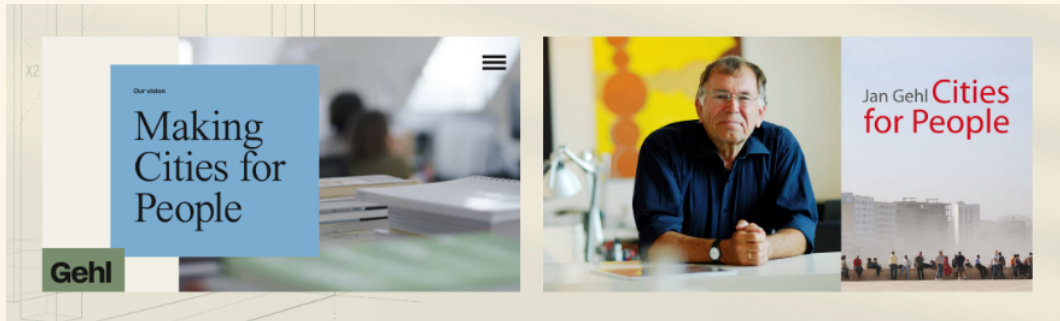


Website Critique: Gehl Architects

Natalie Aramendia & Isabella Kroon



Overview:

For our website critique, we chose the webpage for Gehl Architects. Gehl is an urban research and design consulting firm that specializes in human-centered urban design and offers expertise in the fields of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, and city planning. As one of the top global firms, it is crucial to have a webpage that matches the quality of their projects and showcases a strong brand identity.

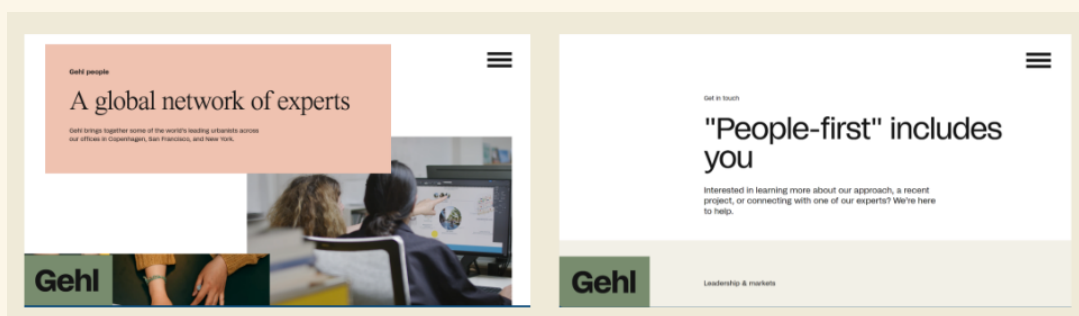
Design & Usability

Design style & use of space:

Gehl's webpage opted for a very clean, rectangular, and minimalist design style. However, the abundance of unbalanced white space between elements, especially at the tops of pages, can cause disorientation and lead users to question whether the page has fully loaded. The website's minimalistic layout also leads to an over-reliance on scrolling in order to include all necessary content.

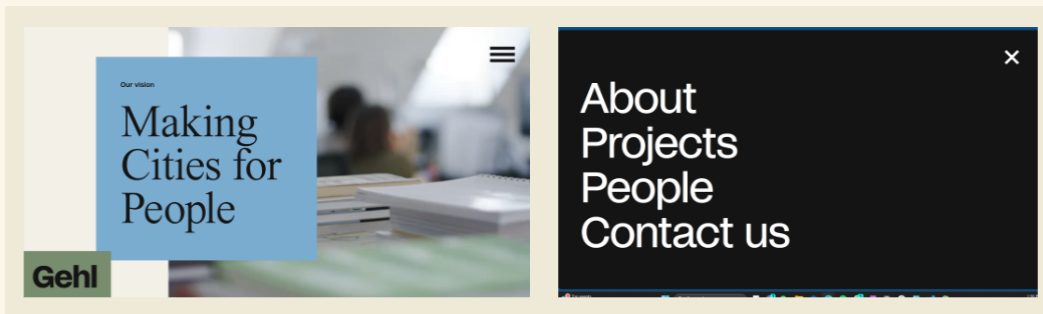
Gehl 'Sticky' Adjustment:

At the bottom left corner of the webpage sits a static "Gehl" sticky. Relocating the 'Gehl' sticky from the bottom to the top of the page would align with standard web design conventions, ensure a familiar browsing experience for users, and avoid the inconvenience of covering new content during scrolling.

