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THE CITY
AT EYE LEVEL

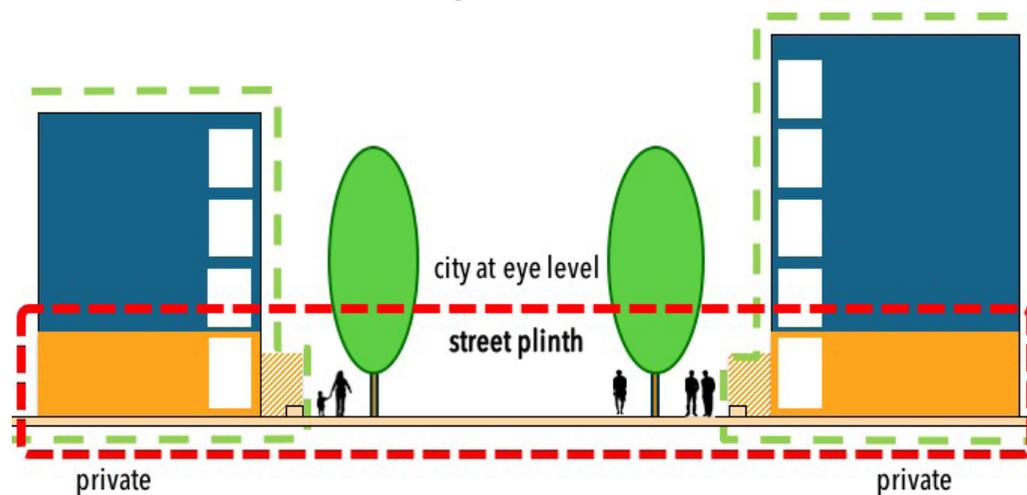
PLINTH RATING MANUAL

A tool for mapping public interaction of buildings

HOW TO ORGANISE THE PLINTH RATING WORKSHOP

“Transforming a street, a district, an inner city, or creating a new district with a great city at eye level takes years and usually involves incremental steps forward. Nevertheless, it’s easy to make a quick start. One of the first steps is to involve the community from the beginning.”

The quality of public space is not only determined by the street that the city owns and maintains. It includes everything you experience and see around you when walking on the street as a pedestrian. To achieve public space quality, the facades of buildings need to be included, especially the ground floors that we see most when we walk past the buildings.



BACKGROUND

Although ground floors, ‘plinths’, only make up a small part of a building, they are the most important for how people experience the quality of their streets. Imagine a city with empty shops, blank walls, closed facades, and mirroring windows everywhere. The importance of plinths is often forgotten in city planning, whereas creating good places requires interaction between buildings, the public realm, and most importantly, people.

With the plinth rating tool more awareness is raised through observation, assuring that the principle of high quality plinths is considered in urban redevelopment projects. The background of this tool originates from the human scale principles addressed in the City At Eye Level book, initiated by STIPO and is inspired, among others, by Jan Gehl’s plea for improved human scale in cities.

