - "solidity, usefulness and beauty" [5,10].

"Solidity" focuses on the constructive aspect, the structural system on physical wrap, technologies and the quality of the materials [5,8]. "Usefulness" is about creating spaces and scales to meet users requirements and how they relate to spaces. According to Vitruvius, "when the arrangement of the environments is correct and does not present obstacles to use, and each building category is assured its suitability and property" [5,8]; "beauty" refers to aesthetic concerns, in order to encourage contemplation and enjoyment [5]. In this context, architectural quality is presented as integration between the functional quality (spatial organization of activities) and technique, which treats of climate regulation (environmental comfort), aesthetics as a symbolic function associated to form, yet, the economy [10]. The "built environment" refers to the building or public space, covered or uncovered environment [15] organized and animated, constituted a kind of aesthetic and physical, psychological and informative, designed to please, serve, protect and unite the people in the exercise of its activities [9]. Usability in architecture is often understood as the functionality or the buildings ability to carry out the tasks envisaged for it, to its efficiency, practical utility or value to the user, considering the financial resources available.

Recent surveys identified factors, cultural, situational and contextual user experience important to base the understanding of usability of the built environment [11,10,16, 17, 19,5,18]. In this perspective, space usability becomes more comprehensive, to assess how people utilize the functions to meet their needs and your experiences [20,21,22] adding to functionality, technological and climatic constraints, symbolic, aesthetic and ergonomic, user needs and expectations, the economic issues and investment returns. Thus, the construction of a static image or constant of built environment usability study would be impossible, which reaffirms its multidisciplinary scope. Some specific aspects of man & built environment have been structured over time with different names and methodologies, but common goals [23,3,20,10].

### 2.1. POE - Post occupation evaluation

The meeting between architecture and engineering evaluation method, applied for buildings, furniture, equipment, with systematic and rigorous evaluation process performance of environments in use. Involves objective and subjective criteria, assessed in terms of performance and suitability in accordance with the activities carried out [24,25,26]. Assess technical aspects, quantitative and qualitative, functional and behavioral characteristics as flows of people, materials, activities, organizational performance and accessibility, and meeting with the ergonomic analysis allows to recognize the user's subjectivity, determine and construct the problem, programs and draw guidelines for the project design [26,27].

### 2.2. Ergonomics of the built environment

Architecture arises as the means of knowing the user and the task, contributing to the planning, design, evaluation of tasks, jobs, products, environments and systems, through interdisciplinary studies and dimensional assessments, physical data, anthropometric, biological, physiological and psychosocial. The studies heading into the interior spaces of work, services and leisure critical to daily functioning and quality of life, and environmental comfort, safety requirements and functionality, presented as the variables involved in the adaptation of the built environment: environmental comfort, perception (cognitive), anthropometric measurements (accessibility, scaling) and the adequacy of materials (coating and finishing) [28,29,30].

### 2.3. Environmental psychology

As "psychology of architecture", " place design" or "pro-environmental architecture", is a young discipline expanding multidisciplinary character, in which people are seen as components with their individual psychological characteristics. The analysis is carried out through the studies of perception (how the individual perceives the environment), cognition (how the mind of an individual absorbs and structure the information received) and the behavior (as the individual understands, reacts and modifies the environment) about the influence of the process in human behavior [32] integrating the environmental stimulus perception. Also, aspects such as readability, orientability, and from experiences and expectations such as identity, familiarity, attachment to the place and satisfaction [31,32,9, 33,34,35,36].

### 2.4. Interior design

The importance of integration between Design and Architecture respect to project the realization of projects with a view to optimizing the space, environmental comfort and well-being. The functionality of any nature internal environment valuing the emotions and positive experiences of your user [37]. This association involves accessibility, readability, orientability studies, with the functional organization, and the composition of ambiances and its elements, that have objective characteristics, related to constructive aspects and regarding the subjective qualities that depend on the user perception from the environment [7,9]. However, these two characteristics may be present on the same element.

### 2.5. Universal design

The design for diversity arises to gather and systematize concepts and embrace broadly many disciplines in order to reduce the distance between the functional elements and the people capacity to enjoy the atmosphere without a personal characteristics discriminatory treatment [38]. The principles of Universal design supports the creation of environments or products which may be used by as many people as possible [39,40,38] - Equality of possibilities of use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Error Tolerance, Minimal Physical Exertion, the design of spaces for access to and use of all users. Focus simply on Universal design principles is not enough to ensure adequate solutions project. The application of usability in the architecture requires the integration

of accessibility restrictions of buildings since the beginning of the process [41]. Thus, the term "universal usability", was used to express the more universally usable buildings project, regardless of age, size, strength or health conditions, experiences and abilities of users [42,20].

