



Street Wisdom, Danish Style

Since over half the world population lives in urban areas, international cities are striving to dramatically improve the quality of urban living. That is the mission of Gehl Architects of Denmark, who were invited to Montreal by the Urban Ecology Center of Montreal (CEUM) to host a workshop on the design of streets as public places. Gehl experts Kristian S. Villadsen and Louise Kielgast led a lively discussion, and the City of Montréal seized the opportunity to set up a supplementary workshop for urban development management teams. The focus: the importance of pedestrians in the city.

The Danish firm has revitalized urban areas from London and New York to São Paulo and Sydney. Gehl Architects focus on the interaction between people and the built environment as studied by the firm's founder, Jan Gehl, for over 40 years. Their methodology includes a grid of criteria to ensure a quality environment for pedestrians. Using this analytical tool, managers can pragmatically assess an environment, rather than relying only on intuitive skills. Workshop participants applied the grid to a local downtown area, easily assessing the level of protection, comfort and enjoyment offered by the public

realm. The tool proved invaluable and for some, has become a now-essential checklist. Others spoke of a better awareness of the human dimension of a space and saw the city with new eyes. To learn more about this method, see www.gehlarchitects.com.

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