WHEN TO ORGANISE A PLINTH RATING WORKSHOP

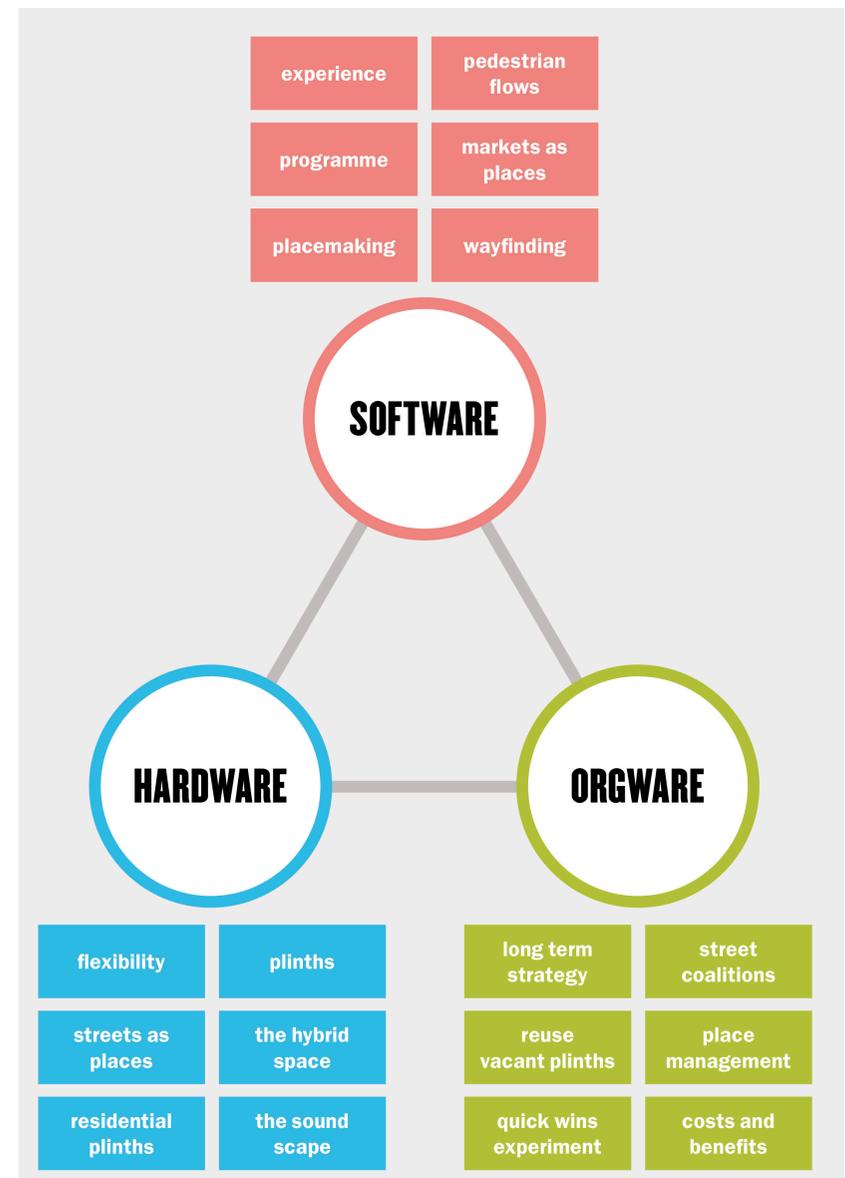
Rating plinths on their quality is necessary to get a grip on which areas, streets, or places could use some support in regards of street and building interaction. Parallel to that, it helps to see which areas already exist of good quality ground floors, locating good places on their proper interaction with buildings. The analysis and observation of such ground floors ultimately helps with creating better plinths, or continue building upon the quality of existing ones.

Place rating is most-commonly used prior to -and following- place developments to analyse strengths and weaknesses of an area to be able to discuss direct actions wherever they are necessary. The plinth rating is ideally applied to a redevelopment project, during an observation process, to raise awareness amongst stakeholders, and during evaluation phases.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR DURING A PLINTH RATING WORKSHOP

The key of executing a plinth rating session is to map the quality of ground floors in an area. This is done through seeing how a building interacts with the public space, observing functions, attractiveness, purpose, ambience, and human scale.

Secondly, this analysis is developed into an action plan for the area, being the first steps towards improvement. During the rating, participants can already get inspired and think of possible solutions, which can later be applied for brainstorm sessions towards short-term experiments and long-term improvements. While executing the place game, the main aspect to observe is how a building and the public environment interact with each other.



The quality of ground floors is determined not only by the design of the ground floor, but also by its use. We call this the hardware and the software. Thirdly, it is also determined by the organizing mechanisms behind it - so hardware (design), software (use) and orgware (strategy). The latter is not measured with this tool; we use the Eye Level Game for that (see other tool description), among others.

