

Context for Urban Design

Week 1, 2006 Fall

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- A comprehensive overview on urban design
- No right or wrong answers,
- Only, Better or worse answers

- Inquisitive approaches ,
- No dogmatic approaches
- No prescriptive fashion, or solution
- But, broad belief (or attitudes) to UD

- Comprehensive reading of past research

- Urban Design
 - What is should be
 - What it is
 - Cf. what urban designers should KNOW
 - Cf. what urban designers should DO
- Structure of the Book
 - Context
 - Dimensions
 - Implementation

- 1. Urban Design Today
 - UD: process of making better places for people
 - 4 themes:
 - for and about people
 - Value and significance of place
 - Real world – economic and political forces
 - » Democratic capitalist nation
 - Design as process
 - Normative vs. Descriptive
 - Understanding, Need, Practice

- Understanding of UD
 - Civic design
 - City design
 - Urban design – ambiguous

Madanipour's 7 areas of ambiguity in UD

scale /

visual or organizational /

physical or social and cultural /

product or process /

architects, planners, or landscape architects /

public or private /

objective or subjective /

Not “either/or” But “and/both”

- If “everything” then “nothing”
- Little value on “boundary” but in “core, or heart”
- Common ground, interface
- Collaborative, interdisciplinary
- Traditions of thought in UD
 - Visual/artistic tradition – Sitte, Cullen, etc
 - Social usage tradition – Lynch, Jacobs,
 - Making place tradition
 - Character/ continuity / quality of public realm / ease of movement / legibility / adaptability / diversity

- UD frameworks – making places
 - Lynch: vitality / sense / fit / access / control / *efficiency* / *justice*
 - Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard: livability / identity / access / authenticity and meaning / community and public life / urban self-reliance / environment for all / *livable streets and neighborhood* / *minimum density* / *integrated activity* / *public space* / *many separate buildings*

– Responsive Environment

- Permeability, variety, legibility, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, personalization

– Tibbalds

- places, humility, mixing of uses, human scale, walking, community, legible, build to last, avoid too much change, intricacy/joy/delight

– New Urbanism

- Diverse in use and population, pedestrian/mass transit, public spaces, local history /culture / ecology/ building practice

- Need for UD
 - Poor quality of much of the contemporary urban environment
 - “Crack”
 - Gaps in urban form
 - Role of the built environment professions
 - Seven clamps of urban design
 - Strategic vacuum / Reactivity / over-regulation / meanness / illiteracy / small mindedness / short termism
 - Joining-up the professions / environment

TABLE 1.1
Types of urban design practice

	PROFESSIONAL DOMAIN	CHARACTERISTICS	ACTIVITIES
URBAN DEVELOPMENT DESIGN	Traditionally domain of architects supported by landscape architects and other designers	Rooted in the development process. Typically applicable at site and neighbourhood scales	Involves <i>all-of-a-piece</i> design situations and some <i>total</i> design situations
DESIGN POLICIES, GUIDANCE AND CONTROL	Traditionally domain of planners supported by architects, landscape architects, conservation officers and others	The design dimension of the planning process (e.g. primarily response to anticipated effects of urban change on urban design quality, whereby guidance and control are typically applied from <i>outside</i> development process). Range of considerations usually wider than concerns of urban development design. Applicable at all scales of urban design	Includes: (i) area appraisals, design strategy and policy formulation; (ii) preparation of supplementary design guidance and briefs, and (iii) exercise of design or 'aesthetic' control
PUBLIC REALM DESIGN	Engineers, planners, architects, landscape architects and others. But frequently unintentional result of unco-ordinated decisions and actions taken by many different parties	Encompasses design of 'capital web' (e.g. roads and streets, footpaths and pavements, car parks, public transport interchanges, parks and other urban spaces). Relevant over range of scales	Includes: (i) design and implementation of specific projects; (ii) production and application of guidelines for design and improvement of a locality; and (iii) ongoing management and maintenance of places, including programming of activities and events
COMMUNITY URBAN DESIGN	No particular profession	Seeks to work <i>with</i> and <i>in</i> communities developing proposals from grass-roots level. Particularly applicable to neighbourhood scale	Utilises range of approaches and techniques to engage with those who will use the environment

(Source: adapted from University of Reading, 2001).

