Prague Public Space Design

MANUAL

Prague Public Space Development

STRATEGY
Where were the Manual and Strategy created?
Prague Institute of Planning and Development (Institut plánování a rozvoje hlavního města Prahy – IPR Praha) is Prague’s preeminent policy centre for urban planning, architecture, development, design and governance. All of the activities of IPR Praha follow a single objective: to make Prague a living, influential, dynamic and competitive city that is pleasant to live in, responds flexibly to the current needs of its citizens and keeps pace with the most developed cities in Europe. The Office of Public Space has been part of the institute since 2013. Its task is to represent the city’s interests as regards public space and to formulate the policy for the development of such space. The proposed Public Space Development Strategy and the Public Space Design Manual are the first steps to influencing the form and quality of public space in Prague.

What is the Manual?
The Public Space Design Manual sets out the principles, rules, recommendations and criteria for designing public space. It serves as a basis for developing public space – it defines quality, responds to problems that have long gone unaddressed and discusses the tools for improvement while looking at the whole as well as the individual details. When drafting the Manual, tried-and-true examples of manuals from developed major cities with high quality public space were referred to, with provisions naturally having to be made for the differences arising from the Czech legislative environment and the social, political and cultural situation in Prague.

Whom is the Manual intended for?
The manual is intended for anyone and everyone involved in the creation of public space at all levels, be it investment, planning, design, approval, maintenance and operation. It will be used chiefly by the representatives of the city’s offices and their planners and designers as well as by the representatives of the various municipal districts. Private investors and the public will also find it extremely useful.

What does the Strategy do?
The proposed Prague Public Space Development Strategy analyses current problems, defines the reasons for and the objectives behind quality public space development efforts and discusses the possible tools to be used to achieve these objectives. The proposed Strategy can also be seen as an explanatory memorandum and introduction to the Manual.

Whom is the Strategy intended for?
The Strategy targets the city’s politicians, investors, users and other stakeholders, chiefly the city administration.
In your opinion, what are the greatest shortcomings of Prague’s public spaces and the process behind their design and creation?

Save a number of honourable exceptions, Prague’s public spaces have no character. The quality and magic of a place are always nullified by the inundation of weed-like elements, by which I mean infrastructure, advertising and inanely designed information systems.

Jaroslav Zima
(architect and urban planner)

Public spaces in Prague are designed without a concept in mind, although I often rather have the feeling that no one has ever given serious thought to them.

Zdeněk Lukeš
(architecture historian)

Chronically problematic locations include not only the outskirts of the city, but, unfortunately, even the centre, especially the squares. The loss of natural functions, the radical drop in the number of inhabitants, the creation of parallel commercial “pseudo-public” spaces, the commercialisation of the centre for tourists and the commercial rather than residential dominance of the buildings surrounding the city’s squares have all resulted in a situation that in many respects appears to be hopeless.

Richard Biegel
(architecture historian and Vice-President of the Society for Old Prague)
The interests of drivers, traffic engineers, network or road administrators, stall vendors, advertisers and the operators of some attractions always appear to have priority over an overall concept, openness and long-term public interest.

Michal Kohout
(architect and academic at the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University)

Absence of an overall vision. Lack of courage to take on more visionary projects. Uncoordinated interventions, with the technical aspects always prevailing in the end.

Petr Kratochvíl
(architecture historian and theoretician)

Day-to-day procedural problems are chiefly the result of the dominance enjoyed by some infrastructure administrators, the preference for transport solutions over the movement of pedestrians, an absent street vegetation concept and the small number of actual, physical modifications to spaces to create liveable streets. The city is markedly affected by the unfair “privatisation” of public space caused by parking.

Petr Hlaváček
(architect, academic and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University in Prague)
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rozvoje veřejných prostranství hlavního města Prahy
návrh
2014/06
Kancelář veřejného prostoru
Key attributes of high-quality public space

— Quality public space is most of all liveable, i.e., safe, accommodating to all groups of people, healthy, lively, communicative, stimulating and beautiful.

— Human scale and the human senses are the basis for designing public space.

— Public space should not only be accessible, but also attractive for all groups of people.

— Proper maintenance and cleaning are essential to quality public space.

— Public space in a city should encourage pedestrians to move about and spend time in it. Liveability of public space should be a priority, and traffic and technical infrastructure should conform to it.

— Quality public space should allow for the widest array of leisure-time activities and encourage social contact between individuals.

— Identification with the environment reinforces social cohesion. Anonymous places lacking in character elicit feelings of alienation and are not sought-out.

