



# International Journal of Design for Social Change, Sustainable Innovation and Entrepreneurship

<https://www.designforsocialchange.org/journal/index.php/DISCERN-J>

ISSN 2184-6995

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



## Reframing beauty in public space: Towards a relational and experiential framework

*Beatrice Villari,*

Published online: May 2026

To cite this article:

Villari, B. (2026). Reframing beauty in public space: Towards a relational and experiential framework. *Discern: International Journal of Design for Social Change, Sustainable Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 7(1), 75-87.

# Reframing beauty in public space: Towards a relational and experiential framework

Beatrice Villari<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano. [beatrice.villari@polimi.it](mailto:beatrice.villari@polimi.it)

## Abstract

This paper addresses the role of beauty in contemporary public space, proposing a shift from an object-based, formal conception of aesthetics to a relational, experiential, and process-oriented framework. Although recent policy initiatives, such as the New European Bauhaus, have positioned beauty alongside sustainability and inclusion as a key dimension of urban transformation, its integration into design and evaluation practices remains limited. Responding to this gap, the paper develops a theoretical and framework-building contribution aimed at operationalising beauty as a relational and experiential dimension of public space. The paper introduces the “Beauty for All” model, developed through design research experimentation in the Milano Innovation District (MIND), a large-scale urban regeneration area characterised by ongoing urban transformation. Grounded in philosophical aesthetics, urban studies, and relational design approaches, the “Beauty for All” model is articulated as a conceptual and operational framework to strategically orient urban public space design, placing beauty at the centre of the process. In particular, the model describes beauty in terms of emotionality, conviviality, plurality, and equity. These dimensions constitute the qualities of public space in terms of experience and relationality. The framework contributes to current debates on urban evaluation by moving beyond exclusively KPI-based approaches and by promoting a conceptual shift in design and strategic processes, integrating the environmental, social, and experiential dimensions of beauty. Its primary contribution lies in reframing beauty as an experiential and relational dimension for urban transformation, capable of supporting designers, policymakers, and stakeholders in discussing and orienting public space development.

**Keywords:** Beauty, Placemaking, Urban transformation, Design evaluation, New European Bauhaus

## Introduction

The notion of beauty in design has progressively shifted from a purely formal and aesthetic conception towards a more complex, relational, and experiential dimension (Koskinen & Meroni, 2024). Contemporary urban transformations require approaches that not only optimise functionality and efficiency but also integrate social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, including inclusion, well-being, a sense of belonging, and sustainability (Gehl, 2010; Montgomery, 2013). This shift is particularly relevant in the context of public space, where aesthetic quality cannot be understood solely as visual order or formal coherence but must be interpreted as a situated condition that emerges through use, interaction, accessibility, affective attachment, and collective meaning-making. From this perspective, beauty becomes a relational quality of urban experience: it is produced through encounters among spatial configurations, everyday practices, social relations, and the symbolic meanings attributed to places.

The recent New European Bauhaus initiative has explicitly repositioned beauty as a fundamental value of urban development towards sustainability, alongside participation and inclusion (European Commission, 2021). This perspective interprets beauty as a dimension of social relations and environments rather than confined to artistic expression or visual quality (Al-Azzawi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, beauty is difficult to

evaluate. While quantitative indicators are fundamental for measuring quantitative outcomes, they do not capture, for instance, the experiential, relational, and symbolic dimensions of urban experience, which are more closely aligned with qualitative measurement. Although relational and experiential interpretations of aesthetics have been widely discussed in philosophy, urban studies, and design research, these perspectives have rarely been translated into operational frameworks that support urban transformation processes and evaluation practices.

For instance, liveability frameworks frequently prioritise measurable indicators such as safety, walkability, environmental comfort, and service provision, while paying limited attention to the experiential and symbolic dimensions through which people emotionally relate to places. Similarly, accessibility assessment tools often focus on technical and functional parameters, including mobility, connectivity, and barrier-free access, without fully addressing how different groups subjectively experience inclusion, comfort, or belonging within space (Carmona, 2019). For example, in contemporary smart cities and key performance indicator (KPI)-driven urban governance models, increasing reliance on quantifiable metrics privileges the measurement of dimensions such as footfall, green surface ratios, transport efficiency, and economic performance (Kitchin et al., 2015). Certification systems and urban rankings, including frameworks such as LEED for Neighbourhood Development (<https://www.usgbc.org/leed/rating-systems/neighborhood-development>) or Global Liveability Indexes developed by institutions such as the Economist Intelligence Unit (<https://www.eiu.com>), frequently reduce urban quality to sets of standardised indicators, leaving little room for the subjective, affective, and culturally situated aspects of urban experience (Sharifi & Murayama, 2013). As a consequence, dimensions such as atmosphere, a sense of belonging, symbolic meaning, or the capacity of space to generate everyday encounters often remain marginal in evaluation processes, despite being central to how people perceive and experience the beauty and quality of public space (Berleant & Carlson, 2007).