- Roles:
 - Total designer
 - All-of-a piece
 - Vision maker
 - Infrastructure designer
 - Policy maker
 - Guideline designed
 - Urban manager
 - Facilitator of urban events
 - Community motivator
 - Urban conservationists

- 2. Urban Change

BOX 2.1 – CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNIST URBAN SPACE DESIGN

Healthier buildings

Early Modernist planning and urban design demonstrated a reaction to the physical conditions of industrial cities. Medical knowledge developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided criteria (the need for light, air, sun and ventilation, and access to open spaces) for the design of healthier buildings and environments. It was argued that the best way to achieve this was to detach buildings from each other, orientate them towards the sun (rather than, as previously, towards the street), spread them out to allow light and air to flow freely around them, and build upwards to where light and air were plentiful.

Healthier environments

Modernists strove both to design buildings providing healthier internal conditions, and to create healthier environments. At the larger scale, the generally agreed solution was to provide more light and air by decongestion, lower residential densities, and the segregation or zoning of housing from industry. The concept of functional zoning was fundamental to the *Charter of Athens*, which proposed rigid zoning of city plans, with green belts between areas reserved for different land uses. This was justified not only on environmental grounds, but also because the resulting city would be more efficient and ordered. New modes of transport would tie the separated areas together.

Accommodating the car

The car and the urban highway were potent symbols of the new age. 'The cities will become part of the country: I shall live 30 miles from my

office in one direction; my secretary will live thirty miles away from it too, in the other direction, under another pine tree. We shall both own cars. We shall use up tyres, wear out roads surfaces and gears, consume oil and gasoline' (Le Corbusier, 1927). In the *Charter of Athens* it was argued that, because existing cities were ill-equipped to accommodate the car and other forms of mechanised transport, 'great transformations' were necessary, with conflicts resolved by segregation of vehicles and pedestrians, and rejection of 'streets' that slowed cars down.

Architectural design philosophies

To express their function and functional requirements, buildings were designed from the inside-out, responding only to their programme and functional requirements (the importance of light, air, hygiene, aspect, prospect, recreation, movement, and openness). They became sculptures, 'objects in space' following their own internal logic without necessarily responding to the immediate urban context. Designing buildings in this manner also expressed their modernity.

Attitude to the past

Modernism had an enthusiasm for the zeitgeist – the spirit of the age – that was a reaction to nineteenth century historicism, and expressed a sense of a radical break with the past. Differences were emphasised rather than continuities, with the past seen as a hindrance to the future. Although this dismissal of the past was a matter of 'rhetoric rather than reality', it was important in shaping attitudes and values (Middleton, 1983, p. 730).

BOX 2.2 – CHARACTERISTICS AND CRITIQUES OF MODERNIST URBAN SPACE DESIGN

Participation and involvement

Modernism was perceived to have a lack of dialogue with the end user: Le Corbusier, for example, had suggested that 'people would have to be re-educated to appreciate his visions' (quoted in Knox, 1987, p. 364), while Walter Gropius considered it undesirable to talk to building users because 'they were intellectually undeveloped' (quoted in Knox, 1987, p. 366). Arguments were advanced about the value of consulting with users and local communities in order to understand and perhaps respond to their opinions, preferences and aspirations. Subsequent experience on the ground was generally uneven, with attempts at participation often being top-down, for rather than *with* or *by* local people (see Chapter 12).

Conservation

By the late 1960s, the cultural and historic attributes of traditional environments, and the way they seemed better able to accommodate and support urban life and activity, were increasingly recognised in contrast to, and as reaction against, Modernist environments. All over Europe and in the US, during the 1960s and early 1970s, policies that protected historic areas were introduced, and conservation became an integral, rather than peripheral, part of urban planning. With it came concern for context, and (in contrast with the internationalism of Modernism) greater respect for the uniqueness of places and their history, and for the continuity of local patterns and typologies.