— The uses afforded by public space should respond to changes in daily rhythms, weekly cycles and the seasons.
Analysis of the current situation – selected theses

Schema showing ownership and management of the various parts and elements of public space

- **Tram/bus signposts**
  - Tram (Public Transport): DP Praha, a. s.
  - Bus (Public transport): DP Praha, a. s. (at stops with at least one line operated by DP Praha, a. s.) or TSK (at other stops) or MČ (temporarily before handing management over to TSK)

- **Overhead lines**
  - DP Praha, a. s.

- **Street lighting**
  - MHMP (manager: ELTODO CITELUM, s.r.o.)

- **Posts and poles**
  - Overhead line poles: DP Praha, a. s.
  - Lampposts: ELTODO CITELUM, s.r.o.
  - Combined: DP Praha, a. s. + ELTODO CITELUM, s.r.o.

- **Transport and technical infrastructure columns and boxes**
  - High voltage: PRE distribuce, a. s.
  - Street lighting: ELTODO CITELUM, s.r.o.
  - Traffic light controllers: TSK
  - Tram control systems: DP Praha, a. s. – Trams
  - Main gas shut-off valves: Pražská plyňárenská, a. s.
  - Telephone network controllers: O2 Czech Republic, a. s.

[MC = Municipal District; MHMP = City of Prague; TSK = Technical Administration of Roads; MZO MHMP = City Greenery Department; Lesy hl. m. Prahy = Prague Forest Management; DP Praha, a. s. = Prague Public Transport Company; ŘSD = Road and Motorway Directorate; PVS = Prague Water Management Company; PVK = Prague Water Supply and Sewerage Company]
Main problems standing in the way of quality public space in Prague

— No political vision for the city has been articulated to allow for the objectives of the development of public space to be defined.

— There is no concept in place laying down the city’s priorities for developing the public realm and public space; nor is there a timeline or long-term investment plan for development.

— Prague’s budget does not have a general investment expenditure heading for public space. There are only separate headings for technical and infrastructure investments.

— Not enough emphasis is being placed on cleaning and maintaining public space.

— The aesthetics and liveability of most public space is poor.

— The actual state of public space and the way it is used do not correspond to Prague’s potential in urban and social structure.

— Transport solutions often strongly determine the physical structure and organisation of space and often degrade, even preclude, the full-fledged use of public spaces.

— There is no coordination of the various bodies responsible for creating and developing public space. Investments are scattered among the managers and organisations that run the city.

— When renovations of public space are being planned, architects are usually not involved. As a result, only specific parts are addressed without an assessment of the effect of the planned renovations on the overall quality of the space and its surroundings.
Process of designing, managing and using public space

**Principles and Components of the Process**

**Proper Planning**
Thorough and detailed planning and design preparations contribute to the quality of public space. An overall concept that is based on a vision and compliance of all sub-projects and phases with such concept is crucial. A basic assumption is that the powers of the various stakeholders in the decision-making process will be strictly defined.

**Stakeholders in the Planning Process**
It is essential that the fulfilment of the stakeholders’ primary roles be ensured by setting up a clear hierarchy and assigning and defining powers and responsibilities. The basic relationship of investor (local government) – project coordinator – architect, designer – implementation coordinator – construction/technology supplier needs to be defined in particular.

**Project Coordinator**
The project coordinator is the executive body of the investor (local government). It should represent the municipality, as the project investor. Depending on the scope of the project, the coordinator can be someone from within the municipality or someone assigned to this role by the municipality.

**Architect: Author of the Concept**
Based on a clear assignment from the project coordinator and investor, the architect draws up a detailed, integrated concept for the site. The architect processes the various inputs and requirements from the other contributors and specialists. He or she formulates the assignment for the specialists, assessing discrepancies and recommending solutions.

**Stages of the Process**

**Preliminary Preparations**
For every public space plan, the urban and architectural contexts of the public space in question have to be assessed first. The potential for improvement of the space has to be guaranteed, and if another investment project is planned for the same public space, it should be recommended that the two projects be merged.

**Public Involvement**
If a public space is to be truly adopted by the user, it is worth involving the locals, especially in the beginning when planning the project, but also during the stages that follow.

**Selection of the Design Contractor**
When selecting the design contractor, the primary objective is to guarantee that the work will be of the highest quality. The selection procedure also has to be as transparent as possible.

**Design**
Each phase of the design stage has to be assigned with the expertise of the planner/designer in mind. If the contractor drawing up the blueprints for the next stages of the project is not the author of the concept or study, its involvement in all of the following stages, including implementation, needs to be arranged by the project coordinator.
**Procurement of permits**
The project should already be discussed with the appropriate public authorities and other stakeholders during the planning and design stages to allow for any adjustments to be made. Otherwise, there is a risk that the required permits will not be issued and work on the project will be delayed.

