

Meaningful Urban Design: Teleological/Catalytic/Relevant

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ABSTRACT *The paper begins with a critique of contemporary urban design: the field of urban design is vague because it is an ambiguous amalgam of several disciplines, including architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning and civil engineering; it is superficial because it is obsessed with impressions and aesthetics of physical form; and it is practised as an extension of architecture, which often implies an exaggerated emphasis on the end product. The paper then proposes a meaningful (i.e. truly consequential to improved quality of life) approach to urban design, which consists of: being teleological (i.e. driven by purposes rather than defined by conventional disciplines); being catalytic (i.e. generating or contributing to long-term socio-economic development processes); and being relevant (i.e. grounded in first causes and pertinent human values). The argument is illustrated with a number of case studies of exemplary urban designers, such as Michael Pyatok and Henri Ciriani, and urban design projects, such as Horton Plaza and Aranya Nagar, from around the world. The paper concludes with an outline of future directions in urban design, including criteria for successful urban design projects (e.g. striking aesthetics, convenient function and long-term impact) and a proposed pedagogical approach (e.g. interdisciplinary, in-depth and problem-driven).*

Provocations

In the early part of 1998, two provocative urban design events occurred at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The first was an exhibition organized as part of an international symposium on 'City, Space + Globalization'. The second was a lecture by the renowned Dutch architect and urbanist, Rem Koolhaas. By themselves, the events generated much interest and discussion, yet were innocuous, compared to, say, Prince Charles's controversial comments on contemporary cities in the UK or the gathering momentum of the New Urbanism movement in the USA. Both events, however, did provoke visceral reactions in this observer about the superficiality of current approaches to urban design.

The two events were sadly symptomatic of traits which render most urban design projects insignificant within the broader context of critical and fundamental urban challenges. Koolhaas is so provocative (but not necessarily either particularly profound or meaningful) that his writings on cities have been analysed by academic scholars (see Saunders, 1997). Koolhaas (1995, p. xix)

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admits that architects are “confronted with an arbitrary sequence of demands, with parameters they did not establish, in countries they hardly know, about issues they are only dimly aware of, expected to deal with problems that have proved intractable to brains vastly superior to their own”, yet purports to analyse complex urban conditions in developing countries such as China. For example, his slide show in Ann Arbor—derived from Harvard University’s Project on the City—was an aggregation of spectacular images (e.g. cranes hovering above giant construction projects), shallow impressions (e.g. that contemporary cities are largely unplanned) and novel vocabulary (e.g. Bigness) in describing the cities of the Pearl River Delta of China. Students of cities, especially architects, are easily dazzled by the impressionistic, spectacular and novel descriptions of contemporary cities by architects such as Koolhaas. However, while these observations are perceptive, are they useful in any meaningful fashion?

Koolhaas over-reads and romanticizes many of the urban phenomena that he at the same time so sharply and originally perceives: Coney Island, skyscrapers, Manhattan(ism), congestion, Radio City Music Hall, the Berlin Wall and so on. Koolhaas the contrarian is determined to be unconventional (which is reflective of the tyranny of novelty in the design fields), and thus reverses expectations that Europeans will view Americans condescendingly. Hating European snobbery and effeteness, he goes, at times, to an opposite extreme and becomes a gullible, bedazzled idealizer of the USA and its associated phenomena: blankness, the ordinary, the unself-conscious, the self-indulgent, the ugly, the crude, the banal (Saunders, 1997). Furthermore, in his ideas about Bigness, Generic Cities and globalization, Koolhaas commits the logical fallacy of presenting part of the truth as the whole: presenting certain conditions—such as those in new Chinese cities—as *the* conditions.

Likewise, the ‘City, Space + Globalization’ exhibition purported to display new and exciting ideas as well as projects about the future city. However, the exhibition was dominated by spectacular images, novel vocabulary and projects that were *in* cities but clearly not *about* cities. The exhibition presented recent work by Michael Rotondi, Michael Sorkin, Rem Koolhaas and other architects who tend to approach the urban problematic primarily from an aesthetic perspective, focusing on striking impressions and images of cities. Their misplaced, and primarily architectural, obsession with form tends to gloss over the complex (e.g. political) and multiple (e.g. economic) factors which actually shape a city and make it an enriching (e.g. social) experience. For example:

The agora was *funky*, not the kind of centralizing, symmetrical space that one imagines in classical antiquity. It’s still a good model. The agora described the size of a tractable body politic and offered the possibility of assembly in a variety of registers, modalities, and settings. The agora supported both efficient passage and organized encounters while simultaneously offering innumerable routes and hence innumerable circumstances for chance, unstructured, and accidental, and serendipitous encounters. (Sorkin, 1997, p. 13; emphasis added)

There is no attempt in the passage above to more fully understand or explain exactly how and why the space of the agora worked, or for that matter, did not work, the way it was intended. This aesthetic obsession is further enhanced by Sorkin’s drawings of ‘Neurasia’, a clever play of words that is akin to Koolhaas’s

peculiar inventions, Bigness and Generic Cities. The drawings (e.g. shifting forms in orange and green) and words (e.g. 'funky') certainly catch our attention, but do they provide any meaningful understanding of contemporary cities, or a useful means of intervening in them? Probably not. The drawings and spatial impressions demonstrate an over-eagerness to be unconventional and spectacular, at the cost of being penetrating and meaningful; which consequently implies a lack of deep understanding and a lack of patience—symptomatic of architects' view of cities in terms of images.

The present author argues for a movement away from this obsession with the architect's focus on image in urban design; toward a focus that is more on the 'urban' than on the 'design' in urban design; and for an urban design that begins and ends with the complex and rich dynamics of the contemporary city rather than with physical form. Thus, an urban designer is not simply an architect, landscape architect or planner who has an interest or has built projects in cities, but one who has a sophisticated and deep understanding of cities and of the substantive contribution that urban design can make to cities.

Significance

The field of urban design is in a state of flux. Various described as an ambiguous overlap of the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning and civil engineering on the one hand, and as a generalist that helps design cities on the other, urban design lacks a clear definition (and hence, a useful understanding) and a clear direction (and hence, a useful purpose).

Simultaneously, countries such as the USA are witnessing an urban revival, as demonstrated by renewed interest in revitalizing inner cities, an expanding market for urban housing, the prominence of cities in popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, popular television programmes such as *Seinfeld*, films such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a resurgence of urban design curricula at leading universities such as Berkeley and Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) and a recent influx of international urban design journals, including the *Journal of Urban Design*, *Urban Design International* and *Urban Design Quarterly*. Seminal books, including *The Next American Metropolis* (Calthorpe, 1993), *Great Streets* (Jacobs, 1993) and *Post-modern Urbanism* (Ellin, 1996), have attracted much attention in the past decade. Several large-scale urban projects have been built recently or are currently under way in metropolitan regions such Detroit (e.g. Detroit Lions and Tigers stadiums, Renaissance Center renovations, new casinos and airport expansion), in the USA (e.g. Getty Center in Los Angeles, neo-traditional residential developments and conversion of military bases and obsolete industrial areas) and in the world (e.g. London's Docklands, Hong Kong Airport and the rebuilding of Beirut and Berlin).