Mixed uses

The logic of functional zoning, reinforced by transport developments and by high land values that excluded lower value uses, reduced the complexity and vitality of city centres. The tendency towards sterility was exacerbated by large, generally mono-functional office blocks and shopping malls, which internalised much of the traditional street life and activity.

Urban form

With new awareness of the qualities and scale of the 'traditional' city, some critics advocated a morphological approach to urban design, based on 'tried and tested' spatial precedents and archetypes, and stressing continuity with, rather than a break from, the past. There was a growing influence from theorists unhappy with the achievements of Modernist urban space design: while Modernism's 'best solo performances' may have been 'more virtuosos', they failed to produce 'good' streets or 'good' cities. There was a recognition that 'the typical fabric and its overall orchestration were better in previous eras' (Kelbaugh, 1997, p. 95).

Architecture

Disillusion with Modernist architecture – or, rather, with its debasement through industrialised production and construction techniques – has been well documented in books such as *Form Follows Fiasco* (Blake, 1974) and *From Bauhaus to Our House* (Wolfe, 1981). In his 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Robert Venturi questioned the purist, minimalist and elitist dogma that, in his view, the International Style and architectural Modernism had become. Influenced by this and by Venturi's subsequent book *Learning from Las Vegas*, new ideas about architecture emerged, including stylistic pluralism and recognition of the built environment's decorative and contextual properties. The centre of many North American cities have become what Kostof terms 'automobile territory', with razed urban blocks given over to car parking next to intensively developed blocks.

Cities for people

The ultimate effect of the car on city form is graphically illustrated in the centres of many American cities. Kostof (1992, p. 277) observes how, in Detroit, Houston and Los Angeles especially, there is 'Modernist urbanism', but not of the sort envisaged by Le Corbusier. 'His iconic *ville verte* – a vision of towers in a park – became in America a *ville grise* of towers in a parking lot'. Although European cities were transformed in less dramatic ways, most saw major road building schemes. Roads did not have the social qualities of streets and tended to slice up and fragment urban areas, causing problems of severance (see Chapter 4). As a reaction to the exclusive emphasis on cars, there has been – in part, at least – a new concern for the pedestrian, and a desire to create pedestrian-dominant environments (accessible to cars, but suiting the scale, pace and comfort of pedestrians) and environments that facilitate use by a range of travel modes.



- Transformations in urban form
 - For example,
 - Pre-rail epoch
 - Iron-horse epoch
 - Street car epoch
 - Automobile epoch
 - Jet propulsion, electronic communication epoch

- Industrial / post-industrial urban form
 - De-industrial, re-industrial, new-industrial,