In this context, this paper proposes the “Beauty for All” model, which supports decision-makers, policymakers, and designers in considering experiential outcomes when designing and evaluating the quality of public spaces, while putting the concept of beauty at the centre of the process. The contribution of the paper is not merely to discuss beauty as an abstract aesthetic category but to conceptualise beauty as a relational and experiential condition that can orient urban transformation processes. The framework advances existing placemaking and urban quality approaches by integrating aesthetics, inclusion, participation, and evaluation into a unified interpretative and operational structure. The Milano Innovation District (MIND) serves as the empirical reference context. The MIND is a large-scale urban regeneration project developed on the former Expo 2015 site, characterised by continuous transformation and by the involvement of a plurality of actors. In this environment, which may be defined as one of “permanent temporariness” (Bishop & Williams, 2012), public space does not appear as a stable configuration but rather as a continuously evolving relational field.

In evolving contexts, beauty must be understood as an emergent phenomenon arising from the interaction among spatial configurations, social practices, and processes of appropriation. Consequently, the evaluation of initiatives tested over time can also be reconsidered, no longer as an ex post measurement of stabilised results, but as a continuous process of interpretation and orientation of transformation.

Starting from these premises, this paper is articulated around two main research questions: (1) how can beauty be understood as a relational and experiential dimension of urban public space? (2) how can this

dimension be operationalised within a framework for design and evaluation, integrating inclusion and sustainability? This paper should therefore be interpreted primarily as a theoretical and framework-building contribution. It aims to articulate a conceptual framework that supports future experimentation, contextual adaptation, and reflection on the role of beauty in contemporary urban transformation, without considering the model as a validated assessment tool.

### **Philosophical aesthetics**

In philosophical aesthetics, the concept of beauty has historically been associated with formal properties and universal judgments. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1790/2000) defines beauty as a disinterested pleasure grounded in a form of purposiveness without purpose and frames aesthetic experience as contemplative, autonomous, and separate from the practical dimension. This position has exerted a long-standing influence on Western thought, contributing to the consolidation of a view of beauty as an intrinsic quality of objects and as the object of universalisable judgments.

Subsequent interpretations progressively challenged the separation between subject and object, reconnecting aesthetic experience to everyday life, embodied perception, and situated interaction with the environment. In the field of art, Stroud (2014) proposes linking the beauty of art to its experience, arguing that aesthetic value does not reside in an artefact's properties but emerges from the interactions among individuals, artefacts, and the environment. This perspective connects to what Berleant (2018, 2025) describes as aesthetic engagement, in which aesthetic perception is intertwined with the environment itself. This perspective is also connected to Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics, according to which aesthetic experience emerges through active engagement with situations and environments rather than through detached contemplation (Dewey, 1934/2005). From this standpoint, beauty is understood as a condition that arises from lived, meaningful experience. Aesthetic experience is, therefore, inseparable from action, participation, and social interaction, becoming embedded in ordinary practices and everyday environments. Aesthetic experience is, therefore, considered immersive and is built through a continuous relationship between the subject and the context. Similarly, Carlson (2005) argues that understanding the natural and built environments directly influences the quality of aesthetic experience, which is shaped by cognitive and contextual dimensions.

Expanding the boundaries of aesthetics to everyday life, beauty is no longer limited to artistic objects and artefacts but manifests in daily interactions and in how individuals inhabit spaces within ordinary environments, practices, and routines (Di Stefano, 2017). This implies that aesthetic value is deeply situated and relational, shaped by habits, cultural contexts, and social practices (Granger, 2003).

This theoretical transition from an object-based to an experiential conception of beauty represents a fundamental step in the present contribution: beauty is understood as a situated, processual phenomenon that emerges through relationships among subjects, environments, practices, and symbolic meanings. Aesthetic quality is, therefore, not fixed or universal, but continuously negotiated through lived experience and social interaction.