### 3. Dimensions and categories of architectural space

According to literature, spaces and ambiences must respond to functional, formal, technological issues (architecture and construction) to psychological and social (the user) [43], which originates the "space programs, architectural, functional, or user needs" that define the object being designed [6]. Figure 1 presents a hierarchical scale of dimensions and categories organizing process.

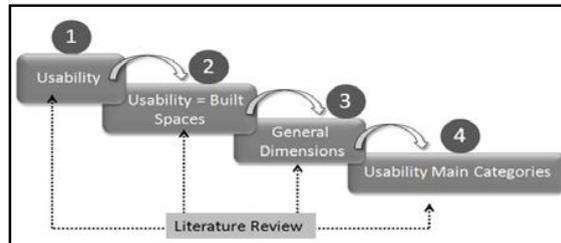


Fig. 1. Usability of architectural spaces – definition process – dimension and categories.

The "dimensions" relate to "elements or factors that constitute a complete entity" [44]. Each dimension consists of a categories set, which are composed of elements or attributes, which represent the most peculiar qualities of environments presented in literature. The overall dimensions are "objective and subjective", composed of elements in the environment, which form the whole of architectural composition [6,9] and can be categorized according to their common qualities. Based in Lynch [34], Ornstein [24], Mallard [9], Gurgel [7], the dimensions were defined as "physical or objective" when relate to main space categories that can be evaluated quantitatively or qualitatively. These can be objectively grouped by their functional, technological content, formal, aesthetic, that guide the design and construction [6]. "Subjective" dimensions are composed of elements whose analysis can be evidenced from the psycho-social and cognitive aspects of the user [9,45]. The Figure 2, presents the main "physical / objective" categories of architectural spaces collected in literature.



Fig. 2. Physical and objective categories of built environment.

#### 3.1. Accessibility

The ease of access and use of environments, products and services by any person and in different contexts, when people in normal physical condition or with varying limitations can experience the built environment so full and complete [46]. It can be "determined by the spatial distribution of potential destinations, its easy to reach and the proportion, quality and characteristics of the activities there found" [52]. Dischinger and Ely [28] defined important accessibility principles in the built environment, as the guidance, the displacement, the use, and communication.

### 3.2. Readability, orientability and safety

Readability is related to "the possibility of organize the environment within a pattern of consistent image generation" [34]. This process evolves the obtaining and mental processing of spatial information and its importance to orientation and displacement in the search for references which helps to build the user spaceperception [47, 49,50,51, 52] which directly depends on the degree of legibility of space [47]. It happens at known or unknown places or based on three main components, which are the engine of "wayfinding," a "reorientation" and the "exploitation of the environment", which involves cognitive aspects how to plan routes and acknowledge the references [47].

### 3.3. Environmental comfort

The study of environmental comfort aims to provide the built environment the conditions of habitability, respecting thermal conditions, ventilation, insulation, acoustic and visual, and others able to change the performance of the building in its context, and the rational use of available resources. The comfort as "a feeling of physical and mental well-being" [53].

### 3.4. Functionality

It happens when activities are located in their own places, which determines that every building to be functional, must have felt and method [54], the configuration and position of spaces depend on the purpose of use of the building, followed by the architectural program and also of the general arrangement of functions, dimensions and conferred by the shapes. The creation of the whole depends on the suitability of different systems that make up the building, which are constructive, that contains the distributive schema or spatial organization, whithaccess mechanisms and the relationship with the outside world [6].

## 4. Subjective dimensions: cognitive and psycho-socialaspects from user in relation to builtenvironments

The "subjective" dimensions are composed of psycho-social and cognitive user aspects [9,45]. The relationship between user and environment is reciprocal and bidirectional, since we have established specific areas of use and occupation [55]. There is an interdependence among the questions: how the behavior impacts the environment?how the environment impacts the behavior? Sauvé [69] defines the concept of "environment", as "a place to live, to learn, to take care, and our daily environment, wich its socio-cultural, technological and historical components" [56].

TheEnvironmental Psychology, defines the environmental as a "multidimensional" and explains "the concrete physical environment, as natural or built is inseparable from social economic, political, cultural and psychological conditions, formed by everything in it is present, this includes people, also influenced by how people perceive, feel and behave in that context [31];experienced by person as a whole, where the phenomenological nature of experience provides a sense of unit field.Among the aspects presented in literature some are emphasized as determinants in the quality of life and could be considered in the projects of spaces-Figure 3.