- Global / local

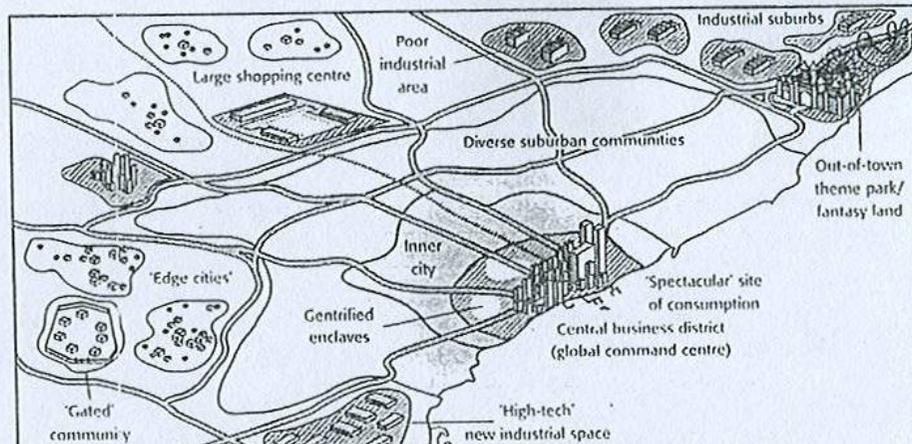
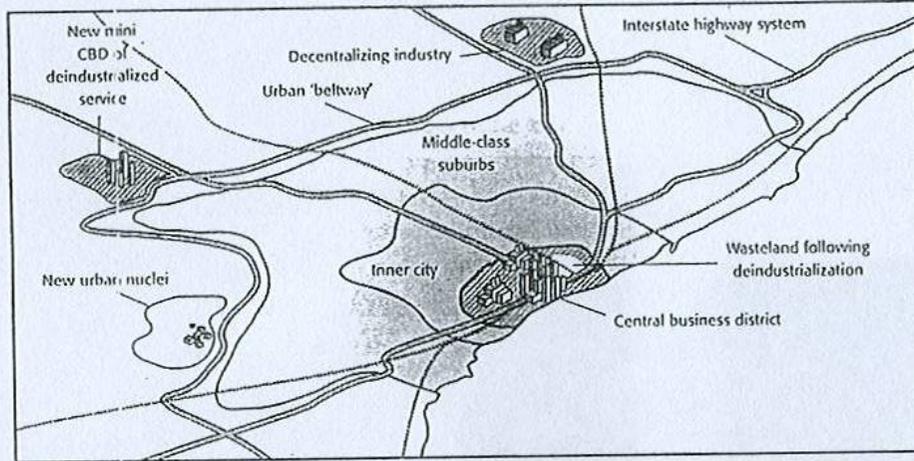
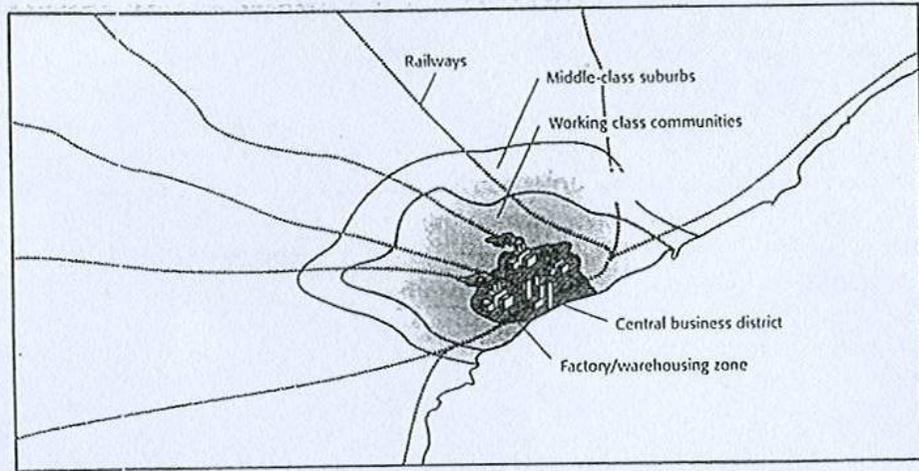


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- Car

TABLE 2.2
Problems of car dependency

<i>ENVIRONMENTAL</i>	<i>ECONOMIC</i>	<i>SOCIAL</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil vulnerability • Petrochemical smog • Toxic emissions such as lead and butane • High greenhouse gas contributions • Urban sprawl • Greater stormwater problems from extra hard surfaces • Traffic problems such as noise and severance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External costs from accidents and pollution • Congestion costs, despite road building • High infrastructure costs in new sprawling suburbs • Loss of productive rural land • Loss of urban land to bitumen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of street life • Loss of community • Loss of public safety • Isolation in remote suburbs • Access problems for those without cars and those with disabilities

(Source: Newman and Kenworthy, 2000, p. 109).

Still car dependent modes

Why?



smart growth

sustainable development

(new urbanism)



UD approaches?