A further development can be seen in the field of the aesthetics of interaction, focusing on the use of products and services (Möttus & Lamas, 2015). This perspective emphasises that beauty arises from the experience of use and from interactions with systems and environments.

Taken together, these contributions enable the construction of a theoretical framework in which beauty is understood as a situated, relational, and processual phenomenon. This position constitutes the conceptual foundation of the “Beauty for All” model, in which experience becomes the primary unit of analysis and relationality the generative principle by which aesthetic value is constructed and transformed in public space.

### **Aesthetics and the quality of public space**

In urban studies, the aesthetic dimension has historically been addressed through concepts such as urban quality, liveability, sense of place, and the image of the city (Lynch, 2013). In these approaches, attention is mainly focused on the legibility of space, its formal organisation, and its capacity to orient users’ experience. Although aesthetics is not always explicitly addressed in these approaches, it implicitly emerges from the relationship among spatial configuration, perception, and everyday urban experience.

The quality of public space depends on its capacity to enable relationships, enabling diverse uses, and structure experience around the human scale (Gehl, 2010; Whyte, 1980). From this perspective, beauty cannot be reduced to formal or stylistic properties but emerges as a relational quality grounded in lived experience, social interaction, and processes of appropriation. Public space is then perceived as aesthetically meaningful when it supports encounters, coexistence, accessibility, and collective forms of urban life. Accordingly, aesthetic quality depends not only on how spaces appear but also on how they are inhabited, interpreted, and collectively experienced over time. Besides, beauty is closely connected to the quality of environments; in this regard, Böhme’s (2013) concept of atmosphere is particularly relevant, emphasising how environments generate emotional and affective conditions that shape how spaces are perceived and inhabited. Consequently, places may be perceived as aesthetically rich or poor not exclusively because of their formal characteristics but because of their ability to sustain meaningful uses, emotional attachment, and forms of social recognition. This interpretation shifts the understanding of beauty from the domain of representation to that of lived urban experience. This interpretation also resonates with placemaking approaches, which emphasise participation, social interaction, and collective appropriation in shaping the quality and identity of public spaces (Montgomery, 2013). Urban quality is then conceived as an emergent and continuously negotiated process involving users, practices, and local communities.

### **Experiential aesthetics and design**

In the field of design, the role of aesthetics has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from a predominantly formal and stylistic function to a strategic, relational dimension of value creation. Studies such as those by Candi and Saemundsson (2011) demonstrate how aesthetics contributes not only to the perceived quality of products and environments but also to their performance in terms of engagement, meaning, and recognisability.

The design field has undergone a significant epistemological and operational shift, moving beyond discrete solutions towards orchestration of complex socio-technical systems, services, and relational dynamics (Buchanan, 2001). This broader understanding of design objects entails the involvement of multiple actors and recognises value creation as a collaborative, situated process that emerges from different contributions and interactions. Value emerges through situated processes of interaction and specific contextual conditions. It follows that the design process becomes a practice capable of orchestrating relationships between actors and systems, through which certain qualities, including beauty, emerge. This perspective

is particularly relevant in contemporary urban transformation processes, in which public space is increasingly shaped by participatory, collaborative, and multi-stakeholder dynamics. In these contexts, design no longer acts exclusively through the production of forms or objects but through the configuration of conditions that enable social interaction, inclusion, and collective experience. Accordingly, aesthetic value is co-produced through situated interactions and cannot be interpreted as an intrinsic property of space detached from its users and practices. The relational perspective on beauty, therefore, holds that aesthetic qualities emerge from networks of relationships among human beings, artefacts, and socio-technical systems, rather than from isolated entities (Botter et al., 2024).

Relationships between material and immaterial dimensions become central objects of design activity, enabling experiential and relational qualities to be interpreted as meaningful dimensions of urban transformation. Accordingly, the “Beauty for All” model is proposed as a conceptual device that connects aesthetic theory, relational issues, and urban transformation processes. The model seeks to support interpretative and strategic reflections on how beauty may contribute to the construction of inclusive, participatory, and experientially meaningful public spaces, without functioning exclusively as an evaluation framework.