Unfortunately, much of this recent interest in urban design repeats the familiar deficiencies of the past: a focus on the superficial aesthetics and the picturesque aspects of cities (instead of what role aesthetics play, say, in community development processes), an over-emphasis on the architect as urban designer and an obsession with design (instead of a more profound interdisciplinary approach that addresses fundamental causes), an understanding of urban design primarily as a finished product (instead of an ongoing long-term process intertwined with social and political mechanisms) and a pedagogical process that is comfortably rooted in architecture and design (rather than in the rich experiences, processes and evolution of cities).

Meaningful Urban Design

There are several critiques of the manner in which urban design is taught, practised and researched at present. The conventional approach to defining the field of urban design is morphological; that is, according to the way it is structured and organized. Thus, urban design is often regarded as an ambiguous combination of architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture and civil engineering. This definition puts urban designers at odds—over power and resources—with architects, planners, landscape architects and civil engineers.

Another problem with current urban design thought and practice is the sense that it is architecture, only at a larger scale. In this school of thought, there is far too much emphasis on ‘design’ (e.g. aesthetics) and not enough of an understanding of ‘urban’ (e.g. how cities actually work). The architectural approach to urban design is reflected in analysis that is purely conceptual (e.g. vectors flying off in all kinds of directions) or too abstract (e.g. quotations from the latest French philosopher in vogue). Attempting to design a city as one designs a building is clearly misleading and dangerous, because unlike individual buildings, which tend to be objects, cities are highly complex, large-scale, organic entities, and contain a bewildering multiplicity of users.

Furthermore, few contemporary urban designers demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the complex ways in which cities function. Especially glaring are a naivety at best, an acceptable ignorance, and a resistance at worst, in understanding power structures (i.e. how and why critical decisions are made about the pattern of investment in cities, and who makes them) and where urban designers fit (i.e. usually marginalized) within such a power structure, dominated as it is by elected officials, local bureaucrats and prominent developers.

On the basis of a new synthesis of existing ideas (for example, see Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996), the present author proposes a meaningful approach to urban design (i.e. one that is truly consequential in improving quality of life) that consists of: being teleological (i.e. driven by purpose rather than defined by disciplines); being catalytic (i.e. generating or contributing to long-term development processes); and being relevant (i.e. grounded in first causes and pertinent human values). In this new synthesis, urban design is circumscribed primarily by *urban* scale and complexity, and rests upon an *interdisciplinary* set of skills, methodologies and bodies of knowledge.

Teleological

In this notion of urban design, it is an ongoing process with built form products (e.g. open spaces, blocks, streets and neighbourhoods) along the way. Primarily, however, the purpose of urban design is to be a stimulus to other goals which are more critical to society and to the substantive challenges facing contemporary cities. These goals and purposes include community development (e.g. empowerment and social integration of marginalized populations), economic development (e.g. inner city revitalization), international development (e.g. cross-cultural learning and collaboration), environmental sustainability (e.g. efficient land use) and fecund urban environments (e.g. neighbourhood safety, range of urban form choices and interconnected types).

Such an understanding of urban design is teleological; that is, it is driven by purpose and not by morphology (i.e. conventional structures of fields and

disciplines). Thus, the phenomenon of urban sprawl and its attendant problems (e.g. cost, resources and social fragmentation) would be a goal and a challenge involving not only design, but also economic efficiency, public policy, social behaviour, cultural understanding and political processes. There would be a purpose-driven (rather than discipline-driven) urban design process for increasing density in a culture of sprawl that addresses important concerns such as privacy/publicness and a sense of home. This would be done for more efficient use of a scarce resource (i.e. land), for greater convenience of access and to create greater and more usable green spaces.

In this view, the primary purpose of urban design would be the improvement of the fundamental quality of life (i.e. socio-economic development), rather than just the quality of urban form. The quality of life is not concerned as much with what a built environment *looks* like, as with how a built environment *works*, in terms of the community, the economy and increasing mutually beneficial international exchange. For example, an urban design project should empower its users (i.e. community development), strengthen the local economy (i.e. economic development) and foster international understanding, opportunity and exchange (i.e. international development). Table 1 further articulates these purposes of teleological urban design, and the case studies which follow illustrate these ideas.

Specifically, a teleological urban design would address three critical aspects of the urban experience, which are the relationships between the city and the economy, the city and society and the city and power. The relationship between the city and the economy considers the economic functioning of the city, including the city as a point in the production landscape as well as a site of investment, the changing international division of labour and the consequent effects on the specific urban economies. The relationship between the city and society focuses on the city as an arena of social interaction, the distribution of social groups, residential segregation, the construction of gender and ethnic identities and patterns of class formation. The relationship between the city and power is the representation of urban structure and political power, and considers the city to be a system of communication, a recorder of the distribution of power and an arena for the social struggles over the meaning and substance of the urban experience.

Catalytic

Urban design projects and processes would generate or contribute significantly to three types of socio-economic development processes—community development, economic development and international development—while simultaneously enhancing the built environment of cities.

Urban Design and Community Development

Urban design as a catalyst for, or as an active component of, community development consists of intelligent community participation in projects facilitated by dialogue between community representatives and urban designers and community leadership that is representative of community views, institutional partnerships (e.g. between private and non-profit sectors) and decision-making structures (e.g. simulations and games) that lead to enabling urban environ-

