

Walk the Line: Public Space and the Essence of Perception, a Case Study of a Beachfront Promenade, Durban, South Africa

Authors : C. Greenstone, R. Hansmann, L. Mbandla, J. Houghton, G. Lincoln

Abstract : All beach areas in South Africa are constituted as public land, open to all to walk on or swim in these spaces. With the completed development of the Durban promenade in 2023 from the Umgeni estuary to the harbour entrance, Durban's beachfront promenade is a notable example of innovative urban design that has transformed formerly segregated spaces into a paved public walkway linking over 15 beaches. Public spaces, however, are not all created equally, with ideas on how individuals and groups become the producers of space can be a useful tool for designing future public spaces. It is the role of planners, architects, and other built environment specialists to ensure inclusivity and symbiosis between how spaces are separated and then created. Lefebvre's ideas about space and social practice provide a foundation for this research, specifically on how spaces like the Durban promenade function as democratic spaces, highlighting questions of what draws individuals and groups to certain areas on the promenade are important. Some public spaces are well designed, accessible, and inclusive, while others create more contestation amongst users. In this research article, Durban's beachfront promenade is used as a case study to better understand the creation of public spaces, more specifically regarding who uses the beachfront promenade and for what reasons. This research adopts a phenomenological and descriptive approach to understanding place by exploring human experiences, emotions and meanings individuals attach to the beachfront promenade and how social processes and interactions shape our understanding, experience, and meaning of places. This research will collect both qualitative and quantitative data along specific nodes located on the beachfront promenade to determine the number of visitors based on demographics such as age, race and gender and the perceptions of visitors to these nodes. The aim is to coordinate and give meaning through surveys and visitor observations to better understand the type of perceptions people have of these spaces, for example, the rationale for utilising space, which already encompasses several activities ranging from cultural, social, economic, environmental, spiritual, physical as well as numerous others.

Keywords : perceptions of space, social practice, identity, urban planning, public space

Conference Title : ICSDP 2025 : International Conference on Sustainable Development and Planning

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : October 07-08, 2025