By legislation King David and his successors defined the components, and consequent shape of the Scottish town. The burgh shall have a high street that serves as the market place, with ‘merket cross’ that stands as a natural focus for the community, and a tooth where the king’s dues are paid. It shall have burgess: individuals who pay a rent to the king, and of necessity there must be plots or (tofts) where the burgesses can live and practise and ply their trade, with a wide-enough frontage onto the high street and depth enough to keep a cow or pig, grow fruit and vegetables, and undertake unpleasant things such as tanning and flax retting. The plots are laid out using the perch as a unit of measure (5 metres) and typically 10-20 metres wide and perhaps 60-100 metres deep, by people called lineatores in Latin or liners in the modern era. Curiously the Scottish burghs rarely had town walls, possibly so that the king could, without breaking the bank, impose an impendiment, rough-up the burgesses if they started to get out of hand. They are also international settlements, trade and commerce are to be found: Scots, English, Flemings, and no doubt many other nationalities. King David was himself part of an international ruling class, half Scot, half Saxon as his parents had spent time in Hungary. The towns were not arbitrary, but designed and assembled. Some were so ordered that they are mistaken today for Roman settlements. They were the sustain-able communities and eco-towns of their day. Power by wind and rain and the sun through the growth of grass and crops and wood, and the sweat of man and beast were instrumental in the development of a nation that is overrepresented in its influence on world technology and thought, although few would thank the Scots for the bagpipes.

We have two models for urban designers from this period. There is the narrow model of the lineatores armed with their wooden pegs and knotted twine, marking out the tofts, the streets and the marches, and there is King David I himself. And it is surely he, with his grasp of the broad interplay of economics, monetary policy, law and order, and leadership that is essential for a town to exist and to thrive, who provides the better model for urban designers today.

In this special Scottish edition, at a time when the trade of the town is threatened on the one hand by the growth of the internet, and on the other by the supremacy of national and multi-national corporate and banking interests, let us remember the uncelebrated urban designers of the Scottish medieval town and the true ingredients for a successful settlement.
The topic in this issue explores a country steeped in contrasts – Scotland – with its distinctive almost European urbanism and wild rugged natural countryside. As the articles describe, it is going through a design revolution, pulling locally distinctive design quality and place-making to the heart of the debate about planning policy and processes. Capturing and supporting the character of Scotland’s cities, towns and rural settlements will save it from the creep of anonymous blocks of flats or grey bungalows that pervade Britain when design is not made a priority.

Shared space is another theme explored here with two articles showing how it can be done successfully, but also the shift in attitudes that it seems to need. Many similar debates and professional exchanges have been mothballed along with the projects that prompted them, and yet the pursuit for better quality must remain our priority.

As the recession continues to depress urban design activity in the UK, and international cities happily reabsorb their talented professionals lost from practices here, we need to ensure that the quality of urban design does not slip away in the haste to recover ground.

A much more positive note was struck in February with the Student Project Award evening, encouraging the next generation of urban designers to see its importance and become supporters of the Urban Design Group. This issue also features the first two of the shortlisted Francis Tibbalds Project Awards for 2010, for which practices have submitted excellent examples of their work for your scrutiny!

Louise Thomas

The First Urban Design Group Student Award


The last issue of Urban Design (Issue 113) published the five students projects short listed for the Francis Tibbalds Award. The main purpose of this event at the Gallery, was to announce the winner selected through voting online by the UDG membership.

To start the evening, Kelvin Campbell of Urban Initiatives gave a stimulating and provocative talk with the title “Where is Urban Design Going Wrong?”. He wondered why, after years of debate and government advice such as By Design, it was still difficult to find good examples of urban design to show visitors; and this could not just be blamed on the economy as matters were not better during the boom years. Examples that ticked all the boxes of the various ‘manuals’ were still devoid of any life. Kelvin suggested that we needed a paradigm shift; for instance too much had been expected from the private sector and we might now see a renaissance of action by the public sector. He also suggested that it would be better to have many small schemes rather than big ones and used Monet’s Water Lilies as a way of proving his point. In terms of design, he favours the imposition of order but it can be the modifier as when a rigid grid is imposed on the hilly landscape of San Francisco. Fundamentally Kelvin advised us to understand the individual house as a basis for design; he illustrated how working with the sequence plot-block, a harmonious description to a students centred evening.