Table 1. Elements of meaningful urban design

Specializations and realms	Urban design core	With community development	With economic development	With international development
<i>Pedagogy</i>	Teleological design	Intelligent participation: dialogue, leadership	Geographic information systems: urban spatial and locational modelling	Impact of foreign aid
Skills	Design in urban contexts	Institutional analysis	Employment generation strategies in projects	Impact of international private investment
Methodologies	Design methodologies: aesthetics, empirical evidence, community-based	Decision-making structures (e.g. SimCity)	Programmes (e.g. job training) as urban design projects	Tension between local and global pressures
Topics	Communications: graphic, verbal, written, computer making processes	Ongoing experience of urban design: enriches expression and identity	Backward and forward linkages in projects	Cross-cultural learning
Courses	Urban design as decision-making processes	Activities, events, programmes and services as part of urban design	Integrating retail and commercial facilities with housing, institutions	International collaboration
	Set of urban archetypes and combinations		Street revitalization	Role of informal sector in developing country cities
	Evolving city: old vs. new		NY NY Casino, Las Vegas, NM	Deeper understanding of different cultures and political economies
<i>Practice</i>	Battery Park, New York	The Ark, San Diego, CA	Dudley Street, Boston, MA	Indore Housing, India
Examples of projects	Museum by Stirling, Stuttgart	Doyle Street Cohousing, CA	Camden Yards, Baltimore, MD	Olympic Projects, Barcelona
Exemplary practitioners	Parc Andre Citroen, Paris	Hisman Hin-nu Terrace, CA	Robert Gibbs	Rebuilding, Berlin
	Broadgate II, London	Enterprise Foundation	Bernard Gliberman	Alvar Aalto
	Duany and Plater-Zyberk	Samuel Mockbee	Skidmore Owings Merrill	Rafael Moneo
	Chan Krieger Associates	Michael Pyatok	Shopping centre designers	Alvaro Siza
	Machado and Silveti	Doug Kelbaugh charettes	Porter (1995), Garvin (1996)	B. V. Doshi
<i>Research</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Theory/Case Studies</i>
Seminal books	Lynch (1981)	Jacobs (1961), Sandercock (1998)	Frieden & Segalyn (1989), Attoe & Logan (1989)	Sassen (2000), Savitch (1998), Serageldin (1997)
Key articles	<i>Methodology</i> Alexander <i>et al.</i> (1977)	Schmeekloth & Shibley (1995), Krumholz & Clavel (1994)		<i>Challenges</i> Gilbert & Gugler (1992)
	<i>History</i> Kostof (1991)	<i>Methodology</i> Rowe (1997), Hester (1990)		<i>Methodology</i> Frampton (1992)
	<i>Challenges</i> Short (1996)			

ments, and the soft-programming of urban design (e.g. incorporation of public expression and cultural identity, and activities, events, programmes and services integrated with the built forms).

For the urban designer, design communication is inherent in the act of design, both as internal communication in the thinking process, and as an external communication with the client, user or broader community. The people within a given context, such as homeowners in a residential neighbourhood or business owners in a commercial downtown, are the agents of change, aided by a communication process that speaks to the formal aspects of their environment. The better this communication process of design, the higher the level of public awareness and sense of ownership, the better the internal decisions of change. There are conventional public involvement formats such as public hearings, city council meetings and planning commission presentations. There are also informal meetings, workshops and brainstorming sessions. One of the most powerful and effective mechanisms for active and intelligent community participation is the charette.

A charette is a short and intense workshop, of a day or at the most a few days, in which the urban design team works with a local community and its social, economic or political leaders to arrive at a conceptual and implementation strategy for a particular project (Kasprisin & Pettinari, 1995). The process usually begins with a consortium of local citizens and organizations inviting a team of private (e.g. an architectural firm) or non-profit (e.g. the American Institute of Architects) urban designers to participate, often along with a local task force. The community and team leaders then prepare for the short, intense workshop by arranging for publicity, student participation, work locations and supplies. The workshop itself may subsequently consist of meetings with different representatives, site tours, open town hall meetings, personal interviews with various stakeholders, detailed work sessions in groups, a written and graphic report and a presentation of findings (see Figure 1). In some cases, there is a follow-up about a year later, in which the urban designer meets with the community to assess the success of the process and provide additional advice.

The effectiveness of this community participation methodology and the often surprising results it generates have been well documented by Kelbaugh (1997) in a series of charettes in the Seattle region. Similarly, the Urban Design Group (1998) provides a series of clear, concise and extremely useful community participation forums, including innovative mechanisms such as street stalls and interactive displays carried out in different parts of the UK.

The popularity of the computer program SimCity, a city building simulator, attests to the possibility of designing urban simulation models with broad public appeal. Whether one is teaching urban processes and structures, analysing specific urban problems or, most importantly, involving the public in urban design and planning processes, SimCity displays a vast, untapped potential of urban design games and simulations. These examples point to creative, engaging and beneficial forms of not only community participation but also, more significantly, community development, because they increase community awareness, generate community strategies and suggest modes of community intervention in the future of their own environments.

Another approach to long-term processes of community development is illustrated by the Hismen Hin-nu Terrace housing project in Oakland, CA (Jones *et al.*, 1995). With a grant from the City of Oakland, the architectural firm of

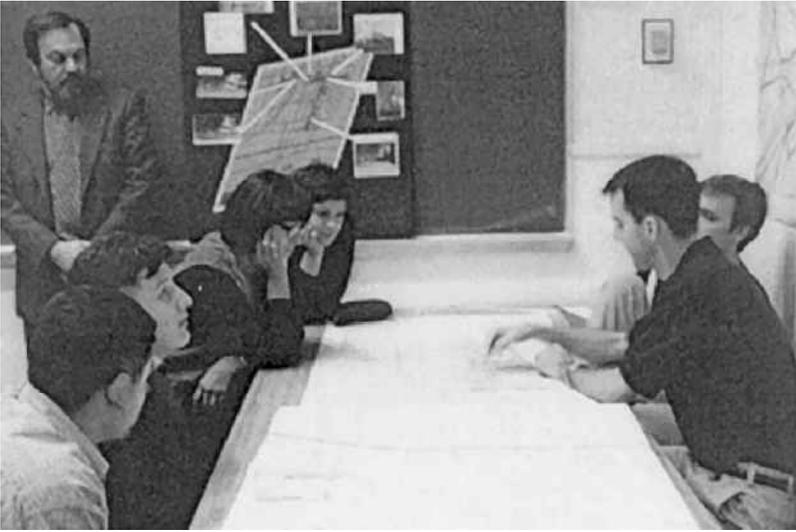


Figure 1. Community-based charette for an urban design plan for the commercial revitalization of Bagley Avenue in Detroit, MI.

Pyatok and Associates studied development scenarios for housing and neighbourhood services on several sites in the city. The San Antonio Community Development Council, serving African American, Latino and Native American residents, expressed interest in developing affordable housing for families and seniors on one of the sites, and joined with the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, which serves the Asian American community. Pyatok and Associates organized a series of workshops using participatory modelling kits to help over 30 neighbourhood participants to design plans for the site and to understand the implications of density.

The 92 housing units in the project now not only house families and elderly citizens with low and very low incomes, but also help mend a deteriorating neighbourhood by restoring its main boulevard with housing over shops. Family housing with a day care centre around quiet courtyards built behind a ground-floor market, niches for street vendors and a job training centre all contribute to community development in the neighbourhood. A multi-ethnic mix of tenants is depicted in exterior murals, frieze panels, decorative tiles and steel entry gates in the form of a burst of sunshine. The art is intended to prove that the USA's cultural diversity is a source of energy for creating community, rather than a source of conflict.

Urban Design and Economic Development

Urban design as a catalyst for, or as an active component of, economic development involves designing projects that generate employment on a long-term basis, attract investment into deprived areas and increase business and tax revenues. In this context, a city is not only a spatial concentration of a large number of people, but also contains a density of economic activities. Urban



Figure 2. Horton Plaza in San Diego, CA, has not only generated jobs and successfully attracted customers and tourists, but has also helped revive the surrounding areas.

designers can be more effective if they understand, and indeed encourage, beneficial economic activities through physical projects.