**Selection of the construction contractor**
The construction contractor has to be selected as transparently as possible so that the quality-price ratio of the deliverables is the best possible.

**Implementation**
Once the construction contractor has been selected, a sufficient amount of time has to be spent on coordinating the suppliers of the different parts of the construction project. The expertise and diligence of the architect’s technical supervision and author supervision are the primary factors affecting the final quality of the project executed in the public space.

**Assumption of management**
The future manager of the completed project has to voice its opinion on the project during the preparation process. The situation where the future manager refuses to accept the completed project must not occur. The investor should arrange for cooperation at all levels.

**Management and maintenance**
For the effective management of public space, Prague has to systematically handle and coordinate – both spatially and temporally – all of the different managers of the various public spaces and technical infrastructure across the city. Thorough and regular cleaning and continuous maintenance are often enough to improve the quality of certain public spaces.

**Economy of public space**
The primary purpose of public space is to provide a first-rate environment for life in the city, not generate profit. It is of course positive if the use of public space generates profit, but this must not be at the expense of its primary purpose: creating a quality environment for life. It is also worth separating the operating and investment costs of the organisations responsible for management. The result will be a better overview of the actual price of their services, and it will be possible to combine the investment costs and coordinate them with the other investments.
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p.2 Stromy a vegetace
Definition of the thematic scope

Basic principles discussed in the Manual

**General, not site-specific**
The Manual discusses principles and rules on a general level. The Prague Public Space Development Plan will address the site-specific factors of each kind of public space.

**Initiatory, not only regulatory**
The document is not a legal regulation: it is first and foremost an initiatory tool. The principles and rules are formulated on a general level and cannot be applied automatically. The individual context of the place and situation always have to be taken into account.

**Details and amenities, not urban planning**
The Manual chiefly address the layout of the public space and the placement of amenities. It intentionally does not deal with the urban structure of the city.

**Physical space, not events**
The primary objective of the Manual is to deal with the physical form of public space as a stage for the goings-on in the city.
Content of the Manual

**Introduction** – contains the basic objectives of the document and information on how to use the manual.

**Typology** – describes on a general level the various kinds of public spaces and their role in the city. It serves as the basis for defining the character of such spaces and, based on it, the principles and rules for designing them.
The Manual is divided up into four basic parts. Each part defines the quality of public spaces and the tools for achieving it. It is structured from the general to the detailed.

**LAYOUT** – focuses on the quality of public space from the point of view of organising traffic and the various components of public space.

**ELEMENTS** – describes the specific rules and principles applicable to the individual components of public space that are categorised by type.
Typology

The Typology chapter deals with the general principles for designing quality public space as a typological unit based on defining its character and role in the urban structure of the city. The basic rules are then set out for achieving a high level of quality for each type.

The importance of a public space within the city and the character of the surrounding buildings are the basic factors that affect the appearance of the space to a great degree.

These factors create the context that lends character, atmosphere, and identity to a certain type of space.

The aim is for each public space to have a legible character and a clear and meaningful role in the overall urban structure of the city.

The basic structure of urban public space is composed of the traditional types: streets, squares, waterfronts and parks. Other specific public spaces that complete the image of a city and are, as a rule, tied both physically and in terms of significance to certain structures or urban types including arcades and passageways, public space around public buildings and transport infrastructure, and housing estates.

Streets

In many places in Prague, especially around functionalist buildings, the building fronts do not copy the street line. This results in unique open areas that can be made into small liveable spaces, enriching the location.

Parks

Prague has many parks that can, with a few minor interventions, form a liveable space where one can regenerate physically and spiritually. They also form part of the urban ecosystem.
For many housing estates in Prague, the parks located in their centre are public spaces where social and recreational activities take place. By making appropriate improvements to them, it is also possible to improve the quality of life in the housing estate.

Squares

Squares are a traditional public space. They represent the city, location, and community. They are a meeting point, point of reference and the city’s parlour or lounge.

[ Prague 1, Staroměstské náměstí | Photo: Tomáš Cach ]

Waterfronts

Waterfronts, quays being an example, are a public space with a great liveability potential. They number among the most sought-out places in Prague. Waterfronts are all the more attractive due to the visual juxtaposition of the water and Prague’s major sights.

[ Prague 2, Rašínovo nábřeží | Photo: Martin Špičák ]

Arcades and Passageways

Arcades and passageways are a phenomenon of Prague and, as such, should be protected and developed.