Following the talk, the five short listed schemes were briefly presented by their authors, after which John Billingham - whose idea these awards were – announced the winners; as the vote had been very close, the UDG had decided to give a runner-up prize (£200) to Armando Delgado (middle left), a student of the University of Westminster, whilst the winner, Nick Thorne of Oxford Brookes (middle right) received £400. Both were also handed a certificate confirming that they had won the Francis Tibbalds Student Award.

The very well attended evening was generously sponsored by Routledge and Urban Initiatives, thus allowing for social networking around a glass of wine and nibbles!

Sebastian Low

International comparisons: Housing and urban form


“The uniformity of estates built to the model codes may appeal to the eye of some, but to the artist give rise to feelings of nausea.” So wrote a way in the 1920s about the development that was happening at a time. Not short of a century on, and the position has changed little. Phrases such as ‘Martin homes’ have entered into common usage (among people interested in urban design at least), as monotonous monomaniacal patterns of housing have been churned out decade after decade in the ubiquitous micro-detached executive home, the semi-detached, and the micro-apartment. We are told that the coming UK general election will be a battle to win over the hearts and votes of ‘Motor- way Man’: a person living on one of these very estates, with two cars 2.4 kids, a dog, a Jacuzzi, a 32 inch wall mounted television with surround-sound, laminate flooring and leather sofa. The hope that things could be different seems lost. And so we come to Eric Firley who in January gave the Urban Design Group a presentation on his Urban Housing Handbook, a beautifully illustrated and seductive characterisation of housing across the globe. From the courtyard houses in Marrakesh, with their space hidden from the street, or Mietkasernen tenements in Berlin with ‘fronter house’ and ‘hinter house’, the Islington terrace mews, or the application of ideas in Copenhagen, Eric demonstrated that there are many more approaches to housing than those to which we have become too closely acquainted. Eric concluded his presentation by showing what would happen if one overlaid different housing types and the associated street patterns in an area of South London.

There was discussion as to how the different housing types can be adapted as needs change. Eric highlighted the consequences of cutting terrace houses into apartments with the private staircase becoming an unlawful communal space into flats and a store for rubbish. There was discussion too over the challenges of the occupation of housing by people from various socio-economic groups. The elegance of Eric’s approach is that it is positive, not normative. He sets out to describe the different types of housing and their setting, leaving it to others to infer the imperatives of each particular approach. It is easy to see the conflict between illumination versus heat loss in higher latitudes, or the struggle for shade nearer the equator; the constraints imposed by 19th century concerns over public health, or the question of how to prevent or extinguish fires. Then there are the questions of security, family and social structure, and the daily lifestyles that the inhabitants lead. It seems a tragedy that we are so impoverished by the restricted range of housing types, when our towns, our cities and our lives could be so much more enriched.

Robert Huxford
Minimum... or Maximum Cities?

- Min-Max-Cities Group, Department of Architecture University of Cambridge, 36 November 2009

Anxieties over urban space within western cities, and fears over the dynamic growth of megacities in the developing world have altered the way that we see the benefits and drawbacks of urbanisation. For some commentators a culture of shrinkage is a necessity, others fear the city is set to swallow the world.

Minimum... or Maximum Cities? was a chance to clarify the design and cultural attributes that will best help to address the urban future. The emphasis of the day was generating critical engagement with ideas that was apparent from the inclusion of the exhibition Paper City: Urban Utopias which was redesigned for Cambridge after spending the summer at the Royal Academy. While the Global Cities exhibition at the Tate a few years ago relied on statistics, the Paper City drawings imagined the future with the intention of widening the debate about what form cities could take by encouraging ‘thinking big’, and outside the framework of official debate.