- 3. Contexts for UD
 - Contexts:
 - Local / global / market / regulatory /
 - Sustainable Design
 - Table 3.1, 3.2, 3.3
 - Key factors:
 - » Stewardship
 - » Resource efficiency
 - » Diversity and choice
 - » Human need
 - » Resilience
 - » Pollution reduction
 - » Concentration
 - » Distinctiveness
 - » Biotic support
 - » Self sufficiency

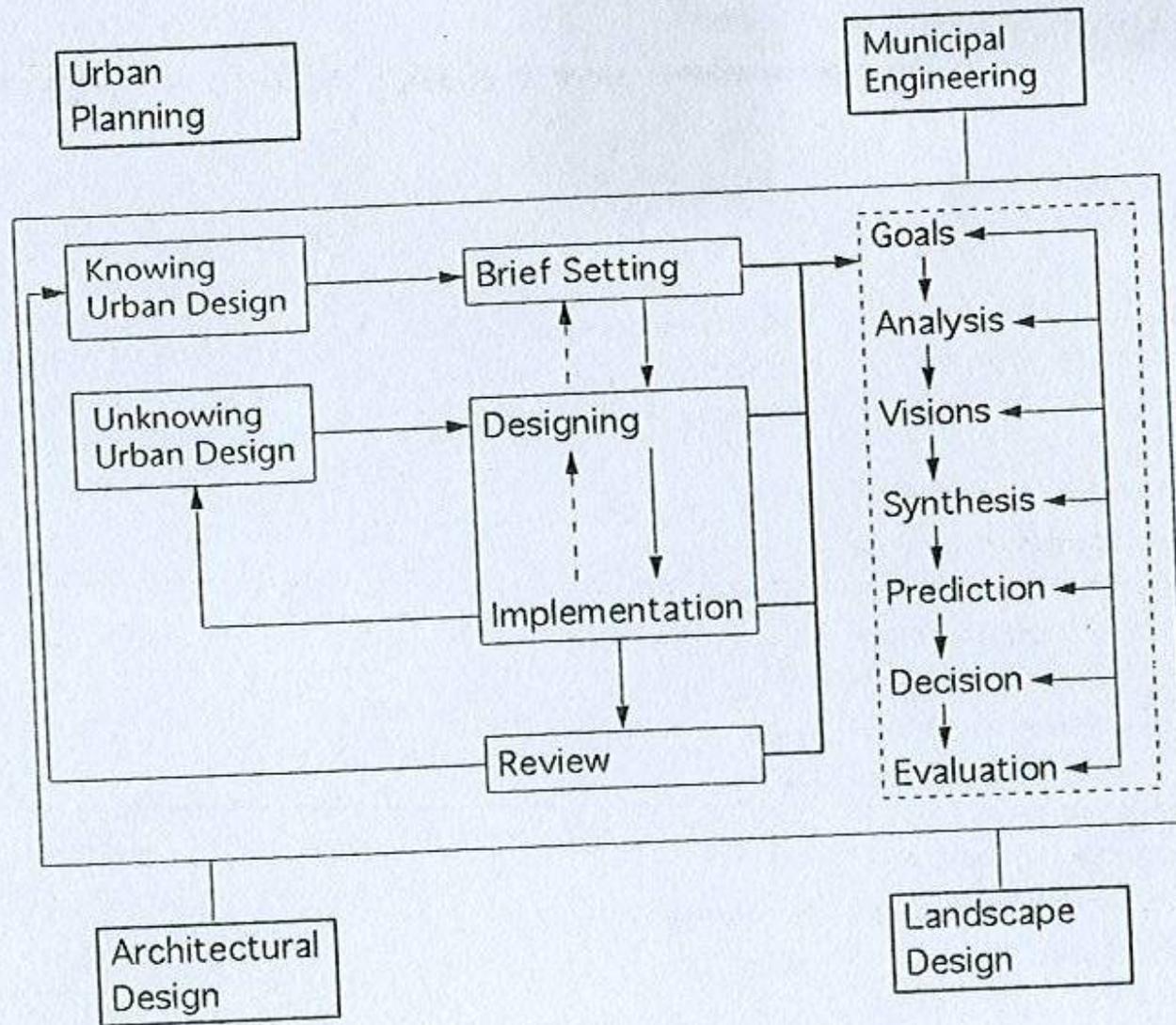


FIGURE 3.9
The integrated urban design process