The Horton Plaza, a highly successful shopping centre in San Diego, CA, generated jobs for local residents, when city officials utilized their position as investors in the project to negotiate for positions (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989). The mayor of the city turned to the Private Industry Council of San Diego County, a training and placement organization, to find jobs for low-income and unemployed San Diegans in Horton Plaza and other city-assisted development projects. The council then served as the main employment office for Horton Plaza. By March 1986, store openings had created nearly 1000 new jobs, and the council filled half of them (see Figure 2). Of the people placed by the council, 70% were minority workers, and 60% came from high-unemployment, low-income neighbourhoods targeted for recruitment.

Lower Downtown, Denver's most exciting commercial sub-market in recent years, provides one model for the economic reinvestment and revitalization of other historic commercial districts (Segal, 1995). The success of this area is based on an understanding of fundamental changes in the marketplace and public policies designed to complement market forces, and represents an incremental, project-by-project development approach that urban designers can adopt. In 1987, the Downtown Denver Partnership, a non-profit business leadership organization, established the Lower Downtown Business Support Office to provide services such as: business counselling to develop business plans, marketing strategies and management expertise; leasing referrals to direct prospective tenants to available space; and the design and implementation of public/private, layered financing strategies for individual projects. Financial support was provided by the city of Denver, the state government's job training office and corporate and foundation grants.



Figure 3. Outdoor seating for cafés is part of the urban design strategy which contributed to the economic revival of a historic area in the Lower Downtown area of Denver, CO.

A historic district ordinance contributed to Lower Downtown's success by creating certainty in the marketplace. Small business and entrepreneurial investors were lured to the area by its scale and historic character, and the knowledge that it will remain that way (see Figure 3). The city's investment of \$1.9 million in streetscape improvements, including new lighting, pavements and street furniture, which was contingent upon the adoption of the historic district ordinance, also reinforced private investment in Lower Downtown. District stakeholders, including developers and property owners, are represented on the five-member design review committee, which is now seen as beneficial to the area because of its localized control. In 4 years, the Lower Downtown area, through the various strategies described above, has attracted more than \$15 million in new investment, 500 jobs and a nearby baseball stadium.

Urban designers can learn to design environments that increase revenues by studying the strategies adopted by the often maligned or overlooked designers of shopping centres, gambling casinos and amusement or theme parks. All of these environments are successful to their owners and operators when they increase revenues, often in a remarkable manner. The US landscape architect Robert Gibbs is one such member of this rare breed (Lagerfeld, 1995). According to Gibbs, a town's retail planning should begin where a shopping centre's does; far from the selling floors. For example, it is disadvantageous to locate a shopping centre in a place where commuters have to make a left turn. People tend to shop on their way to work, and they are less likely to stop if it involves making a turn against traffic.

Most significantly, shopping centre designers know the average shopper (as the urban designer should know their clientele and constituencies), and understand that most shoppers stroll at about 3–4 feet per second, thus walking past

a storefront in about 8 seconds. That is how long a shop owner has to attract a consumer's attention with an arresting window display. Downtown merchants must adapt to the same 8 second rule, but they also have to sell to passing motorists. Sophisticated retailers use a variety of subliminal clues to attract shoppers, whether it is a high-priced stationery store implying an upscale lifestyle through a window display of an old wood desk embellished with expensive writing instruments, or a small, preciously enclosed display that jewellers use to suggest high quality and prices to match. These are but a few of the examples of the manner in which shopping centre, gambling casino and theme park designers understand human behaviour and create environments that encourage certain types of behaviour such as consumer spending; however, urban designers can focus on other types of behaviour, such as the creation of exciting neighbourhoods that foster greater social interaction and mutual understanding amongst different ethnic groups.

Urban Design and International Development

Urban design as a catalyst for, or as an active component of, international development takes the guise of sensitivity to context, the generation of cross-cultural learning and directly addressing issues which arise out of the continuing phenomenon of economic globalization.

A seminal essay which suggests an approach which is sensitive to local context without resorting to mimicry, and which is contemporary without being a generic modernism, is Frampton (1992a). The contemporary paradox of sensitivity to context is that on the one hand, the region or locality has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a regional spirit and display this spiritual and cultural resistance before the modernist personality. However, in order to fully participate in modern civilization, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical and political rationality, something which very often requires the abandonment of major portions of a whole cultural past. Thus, how can contemporary urban design celebrate an ancient tradition and return to sources, while simultaneously becoming modern and participating in universal civilization?

Drawing upon the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Frampton (1992b) proposes a process of assimilation and reinterpretation, wherein sustaining any kind of authentic culture in the future depends upon our capacity to generate vital forms of authentic culture (e.g. via urban design) of regional culture while appropriating alien influences at the level of both the local and the global. Alvar Aalto's work is exemplary of such processes, especially the Saynatsalo Town Hall in Finland (Inam, 1992). The collective memory evoked by the Saynatsalo Town Hall refers to two fundamental cultural traditions: the indigenous, largely agrarian one; and an alien, essentially classical one. With its steps, overgrown with grass and weeds, its variations of silhouette and its weathered materials, Saynatsalo has the air of an ancient complex of buildings which had grown slowly. Indeed, Aalto had identified this rather unique *parti* of a 'growing ruin' in his 1941 essay 'Architecture in Karelia', by suggesting that a "dilapidated Karielan village is somehow similar in appearance to a Greek ruin, where, also the material's uniformity is a dominant feature, though marble replaces wood" (cited in Inam, 1992, p. 63).

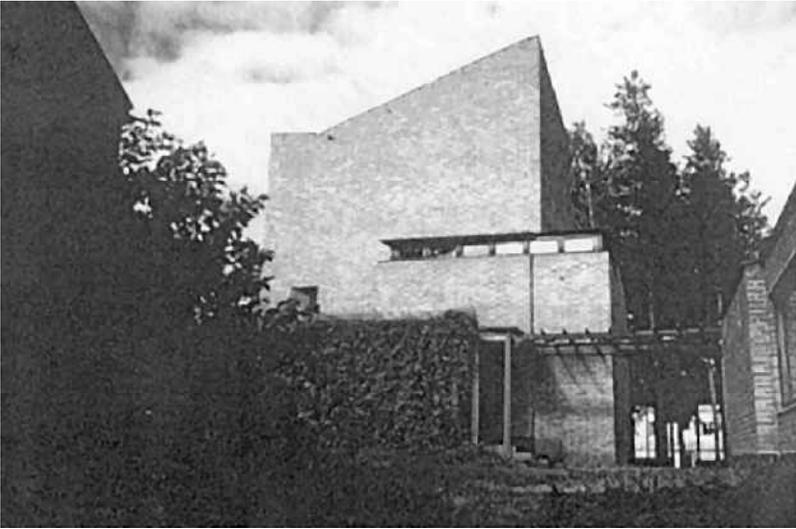


Figure 4. The Council Chamber of Saynatsalo Town Hall, Finland, which reflects the power of cross-cultural symbolism.