In that spirit, the twenty speakers involved in four panel discussions were instructed to ditch their evidence bases, leave pew-erpoint at home, and instead engage in a more exploratory and critical debate about the urban future. From transport systems to energy grids, from social networks to economic activity, all of the speakers had to work extremely hard to explain and then defend their ideas to a critical audience that seemed to relish the opportunity to engage with such substantial issues. Perhaps the worst thing that could happen to the controversial was Rob Lynns from the online magazine Spike’d who argued that designers should hold a public furore in front of the planner, not least because to do otherwise may block developments that will help future generations adapt to a warmer world.

In the final session Re-writing the Rulebook, young gunslingers Darryl Chen (Tomorrow’s Thoughts Today) and Karl Sharro (townemonuman) mixed with old hand Derek Walker, an early Chief Architect of Milton Keynes. They demonstrated between them that there are enough ideas, ambition and energy around to make sure that we shouldn’t walk away from a future that has so many years of new access to existing green space. But an open space strategy can be equally powerful in cities where 20 per cent of adults engage in moderate physical activity, and not access to large green spaces, or good quality green space. No one knows exactly how many people living in six deprived urban areas, with a focus on black and minority ethnic communities.

-- Stella Blond, Head of Communications

Urban green nation

While a lot is known about rural green spaces, surprisingly little is known about urban green spaces. No one knows exactly how many people live in a deprived urban area, or how much open space is there? An open space strategy can be equally powerful in cities where 20 per cent of adults engage in moderate physical activity, and not access to large green spaces, or good quality green space. No one knows exactly how many people live in a deprived urban area, or how much open space is available. While an open space strategy can be equally powerful in cities where 20 per cent of adults engage in moderate physical activity, and not access to large green spaces, or good quality green space. No one knows exactly how many people live in a deprived urban area, or how much open space is available.
The schemes vary in their design qualities and the extent to which they embrace the potential of the home zone concept. Some, such as Lewsey Farm Green in Luton really appear to be glorified traffic calming schemes with a sign designation but no radical transformation of the environment. In contrast the Bristol schemes for the Dings and Southville get closer to the vision. The character illustrations give a visual indication of how the design features of the schemes might be judged, breaking down the environments into areas of design concern. Essentially schemes can have good, moderate or indifferent entrances, highway, streetscape, social-space and interface qualities. It is not possible to illustrate and discuss each scheme here, but to provide some sense of how comprehensive these schemes are, the Table A provides a numerical assessment. Qualities that are indifferent are given 0. Qualities that are moderate are given 1. Qualities that are good are given 2. Summing these qualities gives you a quick sense of which schemes are the most ambitious in design terms. Readers are encouraged to use Google Map and Street View to explore the scheme themselves and search terms are given below. Looking at the column totals we can see the extent to which schemes have been dominated by themes concerned with traffic, whilst the creation of social space for sitting or playing has been rarely achieved. Schemes discussed below have their mark out of 10 for design comprehensiveness in brackets after the name. Given that we are essentially judging whether the street designs are more or less safe, this understanding helps us to explore to what extent the nature of the designs has affected the results. (Note the Victoria Estate in Bury has not been assessed, but its safety record is still discussed below).

ACCIDENT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table B summarises the accident data for each scheme. It is a little daunting, but simply shows the number of accidents each year relative to the year of the treatments. This is certainly the case for six projects, Ivydale Road (6/10), Kennington Road (5/10), Lewsey Farm Green (1/10) (see Haymarket Road, Luton on Google Maps), Methley Drive (3/10), Southville (9/10) and Westleigh (6/10). It reminds us that home zones were introduced to improve street liveability, rather than reduce accidents. The Dings (7/16) (visit Tyler Street, Bristol in Google Street View) has seen a small reduction in accidents, but also from a low level. Since project completion a one year old child has had their foot run over by a passing car and its parent wasn’t pleased!