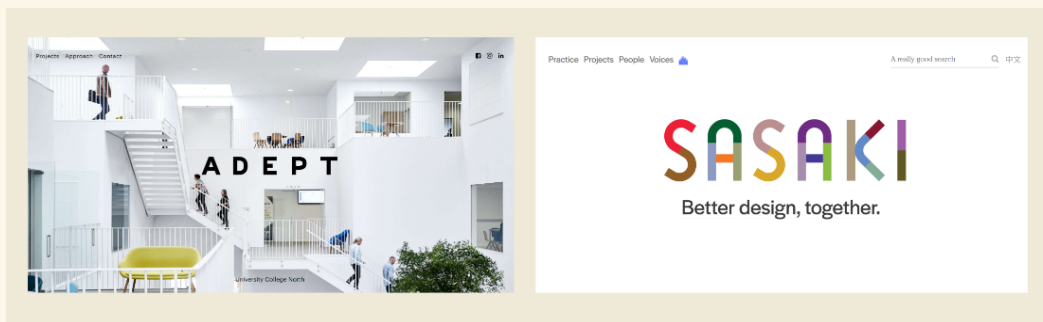


Navigation:

As an architecture firm, showcasing past projects is a cornerstone of the website's purpose. However, the existing navigation structure, hidden within a hamburger menu for 'about,' 'projects,' 'people,' and 'contact,' lacks visibility. To address this, we propose implementing a visible navigation bar at the top of the website. This enhancement facilitates quick and intuitive access to key sections, encouraging users to explore the website's offerings.



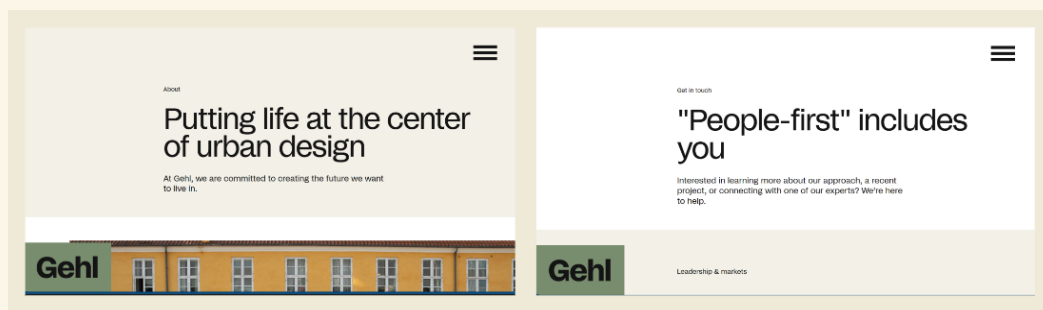
Current design: Hamburger menu



Recommendation: Navigation bar

Visual Hierarchy:

The top of each page is crucial in communicating to the user the purpose of the page, which can be done through establishing a clear visual hierarchy. Currently, the website's design emphasizes generic vision statements over page-specific information, and improved use of bolding and font sizes can enhance user understanding. For example, the contact page should be titled correctly at the top to indicate to the user that they are on the right page; the current bolded statement of *"People-first" includes you* could confuse a user with a careers page.

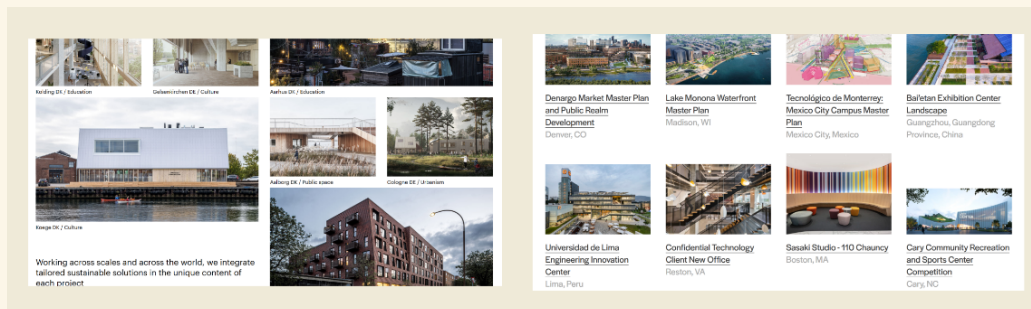


Portfolio Display:

The gallery under 'projects' tab suffers from large inconsistent spacing and varied project display sizes, requiring unnecessary scrolling. Implementing a more compact grid layout would allow users to grasp the breadth of the firm's work at a glance.



Current gallery design



Recommendation: Reduce space between projects

Interaction cues & consistency:

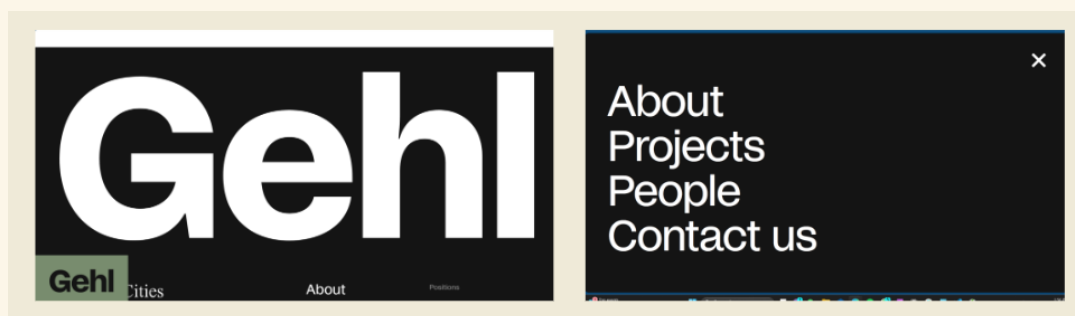
Icons serve as visual cues, guiding users on the expected interaction with specific features. An example of inconsistency arises in the use of the (+) icon. In the 'about' page, the (+) icon appropriately expands information within the box. However, on the 'people' page, encountering a tab opening to the right is unexpected. We recommend standardizing the dimensions of contact boxes across pages and ensuring that the (+) icon consistently communicates a uniform action to enhance predictability and user understanding.