Apart from evoking the memory of indigenous environments, Aalto remained faithful to the belief that a motif borrowed from a different context and transplanted with sufficient conviction onto Finnish soil became genuinely Finnish. The Italian Renaissance was for Aalto an inalienable part of his heritage and philosophy of life. In his view, providing the inhabitants of Saynatsalo with a setting in which they could live much as the inhabitants of 14th-century Sienna did was a natural act. When the members of the municipal board of building inquired if a small, poor community like theirs really needed to build a council chamber 17 m high, especially since the brick was expensive, Aalto responded that the world's most beautiful and famous town hall in Sienna had a council chamber 16 m high, and thus he proposed to build the one at Saynatsalo 17 m high (see Figure 4)! Moreover, Aalto explicitly referred to the courtyard as a piazza in spite of the fact that it is domestic both in nature and in scale.

A contemporary example of sensitivity to context through a process of assimilation and reinterpretation is the work of the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza (Frampton, 1992b). Siza has grounded his buildings in the configuration of a specific topography and in the fine-grained texture of the local fabric. To this end, his pieces of the built environment are tight responses to the urban, land and marinescape of the Porto region. Other important factors are his deference towards local material, craft work and the subtleties of local light; a deference which is sustained without falling into the sentimentality of excluding rational form and modern technique.

The generation of cross-cultural learning arises out of understanding and applying, in a sympathetic and appropriate manner, urban design methodologies, processes and forms from different cultural contexts (Inam, 1997). An instance of this would be the woeful history of large-scale, low-income housing (i.e. public housing) projects built by the government in various urban contexts in the USA. The government's quest to provide no-frills housing (e.g. built at the

lowest costs on cheap, often undesirable, land), combined with the private sector's unrelenting demands that public housing be different (e.g. minimal accommodations which are overly modest and austere) from the rest of the housing stock, undermined the notion that public housing could also be attractive housing, and possibly, even contribute to the surrounding urban contexts (Bratt, 1986).

Henri Ciriani's social housing projects in France, which are the equivalent of public housing projects in the USA, serve as a demonstration of how large-scale, low-income housing projects built by the government can constitute positive contributions to the urban environment instead of being eyesores. La Courdangle is a large social housing project (i.e. 130 apartments, 230 parking spaces and a day care centre) outside Paris in Saint Denis (Ciriani, 1997). The seven-storey building with its striped cladding and geometric frieze rises above the middle of neighbouring streets and forms a corner in an otherwise loosely structured urban space. By creating a visually strong plan of geometrical precision, the project inspires a still-life composition device in urban design. Transformed into a picture plane, the various free-standing buildings as well as high-rise buildings that surround the project integrate into a more harmonious urban setting. The courtyard side of the building is a pure, right-angled figure containing a perfectly defined square space. The layering of the facades facilitates the articulation of the decreasing volumes, contains the apartments' balconies and terraces and mediates between the architecture of the building and the urbanity of the neighbourhood. In this manner, La Courdangle constitutes a low-income housing project that is rich in architectural spaces and detail, while helping define and enhance the urban space around it.

The phenomenon of increasing economic globalization is rapidly growing and has been encouraged at the urban level. For example, in US cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Minneapolis, where foreign investors have been active in buying real estate, downtown real estate interests—brokers, commercial banks, real estate consultants and property owners—have welcomed international property investment. Throughout the 1980s the infusion of foreign capital into the buying and selling of existing buildings and the construction of new building bolstered commercial property markets by raising rents, increasing property values and generally expanding business opportunities. The interaction of forces operating at various spatial scales, especially the urban, can be illustrated in a variety of ways: the construction of an office building for a foreign bank using materials from around the world; the dynamics of a major research university whose architecture and urban planning faculty consult locally as well as internationally; and the corporate plan location and contracting strategies of multinational corporations such as Nike and Coca Cola, as they balance local labour conditions, regional locational advantages, national markets and international investment opportunities (Beauregard, 1995).

The ongoing phenomenon of globalization suggests some strategies for urban designers. Urban designers must be able to understand and react to influences impinging on their communities, regardless of where those influences originate (e.g. World Bank funded housing projects in developing countries) and which actors are responsible (e.g. US architectural firms designing office complexes in London). Furthermore, urban designers must develop associations and networks that extend beyond their spatial reach through collaborative endeavours and thereby provide another mechanism for responding to the multitude of actors

who shape their communities. For example, the Indian architect B. V. Doshi utilized an institution, the Vastu-Shilpa Foundation for Studies and Research, to develop an internationally (i.e. World Bank) funded local (i.e. in the city Indore) housing project in India, Aranya Nagar (Serageldin, 1997). The project has been largely a success due to the Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, which carried out considerable research, including surveys to understand the physical and economic factors that determine the size, type and density of the housing plots that were specific to the local context.

Relevant

Urban design that is relevant is urban design that is pertinent to matters at hand (e.g. critical urban issues), and that is based on fundamental human and natural conditions. In this section, three such relevant approaches to urban design are highlighted: (1) a history of urban form that analyses the determinant processes and human meanings of form; (2) a theory of urban form that is normative and based on human values; and (3) a design methodology of urban form that is empirically based and derived from patterns of human behaviour. These three approaches are discussed by illustrating them with the work of Spiro Kostof (Kostof, 1991), Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1981) and Christopher Alexander (Alexander *et al.*, 1977), but by no means does this suggest that these are the *only* such approaches in urban design. Indeed, there exist other relevant approaches to urban design (for example, see Rowe, 1991), but for the illustrative purposes of this paper, the three examples mentioned above will suffice.

Kostof (1991) studies the phenomenon of city making in a historical perspective, to consider how and why cities took the shape they did. Amalgams of the living and the built, cities are repositories of cultural *meaning*. Behind the arbitrary twist of a lane or the splendid eccentricity of a new skyscraper on the skyline lies a history of previous urban tenure, a heritage of long-established social conventions, a string of often bitter compromises between individual rights and the public will. In a series of discussions of urban patterns such as the grid and the city as diagram, Kostof adopts a truly interdisciplinary approach by drawing upon architecture, cultural geography and social history to interpret the hidden order ascribed in these patterns.

Urban form is related directly to urban process, i.e. the people, forces and institutions that bring about urban form (Kostof, 1991), and a way to examine this process is to ask probing research questions, which are the basis for truly understanding cities. For example, who actually designs cities? What procedures do they go through? What are the empowering agencies and laws? The legal and economic history is an enormous and often overlooked subject. It involves ownership of urban land and the land market, the exercise of eminent domain, which is the power of government to take over private property for public use, the institution of legally binding master plans, building codes and other regulations, instruments of funding urban change, such as property taxes and bond issues, and the administrative and, more importantly, the power structure of cities. Urban designers need not know all of this information, but they *do* need to realize the importance of it, why it is important, to know where to turn to obtain it, and to consider it in their project designs.