We can also judge that the degree of design comprehensiveness is not a factor affecting road safety, for example three areas had a poor accident record before treatment. Five Roads in Ealing (5/10) had an annual average of 2.75 accidents per year. After treatment this was reduced to 1 per annum. As a relatively conservative scheme we can judge that the traffic calming methods introduced (humps, chicanes and re-orientated parking) have positively affected safety (see Broughton Road, Ealing in Google Street View). Methley Drive (3/10) had a very poor record, although the area is relatively large in comparison to others. It had an average of 11 accidents per year before, but after treatment this reduced to 2.7. This more radical scheme had the greatest impact on safety of the projects studied with a reduction of 2.29 accidents per year after treatment (see Charlotte Street, Plymouth in Google Maps). Interestingly this project was promoted and championed by the council’s road safety officer.

The project in Normanton, Derby (7/16) also had a poor record with an average of 2.2 accidents in its area prior to the scheme, and after the project this increased to 3.50. 11 accidents occurred alone during these years following the project’s completion. Further analysis of the case showed that between 2006 and today 11 accidents had occurred at 2 junctions (see Cameron and Duncan Roads and Randolph and Duncan Roads, Derby on Street View). On the edge of the project these junctions had road narrowing and ramp treatments introduced but no give way markings. Subsequently give way markings have been introduced because the designs alone were clearly not encouraging careful approaches at the junction. In subsequent years the accidents have reduced.

Three schemes have had a small negative impact on accident levels. The projects at the Victoria Estate (see Victoria Avenue, Bury in Google Maps), Normoor (9/16) (visit Prout Street, Manchester on Google Street View) and Cavell Way in Sittingbourne (6/16) ultimately show a negative effect on safety. Accident levels are generally low in all schemes. Victoria Estate is relatively large, and has only one accident every 2 years. Normoor also covers a comprehensive area, and is one of the most celebrated schemes, both it and Cavell Way having one accident every 3 years. These latter projects have also had no accidents for 3 and 4 years respectively, suggesting residents may have adapted their driving behaviour following the schemes’ construction.

CONCLUSIONS

In general it is worth remembering that home zones were not introduced for safety reasons, but in order to improve their liveability for residents. The impact of these schemes on liveability is discussed elsewhere (Biddulph, 2010). In terms of road safety, however, we can critically conclude that home zones are not dangerous, and that the design features have typically either maintained or improved safety on the streets.

This should be an important finding for all designers and engineers concerned in principle with the safety of such treatments. Importantly, the comprehensiveness of the designs has not been a factor affecting street safety, suggesting that the combination of traffic calming methods adopted in Ealing, for example, has had as much effect as the more elaborate and environment changing projects in other locations. In addition, however, the Normanton case reminds us that each scheme needs to be understood within its context, that poorly designed features can be problematic, and that designs should be subject to ongoing monitoring and revision. Further research is required, however, to determine by observation, exactly whether patterns of street use and activity have also changed, or whether street users are still sticking to the edges of the street and not venturing out to share the space with vehicles.

Mike Biddulph, Senior Lecturer in Urban Design, School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University.

SMASHER STREET DESIGN
Tim Long describes a new street partnership initiative

Many pavements in towns and cities are congested and have reached their capacity for pedestrians. This congestion prevents walking from increasing, and so the creation of healthier, more vital and viable streets and towns, and an urban renaissance is affected. These pavements are congested because they often cannot be widened and are cluttered by many different pieces of street furniture.

CLEAR ZONE INITIATIVE
Just as some streets seem to have reached their capacity for pedestrians, the Clear Zone Partnership is pioneering a new approach called Smarter Streets. The Clear Zone Partnership is between the London Borough of Camden, the City and Westminster Councils in central London, and it is a centre for innovative street design and new transport technologies.

Smarter Streets’ analysis reveals that streets are made up of many different parts that serve a single function and numerous items of street furniture that have only one purpose. In this way streets have been designed like zoned land uses as they have separate and segregated spaces for each function and provide items of street furniture for each purpose. Instead, Smarter Streets designs streets using mixed use principles, so that spaces and items of street furniture serve more than one purpose.

