LAYERS OF CHANGE IN CITIES

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“All buildings are predictions. All predictions are wrong.“

Stewart Brand, 1994
All plans are predictions. All plans are wrong.
Planning is a tool to address the chaos that future brings.

But future never happens as planned.
Planos delos ALREDEDORES DE LA CIUDAD de BARCELONA y PROYECTO de su REFORMA Y ENSANCHE

Por d. Mestizo Cada

LEYENDA DEL PROYECTO

A. Plazas, jardines, paseos, etc. con sus calles adiuvantes y administraciones para el culto y de beneficencia, etc.

B. Edificios de vivienda pública y de trabajo.

C. Vías de comunicación y accesos.

D. Campos de recreo y deportes.

E. Parques y áreas verdes.

F. Zonas residenciales.

G. Zonas industriales.

H. Zonas comerciales.

I. Zonas mixtas.

J. Zonas exentas de uso.
Barcelona, 1890
Cities are in constant change
Change is slow, so we perceive cities as stable
Ljubljana.
Šolenburgove ulice.
Laibach.
Schellenburggasse.
Understanding how change happens in cities is crucial for usefulness of urban planning.

Different components of cities change with different speeds.

The concept of 'shearing layers' in buildings.
Brand via Duffy, 1994
Site (‘eternal‘)

The geographical setting, the urban location, and the legally defined lot, whose boundaries and context outlast generations of ephemeral buildings. "Site is eternal."

Structure (30 – 300 years)

The foundation and load-bearing elements are perilous and expensive to change, so people don't. These are the building. Structural life ranges from 30 to 300 years.

Skin (every 20 years or so)

Exterior surfaces now change every 20 years or so, to keep up with fashion or technology, or for wholesale repair. Recent focus on energy costs has led to re-engineered skins that are air-tight and better-insulated.

Services (7 – 15 years)

The working guts of a building: communications wiring, electrical wiring, plumbing, heating, ventilating, and moving parts like elevators and escalators. They wear out or obsolesce every 7 to 15 years.

Space Plan (3 – 30 years)

The Interior layout - where walls, ceilings, floors, and doors go. Turbulent commercial space can change every 3 years or so; exceptionally quiet homes might wait 30 years.

Stuff (daily to monthly)

Chairs, desks, phones, pictures; kitchen appliances, lamps, hairbrushes; all the things that twitch around daily to monthly.
What are the 'shearing layers' in cities?
Three basic components of a town plan, that are defining the city in three dimensions:

(1) street pattern
(2) land use pattern
(3) building fabric

*M.R.G. Conzen*
1. Transport routes (1000 + years)

2. Land divisions (300 + years)

3. Buildings and trees (30 – 300 years)

4. City services (15 – 150 years)

5. Land use (15 – 150 years)

6. Ground floor (1 – 30 years)
1. Transport routes (1000 + years)

Transport routes are firmly tied to the location. Main multi-purpose transport arteries hardly ever change course, although new transport modes can add new routes.
2. Land divisions (300 + years)

Legal division of land is a very stable setting. Plots can divide and join, but borders persist.
3. Buildings and trees (30 – 300 years)

By buildings we mean here their structural part, which is the most stable. Similar is the durability of large trees and parks.
4. City services
(15 – 150 years)

Sewage and water systems, communication, various pipelines are very difficult to move, once they are in place underground. Above ground services change faster, and this includes also single-purpose transport infrastructure.
5. Land use (15 – 150 years)

Land use can be more stable than buildings, but it can also change relatively fast, due to economic forces.
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6. Ground floor (1 – 30 years)

Benches, kiosks, lights etc. need to be replaced quite often due to wear.

Ground floor use of buildings can also be changing very fast and very rarely stays the same for decades.
Different layers can change with little friction in relation to other layers.

When change in a faster changing layer demands change in slower layers, problems appear.
How does urban planning address uncertainties in relation to different speeds of change?
Slower changing layers

Scenario planning

Envision several possible paths, follow what is actually happening, and change actions accordingly

“A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam.” (Frederik Pohl)
Slower changing layers

Participative planning approaches

Establishing common ground
Better solutions to complex problems of urban development
Mitigating opposition to plans and projects
Faster changing layers

Tactical Urbanism

Also known as guerilla urbanism, pop-up urbanism, D.I.Y. urbanism, hands-on urbanism etc.

Short-term, low-risk local solutions stimulating long-term change.
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