### **Measuring qualitative outcomes**

Evaluation systems in public space practices remain largely dominated by quantitative and performance-based indicators. These models, often structured around KPIs, prioritise measurable dimensions such as density, accessibility, flows, or economic return, proving effective for comparability, monitoring, and accountability. However, they tend to overlook or underrepresent qualitative, symbolic, and experiential dimensions that are central to urban quality (Montgomery, 2013).

In response to these limitations, several emerging evaluation approaches have attempted to integrate qualitative and quantitative dimensions while shifting attention from purely outcome-based measurements toward the processes that enable urban transformation and collective value creation. In these perspectives, evaluation is no longer interpreted exclusively as a technical procedure for measuring performance but as a process that contributes to the construction of meaning and value within projects themselves (Foglieni et al., 2017). Interesting examples focusing on experiences and qualitative outcomes include the Cornerstone Indicators model developed by Dark Matter Labs (2022) and the relational approach proposed by Vandevyvere and Wyckmans (2023), which they developed in the context of the CRAFT European project; these emphasise the importance of incorporating experiential dimensions into evaluation systems. These approaches are particularly relevant because they move beyond the assumption that urban quality can be fully captured through standardised metrics. Instead, they recognise that transformation processes involve situated experiences, relational dynamics, and context-dependent forms of value that require interpretative and adaptive evaluation frameworks.

In this evolving debate, the “Beauty for All” framework contributes to ongoing reflections on how experiential and relational dimensions may be incorporated into discussions on urban quality and transformation. It is not based on a standardised assessment protocol; instead, the framework supports the construction of situated interpretative structures through which beauty can be discussed in relation to local conditions, collective experiences, and evolving forms of public life. In this sense, aesthetics, participation, inclusion, and urban experience are brought together within a unified conceptual perspective

that supports reflection on contemporary urban transformation processes. This approach is particularly significant in the context of the New European Bauhaus, where beauty is increasingly interpreted as a condition connected to sustainability, accessibility, participation, and collective well-being. Consequently, discussing beauty in urban evaluation also requires reconsidering how public value, social interaction, and lived experience are interpreted in transformation processes.

## **Methodology**

The development of the “Beauty for All” model is grounded in a research approach that combines theoretical inquiry with participatory practices. The methodological framework adopts a transdisciplinary perspective integrating contributions from philosophical aesthetics, urban studies, design research, and social impact evaluation.

The research process was developed within the framework of the European project DESIRE – Designing the Irresistible Circular Society, funded under the New European Bauhaus initiative between 2023 and 2025. Within this initiative, the Milano Innovation District (MIND) functioned as an exploratory and experimental context through which relational and experiential interpretations of beauty could be discussed and conceptually articulated. MIND, developed on the former Expo 2015 site in Milan, is an ongoing urban transformation area characterised by institutional complexity, temporary uses, evolving spatial configurations, and the coexistence of heterogeneous actors and communities. In this sense, the district offered a particularly relevant context for reflecting on beauty not as a stable formal quality but as an emergent condition connected to interaction, appropriation, participation, and collective urban experience (Villari et al., 2025).

The research process included participatory workshops, co-design activities, exploratory discussions, and collective reflection sessions involving designers, institutional actors, MIND operators, citizens, students, and public space users. These activities contributed to the interpretative construction of the framework by enabling the emergence of situated understandings of beauty connected to public space experience.

The framework development process was articulated through three interconnected phases. The initial phase focused on reviewing the literature on aesthetics, public space, urban quality, and evaluation approaches to identify the main conceptual tensions surrounding beauty in contemporary urban discourse. This analysis highlighted three main issues: the persistence of object-based interpretations of beauty; the limited integration of experiential and relational dimensions in urban evaluation systems; and the growing need for frameworks that connect aesthetics, participation, inclusion, and sustainability.

The second phase consisted of exploratory and participatory activities developed in the MIND context. The research adopted a qualitative, interpretative logic to identify recurrent experiential patterns, shared perceptions, and situated meanings associated with public space quality. The materials collected included workshop outputs, observational notes, visual mappings, and qualitative feedback generated throughout the participatory process.

The third phase involved a process of conceptual synthesis through which the emerging reflections were reorganised into four interconnected interpretative dimensions: emotionality, conviviality, plurality, and equity. These dimensions constitute the conceptual structure of the “Beauty for All” framework. These

dimensions operate as interpretative lenses through which beauty can be discussed in relation to urban transformation processes, public space experience, and collective forms of inhabitation.

