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Vishal Bhatti

School of Architecture &
Landscape Design, Shri Mata
Vaishno Devi University,
Kakryal, Katra – 182320,
India.

Abhiney Gupta

School of Architecture &
Landscape Design, Shri Mata
Vaishno Devi University,
Kakryal, Katra – 182320,
India.

Navin Gupta

School of Architecture &
Landscape Design, Shri Mata
Vaishno Devi University,
Kakryal, Katra – 182320,
India.

Correspondence

Vishal Bhatti

Sr. Tech. Assistant, School of
Architecture & Landscape
Design, Shri Mata Vaishno
Devi University, Kakryal,
Katra – 182320,

Visual Quality in Landscape

Vishal Bhatti, Abhiney Gupta, Navin Gupta

Abstract

The contextual meaning of the landscape perceived can differ from individual to individual; which could be judged on various parameters like contrast, colors, form, etc. The paper aims at visual appraisal studies which focus on evaluating the visual characteristics of a place or route including its impact on the society and humans on constant basis with functional relationship.

Keywords: visual landscape, visual quality, visual assessment.

Introduction

Landscape holds a different meaning when perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'.

The landscape around us is an important part of people's lives, contributing to individual, community and national identity and offering a wide variety of benefits in terms of quality of life, well-being and economic activity; which is however, regularly changing. Many different pressures have progressively altered familiar landscapes in the past and will continue to do so in future, thus creating new landscapes. Continuous demand of growing population along with improved lifestyle is the key factor for change which include proper allocation of land, its use and management; thus fulfilling the requirement of new housing, commercial development giving rise to new form of energy such as wind turbines and solar arrays for developing new infrastructure such as buildings, roads, railways and power lines and extraction of minerals for a variety of uses. Climate also plays an important role in bringing change in landscapes.

Visual assessment studies focus on evaluating the visual characteristics, locational installation, and social life of a place or a route on a perceptual basis (including all sense organs, especially the eyes) within a functional relationship. These assessments become operative in urban settlements such as a broad place which includes a whole city or a division of a settlement or a route (boulevard, main road, street).

1. Visual Amenity

Visual amenity can be described as the visual character of the landscape and its impact. The factors relevant to amenity include the characteristics of the locality, the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural or similar interest. When people see and analyze landscape, it introduces related, but very different considerations, notably the views that people have of the landscape and the effects of change on their visual amenity. When a landscape is changed in some way there is a probability that the change will be seen by someone and often by several different groups of people. This may affect both particular views of the landscape and have an effect on the overall pleasantness of the surroundings that people enjoy - which is what visual amenity means.

The distinction between the two components of assessment, as mentioned below, is very important but often misunderstood, even by professionals.

- **Landscape effects assessment:** It deals with changes in landscape as a resource. It is recognized as one of the crucial dimensions of environmental interest, together with matters such as biodiversity, or cultural heritage. It is also concerned with issues like endangered landscapes, involvement of landscape character to sense of place and quality life for everyone, and the mode that change may affect individual components of the landscape.
- **Visual effects assessment:** This is concerned with how the surroundings of groups of people or individuals may be specifically affected by landscape change. This means evaluating changes in specific views and in the general visual amenity experienced by particular people in particular places.

2. Visual Quality

Visual quality is defined as what people as “viewers” like or dislike about the visual resources that compose scenes within their viewing environment. It is also what the viewer like and dislike about the visual resources in the environment around



Natural



Cultural



Project

them and a composite of their perceived sense of the following

- **Natural harmony**
- **Cultural order**
- **Project coherence**

3. Environmental Perception and Behavior

The environmental designer must be interested in building the structure of the environment and its effect on the individual. Also, we must understand the way in which the environment is perceived by the individual; and we must be interested in overall behavioral reaction to social, situations and physical. Our understanding to the environment and our flexibility or response to environmental conditions can result in behavior, although we are actually insensible of the effect of environment on us.

Environments can thus be precisely designed to bring people together agreeably for some purpose as in an amphitheater or to engender a social relationship, as in the arrangement of seats in a park. The value of understanding the technicalities of visual sensation is of course, understandable. Understanding how the eye works and transform retinal images of continuously shifting light forms into the visual world makes it possible for the designer to eliminate distracting situation which makes life difficult. For example our 180° peripheral vision exaggerates the tunnel or passageway the greater our sense of movement.

Perception is a complex process than just seeing through it; people organize, select and interpret sensory stimulation into coherent and meaningful images of the world. The process of selection and attribution of meaning or symbolism to the environment, or the development of an emotional response to aspects of the environment, may vary from individual to individual. This fact is what makes the subjects of perception and behavior so complicated and so unlikely to produce universal rule for designing landscape.

Another factor determining perception or what is selected out of a great bombardment of stimulation is intensity or quality of a stimulus. An element or object in the environment can be so dominant because of its shape, color, contrast and so on, that it cannot fail to be identified and selected by almost everyone, although its meaning and induced behavioral response will vary according to the individual.

For Landscape architecture, another remarkable theory about the interaction of people with the physical surrounding concerns aesthetic satisfaction. It has been suggested that the requirement for the aesthetic enjoyment are simply the requirement for the visual perception itself, raised to higher degree. The essential thing in each case is to have a pattern which contains the unexpected. This seems to be the heart of what we call “beauty” or aesthetic which is explained subsequently. Our grasp and enjoyment of the environment depends upon two principles: the principle of response to

change, novelty and stimulation and the principle of response to repetition or pattern. Our perceptual system thus paradoxically demands variety and new information while at the same time seeking regularity or pattern.