The aim of these multi-purpose spaces and items of street furniture is to achieve more from less space (and often less money), in order to release space for walking. In turn, these de-cluttered streets are simpler and tidier, which creates a higher quality public realm that can reveal the quality of our towns and cities and their architecture far better.

SMASHER LOADING AND CYCLE STANDS
Over the last few years the Clear Zone Partnership has innovated to create a range of Smarter Streets and street furniture designs. A common cause of congestion is where a footway cannot be widened due to a loading bay, or where the footway is pinched by a loading bay that is recessed into it. The Clear Zone Partnership solves this problem by raising loading bays to footway level so that they serve two purposes: a wider footway most of the time, and for deliveries when required. Raised loading bays can also create simpler, tidier streets by providing straight kerb lines along the front of the loading bays. A further benefit of raising loading bays is that they narrow the road slowing the traffic, and thus make it easier for able bodied pedestrians to cross the carriageway, which can reduce the number of people trying to use busy, formal crossing points. The success of raised loading bays has quickly spread to include raised parking, coach, taxi, and motorcycle bays. Examples can be seen in Bernard Street, High Holborn, Goodge Street, Great Queen Street and Drury Lane in central London.

Another multi-purpose and simpler design is in Malet Street, Camden. The road running from Tavistock Place into Malet Street was closed to motor vehicles to reduce traffic, but a cycle contraflow lane was maintained through this area to promote cycling. Traffic was prevented from entering Malet Street by narrowing the road using a traffic island at the top and another fifty metres down the road, which also provided pedestrian crossings, and so they are dual-purpose. The other dual-purpose, simpler design was to install a row of cycle stands between the pedestrian islands to separate the motor traffic lane from the cycle contraflow on Malet Street. Installing cycle stands in the carriageway has additional advantages as they are a simpler, cheaper design; easier to use; and do not affect drainage. These dual-purpose cycle stands were developed further by installing them in the middle of the carriageway in High Holborn to separate the traffic lanes on both sides of the road.

COMPACT STREET FURNITURE
The Clear Zone Partnership employed Factory Furniture to help create another Smarter Street design: successfully combing benches and bins to reduce clutter. The benches are cast as a single piece of concrete with the bins recessed into the ends. This is a tidier, more compact design that saves space, and provides benches and bins to people most needed. Clutter and space is also saved as fewer benches are required, because they can seat more people as they are double-sided. Clutter and space is also saved as fewer benches are required, because they can seat more people as they are double-sided.

The aim of these multi-purpose spaces and items of street furniture is to achieve more from less space (and often less money), in order to release space for walking. In turn, these de-cluttered streets are simpler and tidier, which creates a higher quality public realm that can reveal the quality of our towns and cities and their architecture far better.

SMARTER PLACES
The best example of a Smarter Street where several of these designs have been used together is in Great Queen Street and Drury Lane on the edge of Covent Garden. The scheme removed the traffic lights from this junction (as well as street clutter including: 64m of guard railings, a traffic signal control box, two telephone boxes, bollards, and three lamp posts), and created a shared space and a new public square. Shared space is a Smarter Street design because it is dual-purpose, as it can be crossed by traffic and pedestrians at the same time, reducing delays and congestion for both modes. Raised bays were provided for loading, motorcycles and taxis to widen the footways at the entrances to these spaces near other junctions. The new benches and bins helped to minimise clutter and maximise the amount of space on the square. The new bollards will be installed on Drury Lane in the spring to help de-clutter part of this street.

The result of all these Smarter Street designs is that they have transformed Great Queen Street and Drury Lane into a place for pedestrians by creating more space, less footway congestion, fewer delays when crossing the road, less clutter, and improved the views of the square and the surrounding architecture.