### **The “Beauty for All” model: Towards an accessible and equitable beauty of public space**

The “Beauty for All” model has been developed in the Milano Innovation District (MIND) to support a long-term transformation that makes public space accessible, inclusive, and meaningful to a plurality of users. In line with the principles of the New European Bauhaus (European Commission, 2021), the framework positions beauty as an integrative dimension that connects inclusion and participation to support sustainable transitions. The framework is conceived as a relational and operational structure composed of four interconnected levels: (1) interpretative dimensions, (2) observable experiential factors, (3) contextualised evaluation criteria and metrics, and (4) transformation scenarios. This articulation allows a theoretical notion of beauty to be translated into an operational device for designing and evaluating public space outcomes.

The model is structured around four interpretative dimensions – emotionality, conviviality, plurality, and equity – which articulate a contextualised concept of beauty for the MIND public space (See Figure 1). These dimensions do not function as isolated categories or fixed indicators but as relational lenses through which public space can be interpreted in experiential and social terms. Each dimension highlights specific aspects of urban experience, such as affective attachment, sociability, coexistence, accessibility, participation, and collective recognition. Within the exploratory reflections developed in the MIND, these dimensions informed the imagining of possible trajectories for transforming public space in ways related to collective well-being, participation, accessibility, and urban coexistence.

Indeed, the framework does not merely describe the current state of space but supports the identification of priorities, actions, and intervention strategies. For instance, in the MIND district, the dimension of emotionality was associated with perceived comfort, environmental recognisability, and a sense of safety, while conviviality was associated with the frequency of informal interactions, collective activities, and opportunities for spontaneous encounters. Plurality was understood as the coexistence of diverse practices, user groups, and forms of spatial appropriation, whereas equity was linked to accessibility, inclusion, and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

In this sense, the “Beauty for All” model does not propose a standardised system of indicators but a transferable approach to constructing situated evaluation systems, in which beauty is defined and assessed through collaborative processes. Accordingly, the framework should not be interpreted as a universal assessment protocol but rather as an adaptive, context-sensitive structure that supports urban transformation processes through locally situated interpretations of beauty.

#### *Beauty as emotionality*

Emotionality connects beauty to the experiential perceptions of public space. From this perspective, aesthetic quality is related to the capacity of public spaces to create specific conditions during experiences, such as feeling safe, comfortable, and familiar, and to foster a sense of belonging, thereby supporting people to feel comfortable, recognised, or engaged. In this perspective, elements often interpreted exclusively as functional, such as safety, comfort, accessibility, and environmental recognisability, become central components of aesthetic experience and perceived spatial quality. This concept is linked to place attachment in environmental psychology, which considers the emotional bonds between individuals and

places central to well-being and identity (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Within the “Beauty for All” framework, emotionality, therefore, functions as an interpretative dimension through which beauty can be understood as emerging from lived experience, affective attachment, and the capacity of public space to sustain meaningful relationships between individuals and environments.

#### *Beauty as conviviality*

Conviviality interprets beauty as a relational phenomenon emerging through social interaction. From this perspective, aesthetic value is not located in space itself but in the practices it enables and the relationships it facilitates. Public space is therefore perceived as aesthetically meaningful when it is collectively experienced, socially activated, and capable of supporting spontaneous encounters and shared practices (Koskinen & Meroni, 2024). Conviviality thus describes the extent to which public space can sustain forms of sociability, collective participation, and informal interaction. Botter et al. (2024) introduce the concept of convivial aesthetics, according to which aesthetic value emerges around shared practices and the collective use of space. In the “Beauty for All” model, beauty combined with conviviality translates into opportunities for encounters that public space creates, the ability to enable different uses, and the favouring of informal interactions. In the MIND context, this dimension was associated with the activation of common spaces, the coexistence of formal and informal activities, and the capacity of public environments to facilitate interaction among heterogeneous communities and users.

#### *Beauty as plurality*

In public spaces, plurality is closely related to the ability to include a multiplicity of users, uses, and meanings, fostering social interaction, empathy, and community cohesion. From this perspective, plurality enhances the relational and experiential quality of public space by enabling coexistence among different practices, identities, temporalities, and forms of appropriation. Theoretically, this dimension aligns with pluralistic and decolonial perspectives, conceiving plurality as the coexistence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems (Escobar, 2018). Plurality also implies embracing polycentric and participatory design models, decision-making protocols and inclusive forms of governance and spatial cohesion (Di Prete et al., 2021; European Commission, 2021).