4. Visual Impact Assessment

Visual impact assessment shall identify and predict the type and extent of visual impacts relating to:

4.1 Visual compatibility with environments	e.g. shape, massing, proportion, rhythms and height of building colour, elements and material used;
4.2 Visual barrier	e.g. views blocking towards existing landscape features; or planned/existing view corridors towards notable and landmark features;
4.3 Visual quality improvement	e.g. appealing design feature that attractiveness of the landscape and clearance of visual blight and obstruction;
4.4 Glare from reflected or direct artificial light source or sunlight	e.g. uncomfortable eye feeling caused by light interference from structures faced with polished material or mirror or from direct light sources generated from the proposed development.

In evaluating visual impacts, it is important to cover all potential viewpoints. If this is not practicable, key viewpoints shall be selected at activity nodes e.g. important public open spaces, residential areas and landmarks etc. and major routes e.g. walkways, roads, footpaths and hiking tracks;. The location of these viewpoints shall be typical.

While considering views from a main route, it will be more effective to have a sequence of views recording the changing visual events along the route.

5. Parameters of visual quality

- Land form
- Land use
- Land cover
- Presence of water
- Naturalness
- Color
- Diversity

6. Principle of visual composition

Photography, painting, sculpture and other visual art forms can be analyzed by composition and some principles are common. In landscape most important are the principle of

balance, harmony and contrast, sequence, emphasis and scale. An understanding of these will allow us to analyze the visual grammar of any landscape and help us with both design method and creative inspiration.

6.1 Harmony and Contrast

Harmony is the quality of relatedness. It is found between elements of landscape of similar forms, similar texture, similar characters of line and closely related colors. The closer the relationship between the aesthetic qualities of associated elements, the greater the harmony. As it increasingly close it approaches identity, but, in distinctiveness, harmony would be lost because it depends for its aesthetic impact on the simultaneous perception of both differences and similarities. The desire of harmony rests not only in the similarities between things but in the balance between differentiation and identification.

Contrast is found between different forms, direction of line, qualities, texture and color. Contrast does not necessarily imply conflict- it may be attractive, happy contrast coming from a complementary, mutually supportive relationship between widely different characteristics. Conflict is only perceived when the contrast creates strain, when it is not contained within order and aesthetic purpose.

6.2 Balance

Balance comes from the relationship between masses. It depends on their magnitude, their visual energy and their position. The possibility of visual balance indicates two things, that the parts of a composition have visual energy or force, and that there is a point or axis about which that force acts. This point or axis is brought into being, and given importance, by the way in which plant masses and other elements are placed around it. Because of its vital role of attracting and organization of surrounding elements, the axis may become the focus of composition or the space. The simplest expression of balance is bilateral balance where the arrangement of planting on one side of an axis is repeated in its mirror image on the opposite side.

Balance can also be achieved without symmetry. In this case, visual stability arises not from replication but by the balancing of the energy of different qualities about the axis or fulcrum. Prominent form may balance coarse texture and assertive line may balance intense color. In addition, a small quantity of one prominent characteristic may balance a greater quantity of the same characteristic that is less strongly expressed. For example, a single plant with sword-like leaves, striking would balance a group of three or five smaller plants with ascending linear leaves of similar shape but finer texture.

6.3 Sequence

Sequence is the way that the appearance of a composition changes or describes before the observer. Sequence may be visible from one view point, as in a build-up of colors, textures or forms within a single panorama, or it may be experienced as a development of scenes that unfold as we move through the landscape. Sequence is essential to the qualities of composition. It is an expression of change. It relates the parts to the whole, not only within a static picture, but also over time. Sequence in visual composition can be likened to meter in verse or rhythm in music; it provides a temporal structure to the composition.

6.4 Scale

Scale can be understood most simply as relative size. In landscape design generic scale refers to the size relationships between the various parts of a whole space and within a plant association. These are the aspects of scale that tend to be seen as separate from the observer. Human scale, on the other hand, refers to the relationship between the size of the observer and composition. Because we are designing for people we must take account of the human-scale relationships of landscape and allow for the effects of different patterns of engagement.

7. Conclusion

Visual resource management which is part of visual quality of landscape is a relatively new term being applied by several public agencies to the technique of preserving and enhancing the nation's scenery. For any area of proposed rehabilitation or development, the scenic or disfiguring landscape features are inventoried and recorded by various graphic means and given a rating as to their visual significance. Alternative proposals are then analyzed and evaluated as to their relative benefits and negative visual impact upon existing conditions. In the decision as to the preferred route or course of action the scenic considerations are shown to be telling and often deciding factors.

The procedures should be based on the premise that visitors visited, have an image of what they expect to see and that, insofar as possible, this expectation should be fulfilled. Recognize and consider the numbers and types of viewers, duration of viewing time and the relative quality and intensity of the viewing experience.

All lands are too viewed on ground, from passing roads and from the air. Landscape has a definable character and that those with the greatest variety have the greatest scenic value. Assess each potential view in terms of its foreground, mid-ground and background contribution. Give priority in each scene to the dominant elements in terms of line, form, color and imagery. Consider the capacity of each landscape area to absorb alteration without loss of its visual character.

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