Urban process also refers to physical change through time. The tendency all too often is to see urban form as a finite thing and a complicated object.

However, thousands of witting and unwitting acts every day alter a city's lines in ways that are perceptible only over a certain stretch of time. City walls are pulled down and filled in; once rational grids are slowly obscured; a slashing diagonal boulevard is run through close-grained residential neighbourhoods; railroad tracks usurp cemeteries and waterfronts; and wars, fires and highways annihilate city cores (Kostof, 1991).

As an example, let us consider the grid. The grid is by far the commonest pattern for planned cities in history, and it is universal both geographically and chronologically (Kostof, 1991). No better solution recommends itself as a standard scheme for disparate sites, or as a *means* for the equal distribution of land, or the easy parcelling and selling of real estate. The advantage of straight through-streets for defence has been recognized since Aristotle, and a rectilinear street pattern has also been resorted to in order to keep under watch a restless population. However, ubiquitous as the grid has always been, it is also much misunderstood, and often treated as if it were one unmodulated idea that requires little discrimination. On the contrary, the grid is an exceedingly flexible and diverse system of planning, and hence its enormous success in urban design and planning. About the only thing that all grids have in common is that their street pattern is orthogonal; that is, the right angle rules, and street lines in both directions lie parallel to each other.

Furthermore, the political innocence of the grid in the West is a fiction. In the early Greek colonies, for example, the grid, far from being a democratic device employed to assure an equitable allotment of property to all citizens, was the means of perpetuating the privileges of the property-owning class descendent from the original settlers, and for bolstering a territorial aristocracy. The first settlers who made the voyage to the site were entitled to equal allocations of land both inside and outside the city walls. These hereditary estates were inalienable; the ruling class strictly discouraged a land market. The estates were huge, as much as 2.5 acres (about 1 hectare) for some families. They were then sub-divided by the owner. Within the city, private land could only be used for housing. Any alienation of land or any agitation for land reform was severely dealt with and could be punishable as for murder (Kostof, 1991).

The point is made regularly that grids, especially in the USA, besides offering simplicity in land surveying, recording and subsequent ownership transfer, also favoured a fundamental democracy in property market participation. This did not mean that individual wealth could not appropriate considerable property, but rather that the basic initial geometry of land parcels bespoke a simple egalitarianism that invited easy entry into the urban land market. The reality, however, is much less admirable. The ordinary citizens gained easy access to urban land only at a preliminary phase, when cheap rural land was being urbanized through rapid laying out. To the extent that the grid speeded this process and streamlined absentee purchases, it may be considered an equalizing social device. Once the land had been identified with the city, however, this advantage of the initial geometry of land parcels evaporated, and even unbuilt lots slipped out of common reach. What matters most in the long run is not the mystique of the grid geometry, then, but the luck of first ownership (Kostof, 1991).

However, for the conventional urban designer, a grid is a grid is a grid (Kostof, 1991). At best it is a visual theme upon which to play variations: he or she might be concerned with issues like using a true checkerboard design vs.

syncopated block rhythms, with cross-axial or other types of emphasis, with the placement of open spaces within the discipline of the grid, with the width and hierarchy of streets. To Kostof and the meaningful urban designer, on the other hand, *how*, and with what *intentions*, the Romans in Britain, the builders of medieval Wales and Gascony, the Spanish in Mexico or the Illinois Central Railroad Company in the prairies of the Mid-west employed this very same device of settlement is the principal substance of a review of orthogonal planning. In fact, the grid has accommodated a startling variety of social structures—including territorial aristocracy in Greek Sicily, the agrarian republicanism of Thomas Jefferson and the cosmic vision of Joseph Smith in Mormon settlements like Salt Lake City, Utah—and of course, capitalist speculation.

There have been few serious attempts at a comprehensive and normative theory of urban form. *Good City Form* (Lynch, 1981) is an impressive and courageous attempt by Kevin Lynch as a “systematic effort to state general relationships between the form of a place and its value” (Lynch, 1981, p. 99). Lynch (1981, p. 108) emphasizes “those goals which are as general as possible, and thus do not dictate particular physical solutions, and yet whose achievement can be detected and explicitly linked to physical solutions. This is the familiar notion of performance standards, applied at the city scale”. Lynch generalizes performance dimensions, which are certain identifiable characteristics of cities due primarily to their spatial qualities and are measurable scales along which different groups achieve different positions. These performance dimensions are based on the following thinking:

The good city is one in which the continuity of [a] complex ecology is maintained while progressive change is permitted. The fundamental good is the continuous development of the individual or the small group and their culture: a process of becoming more complex, more richly connected, more competent, acquiring and realizing new powers—intellectual, emotional, social and physical ... So that settlement is good which enhances the continuity of a culture and the survival of its people, increases a sense of connection in time and space, and permits or spurs individual growth: development, within continuity, via openness and connection ... [a settlement which is] accessible, decentralized, diverse, adaptable, and tolerant to experiment. (Lynch, 1981, pp. 116–117)

In Lynch’s theory of good city form, there are seven dimensions (Lynch, 1981). First is vitality; the degree to which an urban form supports the vital functions, the biological requirements, the capabilities of human beings, and protects the survival of the species (e.g. adequate throughput of water, air, food and energy). Second is sense; the degree to which an urban form is clearly perceived and mentally differentiated as well as structured in time and space, and the degree to which that mental structure connects with the residents’ values and concepts (e.g. distinct identity and unconstrained legibility). Third is fit; the degree to which urban form matches the pattern and quantity of actions that people usually engage in or would like to engage in (e.g. compatibility between function and form). Fourth is access; the ability to reach other people, activities, resources or places, including the quantity and diversity of the elements that can be reached (e.g. ease of communication and transportation).

Fifth is control; the degree to which the creation of, access to, use of, maintenance of and modification to urban spaces and activities are managed by those who use, work or live in them (e.g. local power). Sixth is efficiency; the cost of creating and maintaining an urban form (e.g. less energy-demanding processes). Seventh is justice; the way in which urban form costs and benefits are distributed among people, according to a principle such as intrinsic worth or equity (e.g. equal protection from environmental hazards such as cars). These dimensions are applicable in a wide range of urban contexts because they are derived from fundamental human values, and serve as powerful measures of what a 'good' urban design project might be.