Furthermore, plurality also implies moving beyond anthropocentric understandings of urban environments by acknowledging the role of more-than-human relations in public space. In the “Beauty for All” model, plurality is expressed through the capacity of public space to accommodate diverse uses, heterogeneous communities, multiple cultural representations, and differentiated ways of inhabiting and interpreting space. Beauty, therefore, emerges through processes of coexistence, negotiation, and mutual recognition among different actors, practices, and perspectives. In this sense, aesthetically meaningful public spaces are not conceived as homogeneous or fully controlled environments but as open, adaptive ecologies that support diversity and collective coexistence. In the “Beauty for All” framework, plurality describes how beauty can be connected to diversity, coexistence, openness, and the capacity of public space to sustain multiple forms of collective life.

#### *Beauty as equity*

Equity can be understood as a dimension that acknowledges unequal starting conditions and seeks to address barriers to equal access to opportunities (Soja, 2013). Equity connects the concept of beauty in public space to issues of spatial justice, accessibility, and participation. From this perspective, aesthetic

quality cannot be separated from the conditions that regulate who can access, use, and shape space. Beauty is, therefore, reframed not as a privilege for a few but as a collective right that should be ensured for all. In public space transformation processes, equity concerns the possibility for diverse communities and users to access resources, opportunities, services, and decision-making processes under fair and inclusive conditions. It entails, for example, the capacity to provide fair resource distribution or to foster inclusive forms of governance. From this perspective, beauty becomes inseparable from the capacity of urban environments to support inclusion, accessibility, representation, and shared agency. It means going beyond physical and structural issues to include perceptions of powerlessness and the consequent experiences of exclusion.

In the “Beauty for All” model, equity is translated into factors such as accessibility, social inclusion, and participatory governance. The dimension of equity is explicitly related to a normative interpretation of beauty, connecting aesthetic quality to dignity, justice, accessibility, and participation. Public space becomes beautiful not only when it is visually or experientially appreciated, but when it enables equitable forms of presence, use, recognition, and collective participation. In the MIND context, this dimension was associated with the accessibility of spaces and services, the inclusion of heterogeneous publics, and the possibility for different actors to contribute to shaping the transformation process over time.

