



EDITORIAL URBAN DESIGN - THE SYNTHESIS DISCIPLINE

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The objective of this editorial and the next is to stress the importance of urban design knowledge to built environment studies, and to enunciate to dominant positions that currently influence urban design theory. Below, several basic principles are discussed. In late November last year, the Centre for Cultural Communication and Space held an international conference at Udayana University in Bali that welcomed Emeritus Professor Jon Lang as a keynote speaker (Udayana TV Utube Dec 2 2018). The conference was groundbreaking by presenting its first public event in an urban design context. Jon's presence reinforced the immense value of urban design programs when added to architecture and planning. In most such programs, a Masters in Urban Design is seen as an essential component. They provide the missing link between architectural design and regulation, and without it, a great void is created. Jon is my long time friend of the last 30 years and we worked together for 15 of those years at UNSW in the Masters of Urban Design program. It is not beyond extravagance to say that Jon is recognized internationally as 'Mr. Urban Design.' His reputation precedes him, based on a plethora of books and his unique focus on behavioural science, case studies and typologies as the foundation for urban design theory. His message has been well heeded by faculties across the world.

Over that time our friendship has survived many significant disputes over the *actuality* of urban design, the essential components of an urban design knowledge, what constitutes an appropriate history of urban design, the place of theory, and the significance of its practice as an independent and self contained discourse. What we both agree on is that *urban design is not a sub-set of architecture or planning*. It has its own independent existence as a discipline and is not subservient to an assumed extension of either profession. Currently there are two major explanations of *urban design*, one primarily material, the other economic and political. The first is the dominant world view - urban design is *project design*. There is much to commend this position, and it is the approach that Jon has expounded with great eloquence (1987, 2005, 2015). Jon offers a direct and comprehensible approach to building the city by analysing a multitude of case studies from which we can learn. Models can be built of differing design strategies which can be understood, evaluated and applied. Methods are clear and ordered. In context, the concept *urban design* is embedded in projects involving transport, urban landscape, building design, energy and water conservation, use of materials, recycling, solar energy, heat island effects, acoustics, planning regulation etc.

The second approach which I would claim to have established is called the *New Urban Design*. It adopts the paradigm of spatial political economy in urban analysis (Cuthbert

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2013). The theory has a long history, founded by Adam Smith in 1753, and has evolved into a practice used by the foremost social scientists today - David Harvey, Allen Scott, Mark Gottdiener, Ed Soja etc. This paradigm has been expounded in great detail, over one thousand pages in three of my own books and several articles (Cuthbert 2003, 2006, 2007, 2011). In contrast to Jon, this position is messy, difficult, and full of problems and inconsistencies. It begins with an understanding of the capitalist world system and its dynamics, reducing these to urban problems, and viewing urban design outcomes as part of the entire political economy of nations and cities. Urban design then constitutes a set of social practices within which certain forms of building and space exist, rather than a site where certain built forms occur. In this context I have criticized the idea that urban designers are somehow artists (an idea usually promoted by architects), a concept which is a long way from the truth (Cuthbert 2016). Also from this perspective, professional disciplines simply vanish since their self interest and monopolistic practices are not useful to any urban analysis i.e no ownership can be claimed by either profession. Within *the new urban design*, projects represent only one form of spatial organization of which there is a multitude within the political economy of cities. Urban form is interpreted as fixed capital within the overall reproduction of capital from space, and possesses economic, cultural and symbolic components in equal measure. In contrast to Jon's approach, methods here are subject to internal as well as external critical debate, and involve concepts such as social class, means and modes of production, ideology, exploitation, fixed capital, cultural capital and symbolic value. The stress is on analysis over practice, and depends heavily on urban sociology, urban geography and urban economic theory.

While our two approaches may be seen as total contradictions of one another, in fact they are singularly complementary. Jon's emphasis on the material production of space via particular typologies and processes are given added depth by the *New Urban Design* which seeks to understand the forces producing space in the first place, and how it materialises in symbolic as well as physical form for citizens across the planet. In the last instance, the great French theorist Henri Lefebvre reduced the process to three simple words which reflect my own ideology that – 'all space is political.'

In the next issue I apply some of the ideas to the Balinese context, and suggest that in Bali at the moment, what needs to be encouraged is an in depth awareness of urban design theory, strategy and practices that need to be deployed in improving the built environment for the next wave of global tourism.

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