[ Prague 1, Lucerna shopping arcade | Photo: Kateřina Frejlachová ]

Housing Estates

For many housing estates in Prague, the parks located in their centre are public spaces where social and recreational activities take place. By making appropriate improvements to them, it is also possible to improve the quality of life in the housing estate.

[ Prague 9, Prosek residential development, Přátelství Park | Photo: Veronika Kučerová ]
The objective of the Layout chapter is to define the maximum potential for quality befitting the importance of public space.

Layout should always be derived from the overall composition of the space while keeping functionality intact. It should also conform to the space.

Public spaces with the greatest proportion of shared space, providing pedestrians in particular the freedom to move about and spend time in them, are the most liveable.

Fulfilment of technical and legislative requirements must not be the only objective. Their blind observance usually results in an unliveable space.

**STREETSCAPE**

The role of street space in the urban structure is determined by the basic layout requirements of the street. It stems from the importance of the street in the hierarchy of public space. The way a streetscape is laid out affects movement. The layout has to take into account the limits of the space and correspond to the importance of the street.

Streets can be categorised according to type in the urban hierarchy and according to traffic classification. Traffic classification should be based on and support the street type. If the character of the space correlates with urban hierarchy and traffic classification, a quality public space can arise.

For the purposes of the Manual, the following terms are used to describe the streetscapes whose level of traffic ensues from the degree of convergence and divergence of the various kinds of movement: shared space, quiet and calmed streets, important traffic-calmed streets, and streets with heavy traffic.
SDÍLENÝ PROSTOR

VÝZNAVNÉ ULICE S ZKLIDNĚNÝM PROVOZEM

ULICE ZA TÍŽENÉ MOTOROVÉ DOPRAVĚ

KLIDNÉ A ZKLIDNĚNÉ ULICE

SHARED SPACE

QUIET AND TRAFFIC CALMED STREETS

IMPORTANT TRAFFIC CALMED STREETS

STREETS WITH HEAVY MOTOR VEHICLE TRAFFIC

8 m

18 m

24 m

30 m
Public space has to provide ample protection for weaker and more vulnerable users against stronger and potentially dangerous users. Only in this way can public space motivate people to behave in a more considerate and thoughtful manner. It is generally worth adjusting the design to the needs of the various types of movement in the space, as a rule in the following order:

- on foot
- by public transport
- by bicycle
- by car

This order of preference is based on the degree to which such movement burdens the surroundings, for example from the point of view of space demands, energy demands, pollution etc. It cannot, however, be observed dogmatically.

Reasonable comfort should be retained for car traffic, but this should not be to the detriment of the liveability and overall quality of the public space.

One of the tools for improving the quality of space is traffic calming. Reducing the speed of cars in the city generally increases safety, especially for pedestrians and cyclists.
**INTERSECTIONS AND CROSSINGS**

Through its scale and form, the design of urban intersections and crossings has to correspond to the urban character of the site. At the same time, such design protects weaker and more vulnerable users and provides a more pleasant space for spending time in and other non-travel activity. Retaining direct pedestrian routes, without detours, is desirable.

**TRAM AND BUS STOPS**

Stops should be a compositional part of the architecture of the space, highly visible and easy to find. Convenient, barrier-free access across a one-lane traffic-calmed roadway to a tram island can be easily resolved by raising the roadway across the length of the section in question.

An intersection of traffic-calmed streets with an extended sidewalk lowered to the level of the roadway and pedestrian crossings on all arms of the intersection

[Prague 6, Eliášova | Photo: Tomáš Cach]

An appropriately raised roadway along a narrow tram island including modifications for the visually impaired

[Brno, Šilingrovo náměstí | Photo: Vojtěch Novotný]
The most extensive part of the Manual deals with the elements and features of public space. The rules are formulated to take into account the role and impact of each element on the overall quality of public space. The objective is not to describe the element itself, but to determine the principles for designing it with regard to the whole.

For strengthening the city’s identity and its image, it is important that elements typical for Prague be used in the capital. Prague has many different lines of standardised street furniture that rather weaken the city’s identity. For this reason, it would be worth initiating the creation of a Street Furniture Catalogue. For important public spaces, it may, however, be more appropriate to design specific furniture to reflect the character of the site.

It is already worth unifying the colour of ordinary utilitarian metal elements according to the Manual.
Materials and surfaces

Outdoor advertising

Structures to facilitate movement and access

Service buildings and facilities

Street lighting

Street furniture

Transport elements and technical infrastructure

Materials and surfaces

Trees and vegetation

Art in public space
**Materials and Surfaces**

In areas that employ traffic calming in the form of a roadway raised to the level of the sidewalk, it is worth subtly differentiating the height differences using different surface materials or paving patterns. The chosen materials should be related and help unify the space.