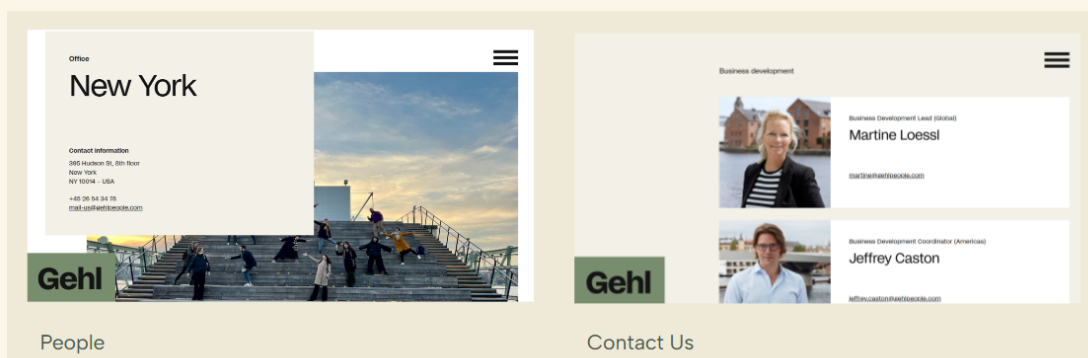
Font sizing:

There are two abnormal font sizes found on Gehl's website: a statement "Gehl" resting above the footer, and the navigation links in the hamburger menu. Large statement font sizes should be used purposefully, and if used are typically found at the top of the page for impactful brand identity, not near the footer. The large text for the hamburger menu navigation buttons is also inconsistent with the design style and can be shocking to the user.



Content:

The content division between pages is often not very clear; for example, office contacts can be found under "People", and people can be found under "Contact Us".



Accessibility

The Good:

The website met certain important accessibility standards. First, its minimal design not only enhances usability, but makes the website more accessible for those with cognitive impairments. There are only a few colors used throughout the website, which have a high contrast with each other and meet contrast standards for those with visual impairments. Most texts were at least 16px, although some footer texts and subtexts were too small at 14 px.

Item	Background Color	Text Color	Font	Contrast	Ratio Success
1	#000000	#FFFFFF	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA
2	#FFFFFF	#000000	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA
3	#000000	#FFFFFF	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA
4	#FFFFFF	#000000	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA
5	#000000	#FFFFFF	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA
6	#FFFFFF	#000000	Family: Arial, sans-serif; Size: 12pt; Weight: Normal; Line Height: 1.2	21.0	Passes 2.1 AA

The Good:

- Color contrast
- Text size
- Minimalist
- Atomic design in flex grid

The Bad:

However, the website also lacks several basic accessibility measures.

Videos & Images

- Videos and images are not encoded with semantic HTML and are instead coded with nondescript “div” tags. The videos do not have any descriptions, and most images do not contain alt-text. The images that do include alt-text only include the location where the photo was taken instead of any descriptive information. In addition, many of the images and videos are embedded using a URL link. When there is no alt-text in these cases, there is no content at all for a screen-reader to relay to the user. Therefore, videos and images are not accessible to those with visual impairments using a screen reader. Finally, most links simply say “Read More,” which can be confusing and suspicious for those using a screen reader.

Keyboard navigation:

- When using “tab” as a keyboard input to navigate the website, text is often not fully visible. There is also no skip navigation option, so those with manual impairments may struggle using the website.



Responsiveness

The website is created with atomic design, with organisms that feature an image, a text box with a title and descriptive text, and a link to access more information. Not only does this enhance usability, but their use of sections and flex grids allows for these organisms to easily respond to screen resolutions. However, the general website layout creates an over-reliance on scrolling to access content, and this is worsened when using a phone or smaller screen where content is condensed into one column. In addition, images and videos do not contain sizing specifications, and are therefore blurry and awkwardly cropped when viewed by phone.

Summary

Overall, for such a well-recognized design firm, we were surprised at the under-developed website and amount of usability and accessibility issues we encountered. We would recommend reformatting the website to be less simplistic by improving the use of white space. In addition, usability would be enhanced by following website conventions to make information more easily accessible. Finally, the website should ensure it adheres to Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) in order for its content to be available to all users.