1. PREPARATION

1.1 SELECTING A SITE

Depending on the nature of the project, the scale of plinth rating can vary from a single street, to a square, to an entire neighborhood. The selection of the site is dependent on the nature of the project but most logically, you do not choose the site, but the site chooses you. Wherever problems occur in relation to building interaction with public space, a plinth rating workshop can be organised.

1.2 WHAT DO YOU NEED?

When executing a Plinth Rating Workshop, only a small range of materials are needed. In preparation, make sure that you collect a map of the area in which the lots and plinths are visible. This allows you (and the group) to rate each plinth separately for an optimal analysis. For this you will also need pencils or markers to actually highlight and rate the plinths.

What do you need?

- A map of the area
- Pencils

1.3 WHO DO YOU NEED?

The Plinth Rating tool can easily be executed, but this does not mean you can do it alone. The tool is ideally used by a group of people for multiple reasons:

- To assure a broader and integral perspective of the plinth rating.
- More people can create faster and more convenient outcomes.
- To raise awareness amongst a larger group of people.
- For sharing opinions with the community.
- For people to experience the place themselves.
- To express a bigger impact towards outsiders.
- Strengthening the sense of community in which you are executing the tool.
- For people to get an idea of the area by observing.
- To be able to discuss and argue about the area.
- To already briefly brainstorm about potential solutions.

The people ideally involved in this group are dependent on the project and motivation for using the Plinth Rating method. Ideally, people from all stakeholder parties are involved; from urban developers to citizens, and from city staff to local shop-owners.

2. GETTING STARTED

Meet up with the group at a central location of the area which you are about to rate. Having an indoor gathering place would be ideal for an introduction and a brief plan of approach. However, this is not necessary dependent on the level of formality of the participants. Logically, executing the Plinth Rating on a sunny day is most convenient and attractive.

2.1 RATING PLINTHS FROM A TO E

Start rating your place! Rating plinths is not a challenging task, the simple approach makes this tool accessible for everyone. While rating the plinths, the following criteria needs to be observed and noted down on the map of your location.

DON'T FORGET...

...when rating a plinth, it can be useful to look at the entirety of the place at eye level. Therefore the Eye Level Game is a helpful tool. The evaluation form can be found at the end of this manual in “Eye Level Game”. The entire manual is linked as “Eye Level Game Manual”. On the website www.thecityateyelevel.com you can find a more detailed description of the criteria for a good city at eye level, and many inspiring examples of improvements.



A

Good ground floor, Good physical structure, Good use

Simply put, an A-rated plinth is the best you can find. An attractive ground floor with enough activity, an inviting function, and a comfortable ambience. An A-rated plinth requires no improvement in regards of use, function, nor physical state. Looking at the plinth, it sets an example for the rest of the place, street, or area.



B

Ground floor with potential, Good physical structure, Use improvement needed

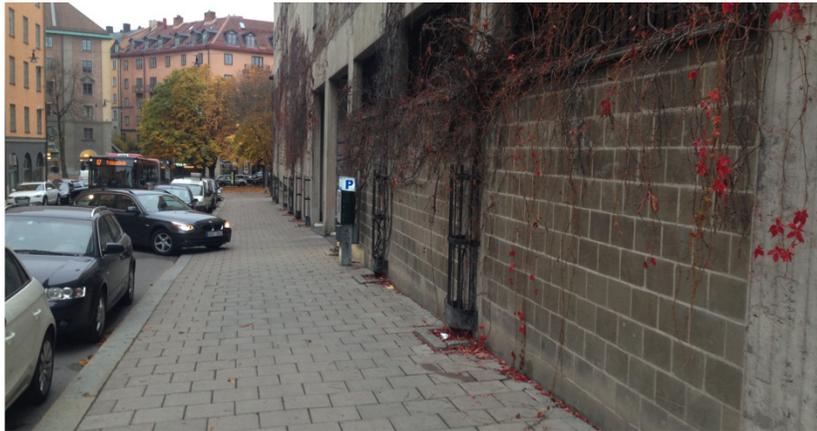
A ground floor is B-rated when the plinth has potential, but is not used correctly. This occurs when the physical state of the building appears well-maintained and open, but the current function is not the most suitable one. The plinth requires a small action such as improving its use, function, or purpose.