The appearance of utilitarian elements should always conform to the whole. Matching materials, surfaces and colours should contribute to consolidating and softening the overall impact of the public space while boosting the compositional differences. It reinforces the character of the capital city as a whole as well as its basic parts.

Combinations of surfaces for various kinds of uses of space. A smooth surface more comfortable for cyclists and pedestrians, clearly differentiated from the surface for motor-vehicle traffic. Everything is colour-coordinated in one shade.

Surface matching helps to soften and clearly define the space in question.

[Brno, Běhounská | Photo: Marek Kundrata]

[France, Paris | Photo: Jan Harciník]
**Trees and vegetation**

A correctly laid out group of trees is able to create composition using the same means that architecture does. Some squares can be “roofed over” by the tree canopy and contribute to a wider array of public spaces.

Parking spaces should be supplemented with park-like vegetation with a sufficient number of trees with adequate space for the roots. Parking spaces should not be designed as a monolithic surface.

A tree in public space increases the liveability of the space
[Prague 1, plaza on the intersection of Dlouhá, Kozlí, V Kolkovně and Masná | Photo: Vladimír Sitta]

Trees in a parking lot have a positive effect on the quality of the space
[Germany, Berlin | Photo: Jan Harcinik]
**Transport Elements and Technical Infrastructure**

The functional requirements of the technical and transport infrastructure network need to be coordinated with the basic role of public space as a liveable place. As a rule, technical and transport infrastructure should have as little impact as possible on the visual and other sensual perception of space. To minimise barriers, the infrastructure elements should be grouped together in shared structures that are as small as possible.

**Street Lighting**

Street lighting greatly affects the atmosphere and appearance of public spaces. When designing street lighting, the cultural, historical and aesthetic values need to be taken into account and respected when choosing lighting systems and parameters.

An example of a street with cross-wire suspension between buildings, i.e., without poles for overhead lines and lighting

*Prague 7, Milady Horákové | Photo: Tomáš Cach*

A suitable combination of area lighting and lighting used to highlight parts of a building

*Prague 1, Václavské náměstí | Photo: Petr Žák*
Street furniture

Passenger shelters should match other street furniture and react better to the needs of the location. The side panels of shelter protect against the weather, but narrow the profile of the sidewalk. If the adjacent buildings provide a natural protective barrier against the weather, they should be used and no shelter needs to be placed here.

Seating should be pleasant to sit on and inviting. The primary purpose of the seating needs to be considered in each case and the design and layout modified to this purpose. Seating promotes social interaction for example.

Protection against unfavourable weather is provided by the entrance to an arcade. No shelter needs to be constructed here

[Prague 1, Vodičkova | Photo: Veronika Kučerová]

Appropriately situated benches in public space with covered back

[Denmark, Copenhagen | Photo: Adam Gebrian]
**SERVICE BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES**

A lockable kiosk situated on a square allows for easy maintenance, longer durability and blends into the surroundings.

[Spain, Madrid | Photo: Tomáš Cach]

**STRUCTURES TO FACILITATE MOVEMENT AND ACCESS**

Public space should also allow people with physical handicaps to move about comfortably and safely.

Stairs can also substantially shape the urban environment. Not only do they connect different areas, they can also contribute to the liveability of space and be used as seating.

[Italy, Rome | Photo: Jan Harciník]

The most suitable places for markets are traditional locations on squares and plazas, which were created for this purpose. In connection with the overall visual appearance of the market, at least a common colour and simple shape of the stalls should be used.

Stairs can also be used like street furniture, allowing people to sit on them and spend time there.

[Spain, Madrid | Photo: Tomáš Cach]
Art contributes to the quality of public space if the concept, scale and form of the work takes into account the place where it is situated. The relationship between architecture and art needs to be reinforced and the role of art in public space needs to be promoted. A work of art ceases to be an object intended only to be viewed. It makes it possible to further enrich and bring life to public space.

The advertising space respects the structure of the facade and the advertising is colour-coordinated

[ Germany, Berlin | Photo: Žofie Raimanová ]

A work of art that is somewhere between sculpture and architecture or sculpture and furniture. A sculpture can also create a liveable space and bring life to a space

[ Great Britain, London | Photo: Žofie Raimanová ]
WHAT AM I LOOKING AT?
This brochure was developed to provide information on the Prague Public Space Design Manual and the proposed Public Space Development Strategy and contains an extract of the main topics found in these documents. Its purpose is to present the basic principles set out in these documents in an accessible manner.

This brochure is not the complete version of the documents. It is intended for information purposes only. The complete version of both documents can be downloaded at: manual.iprpraha.cz