Christopher Alexander (Alexander *et al.*, 1977) adopts a problem-solving approach to design and explicitly renders the design methodology, but more importantly, describes how a meaningful urban designer might draw directly from empirical evidence (rather than, say, idiosyncratic impulses) and extensive research as a source of design. The book is most useful as a series of thoroughly analysed and empirically based guidelines, which are broad enough to be adapted to different contexts and architectural styles. Each suggested solution is described in a way that provides the key relationships (e.g. between human behaviour and spatial setting) needed to solve the problem, but in a general enough manner to allow for adaptation to particular lifestyles, aesthetic tastes and local conditions. Each pattern describes a problem which occurs repeatedly in the built environment; archetypal problems of urban form, for example. The longest portion of the description of each pattern describes the empirical background of the pattern, the evidence for its validity and the range of different ways the pattern can be manifested or designed.

The first 94 patterns deal with the large-scale structure, including the urban, of the environment: the growth of city and country; the layout of roads and paths; the relationship between work and family; the formation of suitable public institutions for a neighbourhood; and the kinds of public space required to support these institutions (Alexander *et al.*, 1977). The following two examples of urban patterns illustrate the value of this design methodology: identifiable neighbourhood; and public outdoor room.

According to Alexander *et al.* (1977), and the scientific research they cite, people need an identifiable spatial unit to belong to. They want to be able to identify the part of the city where they live as distinct from all others. Available evidence suggests, first, that the neighbourhoods which people identify with have extremely small populations; second, that they are small in area; and third, that a major road through a neighbourhood destroys it.

What, then, is the right population for a neighbourhood? The neighbourhood inhabitants should be able to look after their own interests by being able to reach agreement on basic decisions, such as about public services and common land, and to organize themselves to bring pressure on local governments. Anthropological evidence cited by Alexander *et al.* (1977) suggests that a human group cannot usually co-ordinate itself to reach such decisions if its population is above 1500. The experience of organizing community meetings at the local level suggests that 500 may be a more realistic figure.

As far as the physical diameter is concerned, in Philadelphia, PA, people who were asked which area they really knew usually limited themselves to a small area, seldom exceeding the two or three blocks around their house. One-quarter of the inhabitants of an area in Milwaukee, WI, considered a neighbourhood to

be an area no larger than a block, around 300 feet (about 90 metres). One-half considered it to be no more than seven blocks.

The first two features of the neighbourhood, small population and small area, are not enough by themselves. A neighbourhood can only have a strong identity if it is protected from heavy traffic. Research cited by the authors suggests that the heavier the traffic in an area, the less people think of it as home territory. Not only do residents view the streets with heavy traffic as less personal, but they also feel the same about the houses along the street: "It's not a friendly street ... People are afraid to go out into the street because of the traffic ... Noise from the street intrudes into my home" (cited in Alexander *et al.*, 1977, p. 83). This study, conducted by the University of California at Berkeley, found that with more than 200 cars per hour, the quality of the neighbourhood begins to deteriorate.

Therefore, the proposed strategy suggests helping people define the neighbourhoods they live in, not more than about 300 yards (270 metres) or so across, with no more than 500 inhabitants or so and, in existing cities, encouraging local groups to organize themselves to form such neighbourhoods, and keeping major roads outside these neighbourhoods. While one may disagree with the dimensions suggested in this pattern, one has to acknowledge that population size, physical area and traffic flow are critical considerations for the design of contemporary neighbourhoods.

In the public outdoor room pattern, Alexander *et al.* (1977) suggest that there are very few spots along the streets of modern towns and neighbourhoods where people can hang out comfortably for hours at a time. Men often seek corner bars and pubs, where they spend hours talking and drinking; teenagers, especially boys, choose special corners too, where they hang around, waiting for their friends. Elderly people like a special spot to go to, where they can expect to find others; small children need sandpits, mud, plants and water to play with in the open; young mothers who go to watch their children often use the children's play as a opportunity to meet and talk with other mothers; and so on for a variety of groups. Because of the diverse and casual nature of these activities, they require a space which has a subtle balance of being defined and yet not too defined, so that any activity which is natural to the neighbourhood at any given time can develop freely and yet has something to start from.

What is needed is a framework which is defined just enough so that people naturally tend to stop there; and so that curiosity naturally takes people there, and invites them to stay. A small open space, roofed, with columns, but without walls at least in part, will provide the necessary balance between being open and enclosed. Examples of this pattern were built with the assistance of architecture students in Cleveland, OH, on the grounds and on public land surrounding a local mental health clinic. According to staff reports, these places changed the life of the clinic dramatically: many more people than usual were drawn outdoors, public talk was more animated and outdoor space that had been dominated by cars became more human. In addition, in the 12th and 13th centuries, there were many such public structures dotted through the towns, and which were the scene of auctions, open-air meetings and market fairs.

Therefore, in neighbourhoods and work communities, the authors suggest making a piece of the common land into an outdoor room—a partly enclosed place, with a partial roof, columns, without walls, perhaps with a trellis; placing



Figure 5. A contemporary example of a successful outdoor room which reflects the guidelines of the outdoor room pattern—Citywalk in Los Angeles, CA.

it beside an important path and within view of houses and workplaces. In this and the other patterns in the book, the authors outline an urban design methodology that is based on archetypal problems (e.g. public outdoor spaces), analyses of built examples, descriptions of historical precedents and the explicit unpacking of design solutions such that they are clear, relevant and thoughtful (see Figure 5). The basis for the design patterns was extensive and thorough research carried out over an 8-year period. Today, there is current and voluminous research, for example on environment and behaviour (for example, see Moore & Marans, 1997), that is highly relevant and useful for urban designers.

Future Directions in Urban Design

Urban designers (e.g. Beckley, 1998) are beginning to question what in fact is 'urban' in the contemporary environment. However, few will argue with

definitions two decades old that are still relevant today: a city is a “relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement [or network of settlements] of socially heterogeneous individuals” (L. Worth cited in Kostof, 1991, p. 37), and a “point [or points] of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community” (L. Mumford cited in Kostof, 1991, p. 37). The urban designer’s imperative, then, is to understand cities. On the one hand, the most enduring feature of the city is its physical build, which remains with remarkable persistence, gaining increments that are responsive to the most recent economic demand and reflective of the latest stylistic vogue, but conserving evidence of past urban culture for present and future generations. On the other hand, however, urban society changes more than any other human grouping, economic innovation usually comes most rapidly and boldly in cities, immigration aims first at the urban core, forcing upon cities the critical role of acculturating refugees from many countrysides and the winds of intellectual advance blow strong in cities (Vance cited in Kostof, 1991).

Based on the new synthesis of ideas proposed in this paper, there are three levels of success of an urban design project. These include, first, the purely aesthetically informed notion of urban design as a finished product (e.g. Does it look good?). The second is the sense of the project as an autonomous object that functions in an affordable, convenient and comfortable manner for its users (e.g. Does it work?). The third, and new, idea is to have the urban design project generate or substantially contribute to socio-economic development processes (e.g. Does it produce long-term quality of life impacts?). In this sense, urban designers and urban design projects become catalysts for community betterment, economic improvement and international understanding.