C

Ground floor with potential, Minor physical investment needed.

The typical C-rated plinth is a ground floor where the physical and functional potential is not fully reached. A C-rated plinth can ideally be transformed into an A-rated plinth with minor changes such as some extra paint, upgraded facade materials, improved transparency, but also looking at better opportunities for its purpose.



D

Bad ground floor, Major physical investment needed

Turning a D-rated plinth into an A-level plinth would require a major transformation of the physical structure. Cheap and quick solutions would not be enough to open up the plinth and create a comfortable place. More expensive and competent hardware operations are necessary to change a D-rated plinth.

E

Bad ground floor, No transformation possible

E-rated plinths mostly exist out of blank walls, closed garage doors, or gates for resupply. Useful functions with a purpose are not possible here, only steps towards a more attractive plinth, a better ambience, or a slightly better-looking ground floor. One of the few actions which can be executed here are wall paintings, artistic graffiti, or facade gardens. In the long term, the building needs to be demolished to create a good plinth.

As we go up from A to E, the investment needed to create a good street becomes more costly. Mapping streets this way gives a good overview of which plinths we should cherish and see as an example (A), where relatively low cost quick wins are possible (B), where the more costly interventions are needed (C and D), and which buildings can only be genuinely changed on the long term by redeveloping them (E).

2.2 COMBINING FINDINGS

With the gathered rates and intel of the plinths in the area, a more concise map needs to be drawn up for clarification. The gathered information needs to be discussed, compared, and synthesised in order to do so. This is ideally done through gathering the participants and meeting up for a discussion round. The ratings of plinths are presented to each other to eventually draw up one comprehensive map collaboratively.

DON'T FORGET...

...to look at the many articles on the City At Eye Level website. On this platform, useful cases and articles are published for supportive inspiration.

Example of a plinth rating map for Panepistimiou, Athens. Blue is good, orange is bad. (In this case, we added an extra category, red, for monumental buildings. They do add quality to the street but are placed more backwards from the street. They do not have the structure of open ground floors, and cannot be expected to be changed.)



3. ACTION PLAN

Following the observation of the plinths, the map is developed into a more presentable and professional visualisation. This can be done through re-sketching the observation maps, whereas more professional programmes such as Adobe Illustrator can be used by a graphic designer within your network. Dependent on the level of formality, either option is possible.

By having a more tangible map of the quality of the plinths, an action plan can be established to take the first steps towards practical implementation. Remember to include the HSO method in your approach to assure a wide range of operational solutions.

Depending on the state of the analysed plinths, hardware, software and orgware measures require the action plan to be multidisciplinary by looking at different roles of the stakeholders. When setting up the HSO strategy plan, designated stakeholders should obtain a certain role by making them responsible for their tasks to ultimately create ownership of the plinths and the interrelated public space.

When setting up an action plan, both short-term experiments and long-term improvements should be established to create a sustaining plan. After the implementation of short-term experiments, the Plinth Rating workshop can be executed again to see where possible challenges occur and wherever opportunities arise. Comparing the before and after evaluation of the plinths can visualise the progress that was or needs to be made.

SOURCES

- City at Eye Level book
download at www.thecityateyelevel.com
- Cities for People - Jan Gehl page 240. A summary of Gehl's article 'Close Encounters with Buildings' can be found in the book or with [this link](#).

HELPFUL LINKS

- [80 Lessons to a Good City At Eye Level](#)
- [Take Action: Street: The Place Game and The Plinth Game](#)
- [Close Encounters With Buildings](#)
- [History of the City, Street, and Plinth](#)
- [Walking Streams and the Plinth](#)
- [Eye Level Game Manual](#)
- [Eye Level Game](#)

INFORMATION

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