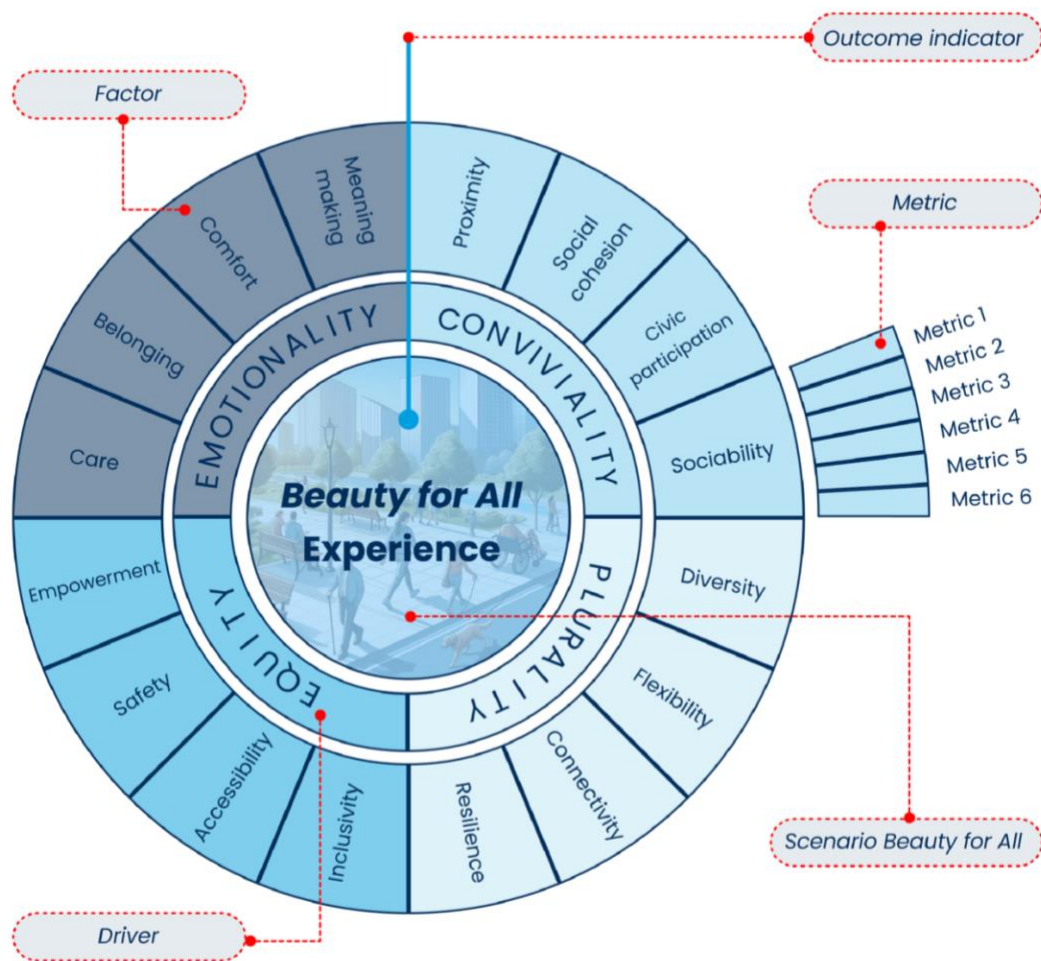


Figure 1: The “Beauty for All” model developed within the Milano Innovation District (MIND), illustrating the relationship between interpretative dimensions, experiential factors, contextualised metrics, and transformation scenarios.

## Conclusions

This paper has explored the role of beauty in public space by developing the “Beauty for All” model within the MIND. It proposes a design and evaluation framework that integrates New European Bauhaus principles, placing beauty at the centre of the urban regeneration process, and offers a tool to translate these values into design practices and outcome evaluation systems.

The framework interprets evaluation as a participatory and interpretative process, and understands beauty as a situated and relational phenomenon that emerges through social interaction, spatial practices, and collective experience. The main contribution of this work is to propose an interpretative model that translates beauty into an observable, designable, and evaluative dimension. The model is conceived as an open and adaptable framework whose transferability depends on the possibility of reactivating locally situated processes of interpretation, participation, and contextualisation. It is designed to be applied in different urban contexts, adopting contextualised indicators.

At the same time, the framework presents some limitations. The construction of qualitative and relational evaluation systems requires interpretative capabilities, participatory processes, and context-sensitive research activities that may be difficult to standardise or scale within conventional urban assessment practices. Moreover, the model should currently be interpreted as a propositional and framework-building contribution rather than a fully validated assessment protocol.

Future developments may explore how the framework can support further discussions on urban evaluation, participatory evaluation approaches, and public space transformation across diverse urban contexts. In particular, further research may examine how relational and experiential interpretations of beauty can inform urban quality, sustainability, and collective well-being, redefining measurement approaches and decision-making tools to preserve situated, relational, and adaptive processes.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all colleagues in the DESIRE research group who contributed to and supported the development of this work through discussions, feedback, and collaboration. Special thanks are extended to Giulia Pietracaprina, whose Master’s Degree thesis in Product-Service-System Design at Politecnico di Milano provided an important contribution to the development and refinement of the “Beauty for All” framework.

## Declaration on the use of AI

Artificial intelligence tools were used to support the preparation of this manuscript, specifically to translate selected sections into academic English and to review the linguistic fluency and coherence of certain logical passages in the paper. All conceptual development, theoretical framing, interpretation of results, and final revisions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

## References

- Al-Azzawi, S., Inalhan, G., & Al-Azzawi, N. (2025). Aesthetic–restorative qualities and social interaction in public open spaces: investigating the pathways to place attachment. *Architecture*, 5(4), Article 114. <https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture5040114>
- Araabi, H. F. (2022). Commentary: Beauty in urban design - oppression or emancipation?. *Urban Design International*, 27(2), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-022-00202-z>
- Berleant, A. (2018). *Aesthetics and environment: Variations on a theme*. Routledge.

