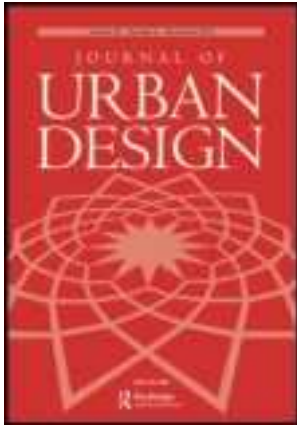


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GUEST EDITORIAL

People in the Design of Urban Places

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This issue of the *Journal of Urban Design* focuses on research related to social issues in urban design.²

Concern with social issues in urban design and planning arose in the 1960s in response to modernism's flawed abstract, universal conception of human needs and blindness to social differences. A whole generation of sociologists and urban commentators emerged in response to inhumane urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s, including Herbert Gans, Marc Fried, Jane Jacobs, William F. Whyte, Michael Young and Peter Willmott. At the same time from the design perspective, people such as Kevin Lynch, Donald Appleyard and William H. 'Holly' Whyte began exploring the psychological, social and cultural dimensions of place, and developing new methods for assessing them that would be relevant to design, with important early elaborations by Amos Rapoport, Clare Cooper Marcus and others. Environmental psychologists such as Kenneth Craik, Kurt Lewin and Roger Barker and the anthropologist Edward T. Hall also developed new ways of thinking about the role of space in intrapsychic and interpersonal life. The field of environmental psychology was born. The Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) was founded in 1968 and *Environment and Behavior* began publication in 1969. Research ranged widely, exploring the social and psychological dimensions of urban experience, from children's conception and use of the city or the behaviour patterns of women in public spaces, to perception of the urban soundscape or social differences in cognitive mapping of the city.

Prior to that, social scientists rarely dealt with space and place, and designers had not seriously attempted to understand the users of the environments they planned and built. The idea that design professionals and experts might learn from people who were not trained in architecture was uncommon, even unthinkable, and to this day some professionals continue to resist that idea. When architects and planners first invited social scientists to join their faculties the motive might have been to 'fix' the embarrassment of award winning projects such as Pruitt-Igoe being declared unliveable. Could social scientists help architects and planners avoid making such mistakes again? Since then the diversity and complexities of social research in the environmental design fields have tempered the myth that architecture and planning alone caused the social problems of that public housing in St. Louis.

Early Impact

The impacts of the early research on social factors in environmental design, planning and policy have been substantial. Most designers acknowledge the powerful role of space in shaping social behaviour, and now many social scientists agree. Whereas modernism treated people generically, the differing needs of children, elderly, disabled and other subgroups based on gender, race, ethnicity and class are now commonly considered in design and planning. Social and behavioural perspectives are routinely accepted by practising and teaching designers, even if they are not always followed. Guilt and resistance are themselves both evidence that there has been an impact on design professionals. Even if some dismiss the social perspective, it is no longer unheard of, no longer a time-consuming distraction from design and planning.

Environment and behaviour research is best used when applied in practice. Many of the methods developed in the 1960s to evaluate social values and needs in design such as behavioural observation, interviews, cognitive mapping, photovoice, time lapse photography and post-occupancy evaluation are now common practice in design research and are taught in schools of architecture, planning, and landscape architecture. Post-occupancy evaluation (POE) research has become part of the mainstream of architectural and planning practice and is being combined with building performance analysis under the terminology Building Performance Assessment. Programming has moved from square-footage assigned to functions to include more socially, psychologically and culturally informed performance criteria. Today, numerous successful housing developments, public spaces, and streets have benefited from user participation in design.

Emerging Issues in Urban Design

Some of the earlier approaches in using social factors in practice have been updated for a new century. For example, instead of *participatory design*—integrating user opinions in the design process—presenters offered the idea of *co-design*, a design process which gives equal agency to users as to the architect and planner. While some subfields, such as the design of hospitals and schools, and aspects of building science, are clear on how to integrate user feedback into design, other areas still struggle to do so regularly. Citizen involvement has been institutionalized in planning and design processes, but, regrettably, it is sometimes simply facilitation of dialogue without genuine collaboration with users in developing designs and plans. Often processes seem to be structured to favour designer preferences, and community input processes are sometimes tightly orchestrated to produce a politically acceptable outcome. One exception is in the development of co-housing where future residents and owners actually shape the project from the beginning.

The healthy city is an enduring public health issue. Air quality and sanitation were concerns in the 19th century city and precipitated the birth of city planning as a profession. Health in the built environment has at least two new edges. The 19th century concern with disease reduction has evolved into a contemporary concern with sustainability, a complex, contested term that requires innovative social analysis and planning, not only technology and hardware innovation.