Consequently, urban designers should focus more on the ‘urban’ of urban design, and become less infatuated with the ‘design’ of urban design. Urban design must begin with cities: how they work and change; and what impacts they have in creating enabling vs. destructive impacts. For example, urban design has to be seen within the framework of investment and development policies, and as a shaper of those policies: Crane’s (1966) capital web of investment decisions; and Lai’s (1988) invisible web of laws and norms that guide people’s behaviour. At the same time, design and form play a critical role because they are a language and vocabulary for analysing and intervening in cities.

At the most fundamental level, all urban design should be responsible for creating an environment that satisfies, informs and inspires its users (i.e. the community). This is an urban design that possesses an articulate communicative proficiency. Urban design of profound significance has a poetic quality. By the means of compressing its meanings into a concise formal expression, a poetic urban design project draws the mind to a level of perception concealed behind the conventional presentations of urban form. The most effective symbols are those which, while operating within a given set of conventions, are imprecise, sparse and open-ended in their possible interpretations, tending more to the metaphor than the simile. Such an approach requires deep cultural understanding and social sensitivity.

Implications for Education

The pedagogical approach to meaningful urban design will be interdisciplinary (e.g. examining cities from the perspectives of architects, landscape architects,

urban planners, policy makers, social workers and business interests), teleological (e.g. driven by the express purpose of addressing critical urban challenges such as uncomfortable and unsafe built environments, community powerlessness, economic deprivation and fragmented interventions), critical (e.g. based on in-depth understanding of urban design problems and promises through analysis of urban design practice and case studies) and catalytic (e.g. the formulation of effective urban design strategies that include a focus on urban design products such as building complexes and public spaces, but also include the generation of long-term community and economic development processes).

The primary impact on this type of learning for students will be an understanding of the urban designer as a leader. Through an in-depth analysis of urban issues, an interdisciplinary approach to urban problem solving and skills that focus not only on issues of urban aesthetics and form but also on purposeful intervention generated by long-term processes, students will gain a profound and empowering understanding of meaningful urban design. Students of urban design will also gain humility and confidence by studying the power structures of cities (and realizing just how little power urban designers actually have), practising critical thinking and learning to be politically savvy in order to accomplish their goals. A secondary impact on learning for students will be a unique opportunity for them to shape the future direction of urban design through readings, research, discussions, case-study analyses and project designs that will focus on specific urban challenges, examine deficiencies in current urban design approaches and projects in addressing those challenges and formulate alternative, more meaningful, urban design strategies.

In order to reach such goals, an urban design programme should focus on two major sets of skills: understanding how cities work; and learning to shape cities. Understanding cities includes their conception (e.g. urban theory and form), their evolution (e.g. history of urban form), their decision-making processes (e.g. urban political economy) and their use and experience (e.g. urban sociology). Learning to shape cities includes design methods (e.g. based on empirical evidence and community participation) and communication skills (e.g. graphic, verbal, written and computer-based). The goal of a meaningful urban design pedagogical initiative would be to attract students of the built environment (e.g. architects, landscape architects and urban planners) who will become sophisticated practitioners and influential leaders of urban design in architectural and planning firms, community organizations, public agencies and international institutions. The initiative would thus involve: (1) teaching of exploratory seminars and studios in new urban design methodologies (e.g. international studios); (2) research into the relevant roles of professionals, especially architects and planners, in the urban design of contemporary cities (e.g. institutional structures); and (3) professional work, in the form of community outreach and project analysis (e.g. evaluating New Urbanism).

In summary, a meaningful pedagogical approach to urban design should have the following characteristics: (1) small (i.e. selective)—focus on key urban design challenges, e.g. inner city revitalization; (2) focused (i.e. depth)—develop expertise in the urban design/urban development nexus; (3) distinct (i.e. cutting-edge)—experiment with new studio formats, projects and research, e.g. international collaboration and cross-cultural learning; and (4) existing resources (i.e. breadth)—build upon other departments, e.g. social work, business, natural resources and environment.

The critical question that guides this meaningful future of urban design is simply: So what? That is, what consequential purpose has been achieved by particular urban design theories, urban design methodologies, urban design practices and urban design practitioners? The implication of such probing questions is that it is far from adequate to consider urban design projects as successful if they are only physically appealing or thought-provoking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author would like to return to the provocations that were referred to at the beginning of this paper. While both Rem Koolhaas and Michael Sorkin are emblematic of the image-based, architect-driven urban design that permeates much of the world and especially the USA, they are also contributors to an urban design strategy that is realistic, and contrary to the nostalgia evoked by the New Urbanism and neo-traditional movements. Thus, for Koolhaas:

If there is to be a 'new urbanism' it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence ... but about discovering unnamable hybrids [as is the case with Los Angeles] ... Redefined, urbanism will not only, or mostly, be a profession, but a way of thinking, an ideology: to accept what exists. We were making sand castles. Now we swim in the sea that swept them away. (Koolhaas, 1995, pp. 969–971)

Koolhaas thus encourages us, first, to accept the contemporary urban condition (instead of seeing it through rose-tinted lenses), and second, as architects, urban designers and planners, to understand and work with the contemporary urban forces (instead of imagining a world without cars or highways).

Similarly, Sorkin extols us to learn from those urban design projects and urban environments which are successful in terms of the designer's objectives of attracting people to these environments and the vibrant use of these environments by people. Even if the objectives were to differ, say, in terms of greater social interaction and co-operation in a neighbourhood, the designers of shopping malls, gambling casinos and amusement parks at least understand human behaviour as it relates to entertainment and consumption—lessons which can be used for other, perhaps more noble, projects. Thus, according to Sorkin (1997, pp. 29–31):

Disneyland ... is foremost a playground of mobility, its entertainments largely those of pleased motion. And, there is something to be learned here. It seems undeniable that for all of its depredations, all of its regimentation, surveillance, and control, part of what we experience as enjoyable at Disneyland is the passage through an environment of urban density in which both the physical texture and the means of circulation are not simply entertaining but stand in invigorating contrast to the dysfunctional versions back home. One extracts from Disneyland a shred of hope, the persuasive example that pedestrianism coupled with short distance collective transport systems can be both efficient and fun, can thrive in the midst of an environment completely otherwise constituted, and that the space of low, sufficiently decelerated, can become the space of exchange.



Figure 6. The design of Disneyland in Los Angeles, CA—albeit ‘artificial’ and designed to foster consumption—offers deeper lessons for understanding human behaviour and creating exciting environments—for, say, multicultural interaction—based on such understanding.

The ‘shred of hope’ offered by Disneyland (see Figure 6) is constituted by such lessons carefully and critically collected from numerous examples of contemporary urban design projects, and articulated—via relevant history, theory and methodology—into a meaningful approach to urban design.

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