- Berleant, A. (2025). The aesthetics of engagement. In G. Parsons, N. Hettinger, & S. Shapsay (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of nature and environmental aesthetics* (pp. 93-103). Routledge.
- Berleant, A., & Carlson, A. (Eds.). (2007). *The aesthetics of human environments*. Broadview Press.
- Bishop, P., & Williams, L. (2012). *The temporary city*. Routledge.
- Böhme, G. (2013). The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres. *Ambiances*.  
<https://doi.org/10.4000/ambiances.315>
- Botter, F., van Amstel, F. M. C., Mazzarotto Filho, M. A., Guimarães, C. (2024). Prospective design: A structuralist design aesthetic founded on relational qualities. In *DRS2024: Boston, 23–28 June, Boston, USA*.  
<https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.883>
- Buchanan, R. (2001). Design research and the new learning. *Design Issues*, 17(4), 3–23.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1511916>
- Candi, M., & Saemundsson, R. J. (2011). Exploring the relationship between aesthetic design as an element of new service development and performance. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 28(4), 536–557.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5885.2011.00827.x>
- Carlson, A. (2005). *Aesthetics and the environment: The appreciation of nature, art and architecture*. Routledge.
- Carmona, M. (2019). Principles for public space design, planning to do better. *Urban Design International*, 24(1), 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-018-0070-3>
- Dark Matter Labs. (2023). *Cornerstone indicators: Developing a prototype indicator design process*.  
<https://darkmatterlabs.org/initiatives/cornerstone-indicators>
- Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as experience*. Perigee Books. (Original work published 1934)
- Di Prete, B., Rebaglio, A., Crippa, D., Bargna, I., Santanera, G., & Michelini, L. (2021). Design for urban regeneration: Future scenarios and common challenges in a multispecies world for synergistic action-research between design and anthropology. In B. Camocini & F. Vergani (Eds.), *From human-centered to more-than-human design: Exploring the transition* (pp. 28–61). Springer.
- Di Stefano, E. (2017). *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*. Carocci.
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.
- European Commission. (2021). *New European Bauhaus: Beautiful, sustainable, together*. <https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu>
- Findegli, A. (1994). Ethics, aesthetics, and design. *Design Issues*, 10(2), 49–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1511628>.
- Foglieni, F., Villari, B., & Maffei, S. (2017). *Designing better services: A strategic approach from design to evaluation*. Springer.
- Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for people*. Island Press.
- Granger, D. A. (2003). A review of Richard Shusterman, 2000, *Pragmatist aesthetics: Living beauty, rethinking art*. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22, 381–402. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025157631150>
- Kant, I. (2000). *Critique of judgment* (P. Guyer & E. Matthews, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1790)
- Kitchin, R., Laurialt, T. P., & McArdle, G. (2015). Knowing and governing cities through urban indicators, city benchmarking and real-time dashboards. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 2(1), 6–28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2014.983149>
- Koskinen, I., & Meroni, A. (2024). Convivial aesthetics in social innovation: A nested framework from three projects in Milano. *CoDesign*, 20(3), 481–498.
- Lynch, K. (2013). “The image of the environment” and “The city image and its elements”: From *The Image of the City* (1960). In M. Larice & E. Macdonald (Eds.), *The urban design reader* (2nd ed., pp. 125–138). Routledge.
- Montgomery, C. (2013). *Happy city: Transforming our lives through urban design*. Penguin UK.
- Möttus, M., & Lamas, D. (2015). Aesthetics of interaction design: A literature review. In *Proceedings of the Multimedia, Interaction, Design and Innovation (MIDI '15)*, Article 1.  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/2814464.2814466>
- Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.09.006>
- Sharifi, A., & Murayama, A. (2013). A critical review of seven selected neighbourhood sustainability assessment tools. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 38, 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2012.06.006>
- Soja, E. W. (2013). *Seeking spatial justice*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Stroud, S. R. (2014). The art of experience: Dewey on the aesthetic. In W. Malecki (Ed.), *Practicing pragmatist aesthetics: Critical perspectives on the arts* (pp. 33-46). Rodopi.
- Vandevyvere, H., & Wyckmans, A. (2023). NEB impact model: Summary for cities (Deliverable D1.1, version 30 June 2023). CrAft – Creating Actionable Futures (Horizon Europe project), Norwegian University of Science and

Technology (NTNU). <https://craft-cities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/D1.1-CrAft-NEB-Impact-Model-updated.pdf>

Villari, B., Pietracaprina, G., Martelloni, L., La Loggia, F. (2025). Beauty, inclusiveness, and sustainability for the public space in MIND. In A. Deserti & E. Puerari (Eds.), *Experimenting with the New European Bauhaus values and principles in urban transformation*. Springer.

Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The social life of small urban spaces*. Conservation Foundation.