Concern for public health is intrinsically connected to body conscious design, another issue making its place in environmental design, starting with ergonomic office design as a way to overcome repetitive strain injury (RSI), extending to urban design as a way to promote fitness and reduce obesity, and eventually leading to a redefinition of comfort at all scales. For example, rather than designing for softness and ease, which is our current understanding of the term *comfort*, the older Latin meaning of the word (to strengthen) emphasizes designing for proper alignment in seating, work routines, educational and recreational settings. We also observe other once-distant research areas such as neuroscience offer new ways to understand the power of the environment as a form of non-verbal information that communicates with the pre-verbal parts of the brain (limbic and reptilian) and accordingly influences unconscious expectations and behaviour.

The Contributions of this Issue

The papers in this issue reflect some of the major social issues in urban design today. Research into humans in designed environments has consistently intersected with and appropriated methodologies from other academic fields that study people, such as anthropology, geography, sociology, psychology and cognition. Ethnography, in particular, has over time proven to be a useful methodology in understanding user perspectives at every scale of the environment, from homes to public spaces.

Public health is a strong theme in urban design, including planning for the health of older adults and children, and promoting physical activity through environmental design. Research has addressed topics such as perceptions of natural landscape, healing gardens and nature in urban spaces. Not surprisingly, issues of sustainability are closely connected with human well-being, and topics such as sustainable design, occupant comfort and cultural knowledge all add to the field's dedication to understanding healthy environments for humans and for the planet.

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris addresses the implications of changing socio-economic conditions, including public health for urban design. The next two papers investigate specific aspects of health. Rodrigo Mora reports on an experiment with outdoor gyms in Santiago. Another important dimension of the healthy city is walkability. Arlie Adkins, Jennifer Dill, Gretchen Luhr, and Margaret Neal examine the attributes that make attractive walkable environments.

Digital technologies are changing the ways in which we observe and conceptualize urban space. Now we can navigate the city through digital media and no longer need to traverse its streets to explore possibilities. At a larger scale technology has facilitated the global flow of information and capital. New technology has implications for place identity, social and economic relations, and therefore is becoming a major area for new research. How is this simulated urban experience changing our conception and use of the spatial city? With the surging popularity and availability of computer-aided analysis, including mapping, modelling and geographic information systems, new levels of complexity and depth have been added to the methodological frames available to environment and behaviour researchers. For example, social technologies are reinventing our experience of public space, and robots are helping designers understand occupant

comfort in green buildings. Urban researchers are investigating modern technology's impact on society, our experience of where we live, and even how we do research. Focusing on the food truck phenomenon, Ginette Wessel studies how social media affect how people conceptualize urban space, and how and where people gather in public places.

The distinction between space and place has been a recurrent theme of research in this field: spaces have physical properties, while places have personal, social and cultural meaning and value. The concept of place counters a modernist assumption that spatial design criteria are universal, independent of history, culture and geography. Has place identity been threatened by globalization? Are places becoming more alike than different, or do different cultures still impose distinctive traditions? Is the once homogeneous suburb becoming less so?

A 'classic' theme in the field of environment and behaviour that overlaps with urban design is public space, how it is used and by whom. Definitions of public and private are blurring. While public life took place in public spaces in cities of the past, today much public activity occurs in spaces such as the shopping mall that are privately owned and controlled. In the developing urban edge, minimal space is devoted to civic uses and even streets are often privately owned. What are the consequences for public life when the city loses its public structure? Many researchers have responded to William Whyte's work on New York City plazas, globalizing and updating this classic theme in social factors research. Public space is still deeply contested and yet vital to societies around the globe. Researchers are still working to understand what public space is and how it operates. In this context Sungkyung Lee examines place identity and meaning in the anonymous commercial landscapes of Busan, South Korea. Through historical research Delia Wendel reveals how the entire city of Baku, Azerbaijan, became a medium for political and artistic expression in the early Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922. Finally, Liz Ogbu explores how design might respond to the needs of one largely ignored sector of society, the informal economy and the situation of day labourers.

Conclusion

This special issue of the *Journal of Urban Design* demonstrates continued vigorous interest in the social. As cities continue to grow and become more cosmopolitan, research into the social and cultural context for urban design will provide guidance for better cities.

Learning to read the values that are built into our environments tells us about ourselves in the way that archeologists are able to tell us about past societies based on their material objects and buildings. Analyzing our contemporary environments is a form of cultural criticism in which we articulate what is commendable and show how places could be improved for social, environmental and humanitarian goals. In our field cultural criticism and environmental design are seamless. Research that analyzes, criticizes or advocates helps to create better environments. Analysis and action have a lot in common. Social research is part of urban design.

Notes

1. Georgia Lindsay and Lusi Morhayim, along with Jonathan Bean, organized the 'Death + Life of Social Factors' conference.
2. The papers were initially presented at an international conference 'Death + Life of Social Factors: Reexamining Behavioral and Cultural Research in Environmental Design', held at the University of California at Berkeley in Spring 2011.