

# Public affective appraisal for urban design of the CBD of Nairobi

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## Introduction

There is growing concern about city appearance and how citizens can be allowed to participate in the visual character of their community. This is justifiable, as studies have on one hand confirmed that the design professionals do not share the values of the public and therefore do not deliver these values in plans and design. On the other hand, numerous studies have established that the appearance of a city influences whether a person will approach or avoid the space. These environmental affects subsequently influence behavior and ultimately choice options. The success of any central

business district depends on the meaning that the public assign it. The public approach to, or avoidance of, an area depends on the affective quality imbued in it.

This paper introduces and explains "affective quality" and discusses the shopping pedestrians' affective appraisal of different zones of the central business district of Nairobi. It also compares the resulting evaluative image map of the CBD to the mean aggregate revealed preferred routes followed by shopping pedestrians.

## Affective quality and information

The information field created by the surfaces enclosing a space governs its affective quality. People can only feel comfortable in environments that emit levels of information that is commensurate with their arousal needs. "Information" represents the psychological meaning of environmental complexity. The level of information capacity that a person can comfortably accommodate has been increasing with the sophistication of the world. People can appreciate higher levels of information than their predecessors who were exposed to less complex environments. This is the reason that built environments that used to be popular in the past are found to be less sophisticated, boring, and unattractive. A Nairobi example is Kirinyaga Road.

Nevertheless, when the collapsed shopping pedestrians' itineraries using the Geographic Information System (G.I.S) program was overlaid on the evaluative map of the CBD, a discrepancy emerged in that the most frequented routes did not fall in the district that possessed the highest affective quality.

The research study that informed this paper established that the public cognize and delimit the CBD of Nairobi in six distinct districts. Amongst these districts, there are those that have desirable affective quality whilst some are abhorred. The areas that are reckoned to possess high affective quality are composed of relatively newer buildings using high-tech construction technology and materials. On the other hand, the undesired districts are predominantly composed of buildings that use locally available construction technology and materials.

This paper proposes the need for regular evaluation of public perception of the city appearance as part of the city planning process. This is in appreciation of the dynamism of culture that calls forth new environments. Subsequently, this process of establishing the affective appraisal of the environment should be integrated in the planning process to be able to model an environment conducive to the psychological well-being of the public.