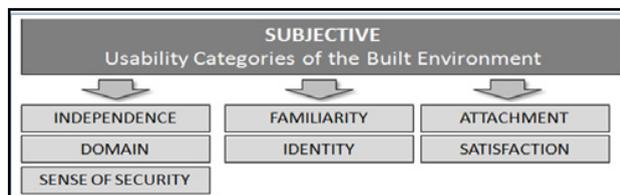


Fig. 3. Subjective Categories of built environment Psycho-cognitive aspects: user/built environment.

#### 4.1. Affection or attachment - "place attachment"

It's a complex concept defined as a link between the person and specific places or emotional involvement with the places [57], in attention to physical-spatial characteristics, as well as affective and symbolic meanings of individuals or groups, which theory comes from studies of child development, defines the attachment by the behavior of get and keep close to another individual, as structured environment that fosters comfort, safety, security and self-confidence [58]. Tuan (1980, 1983) [61] relates the geographical space to affective binding as a way to turn this space into place through the experience, embraced by three dimensions: functional, symbolic and relational. The functional respect to the role of the physical space as attractor, encouraging or inhibitor of movements, which interfere with behaviors that occur there [59] which can generate as much well-being, as frustration and stress. The symbolic has a socio-cultural content and individual, influences the way each person acts on the different situations. The relational dimension concerns the sense of cognitive and emotional connection between people and environment characteristics, where the individual is perceived as belonging to the group and a specific place, identifying a unique relationship between them [60]. This concept requires an understanding of the "past" and "interrational potential of place", related to experiences and expectations or memories about the environment. The feeling of affection with the place is also coupled to others, such as spatial identity, space, appropriation - topophilia.

#### 4.2. Identity

The "differentiation and individuality of each place to the user" [34] related to significant places, which emerge in a social, cultural and economic context and provide individuals a sense of belonging to a place [62]. This sense has the function of "describe and socialize the person through their interactions with the physical world" what happens from memory-related cognitions, the attitudes, values, preferences, the meanings and behaviour, as well as to experience linked to daily life [35]. However, these meanings are not static and neither the same for all people, but constructed and deconstructed continuously, working variously in the thoughts, feelings, in the state of humor, social interactions and physical well-being [63]. Tuan (1983)[61] places space and points out that a "place" is related to security and stability, while "space" means the freedom and movement, and the space is more abstract, with movement and transformation, while the place corresponds to a process of appropriation of space, the subject prints its mark, assigns new meanings identifying with this environment. It is noteworthy that, the physical scenarios alter their ability to satisfy the needs and user desires, as this also changes the internal physical scenario to ideal according to cycle and interests [64].

#### 4.3. Independence

The possibility of defining their own activities and destinations for as long as possible. A good environment and equipment design facilitates activities independently, which requires to be free of obstacles and easy maintenance to avoid accidents; attractive for all and according to biomechanical features of anthropometric and user population. Many measures can be considered, such as presence of ramps in circulation with gaps, which facilitates the displacement, banks with backrests, armrests and seats well dimensioned [66, 45].

#### 4.4. Familiarity

Identification and affection to the place can interfere positively in their skills and abilities. Thus, the positive mental representation about environments could be facilitated and since it involves the reciprocal interaction between the user and the space, relates directly to the place appropriation process. The mutual influence between user and space is the reason people and groups are, or not, feel identity in various places in which they live, so, the ambience is what makes this communicative process [10]. Environments with historical references and based on tradition solutions and regional customs, may also offer some sense of familiarity and continuity.

## 5. Conclusion

In view of the reduced researches involving usability in architecture, the choice by the qualitative model with multidisciplinary focus involved definitions and precepts of various knowledge areas. Aimed to understand about the emergence of different usability concepts over time, to achieve the built spaces. This research led at first to identify and classify the key aspects to consider in the design of architectural spaces in general, and demonstrate their close relationship with the users requirements and their capabilities in order to reach their goals as satisfactorily as possible. The multidisciplinary literature review was important for structuring the main spatial aspects - objectives (functional and technological) and subjective (the user expectations related to the environment) determining greater consistency of general space dimensions and categories.

These result forms the initial lead, to be unfolded to more comprehensive searches, directed to specific groups of people and different buildings types, through case studies in order to measure the perceived importance and satisfaction about the categories identified in the literature review. Since accessibility and inclusion are qualities to be studied in addition to the internal scope of buildings, it is suggested for future researches, to include a reassessment of the communication between internal and external spaces in order to create new deployment and more permeable patterns, and ensure better connectivity between building and environment, aiming at the quality of the urban places, and planning quality of life to be offered by the cities to its inhabitants. In this sense, rethink the usability studies in extended scales as its direct interference in the landscape, mobility, maintenance of quality and interactivity between the architectural and urban functions in its area of influence.

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