In short, the Clear Zone Partnership has applied urban design principles to create a new approach to street design, achieving more from less and greater freedom of movement for pedestrians.
The debate over shared space in Kensington and Chelsea continues. Objectors fear that shared space heralds the arrival of beggars, prostitutes, drug dealers and an unprecedented level of anger, and the Guide Dogs for the Blind say that the Exhibition Road plans are ‘dangerous and hazardous for thousands of vulnerable local residents and visiting tourists’. Council leader Merrick Cockell however sees the one hundred plus accidents in last three years as an illustration that the current arrangements are not safe. Journalist Simon Jenkins suggests that traffic engineers are the most dangerous people in London; shared space, he argues, can neuter the threat of vulnerable local residents and ‘dangerous and hazardous for thousands of beggars, prostitutes, drug dealers and cycling and rollerblading may be a real worry’.

Viewpoints

THE NEW ETHOS OF PUBLIC SPACE

The arrival of zombie drivers, heralding a new sense of space, he argues, can neuter the threat of,beggars, prostitutes, drug dealers and cycling and rollerblading may be a real worry.

EXPECTING THE WORST

In what are we scared of? Charles Landry argued that interpreting the world from the perspective of risk is the defining characteristic of contemporary society. From climate change, flu pandemics to terrorism we appear to have little confidence that we are equipped with the knowledge and ability to deal with the future.

The changing outlook on risk is reflected in a shift from probabilistic thinking to what Frank Furedi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent terms possibilistic thinking. In the past, confidence that we could understand and then act, underpinned our approach to calculating and managing hazards and potential risks. Today we speculate what can go wrong, rather than which is likely to happen. Possibilistic thinking is driven, he argues, by cultural narratives – knowing and apprehension over the unknown, routinely expecting the worst possible outcomes.

This process will be familiar to urban designers acquainted with scenario planning, the increasingly influential backdrop to urban and infrastructure planning – that we live in a society which lacks the controllability of previous times. The view that urban and eco systems are vulnerable and susceptible to failure underpins the aim of generating alternative scenarios by engaging with uncertainties. Yet it is invariably the worst case scenarios that exert the greatest influence. This hinders a proper understanding of risks by encouraging worst case thinking.

Authors

Queen Elizabeth Hall where skateboarders and cyclists now gather has the air of an officially designated playground where kids are permitted to expend energy. Free public space is quickly seized – surely a worrying inversion of urban freedoms?

VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN A BIG, BAD WORLD

While scenario planners speculate on harmful consequences, communities also speculate on potential risks. Given that cities are valued as being where strangers meet, we are now suspicious of those we don’t know. This stranger-danger reflects a collapse of confidence that we can interpret the world. Communities feel that they lack commonly evolved codes or rules of interaction essential for community life. Consequently we hesitate before becoming involved in situations that in the past were considered routine – providing a calming influence over high-spirited kids. When kids’ behaviour is routinely considered a problem, it suggests that adult perceptions of risk are not generated by specific threats, but from culturally generated fears. It is no surprise then that hard surfaces, sharp edges or flowing water are considered too problematic. Instead of accepting that we are naturally resilient, designers are expected to compensate for our perceived vulnerability by designing out uncertainty. As John Adams - author of Risk - points out, we find it difficult to accept the possibility of bad luck or accidents, instead we become passive victims of circumstances.

Notably our sense of vulnerability is also used as the means for planning authorities to connect with communities. Neighbourhood planning exercises engage communities over their fears, reinforcing their sense of vulnerability, and strengthening the grip of risk and safety in design processes. Shared space, which promotes risk as a means of negotiating potential threats from which we must escape, is now justified as creating safer places - reducing accidents, or combating community fears of breakdown, through new codes of courtesy and behaviour. The culture of planning, who argue that this will encourage anti-social behaviour is engaging in the same game, but whoever plays the best safety card will trump the opposition.

STANDING UP FOR OURSELVES

Tari Borden once argued that ‘much of the joy of public spaces comes from their surprising qualities, from not always knowing them or the people they contain’. Something will be lost if cities become places where surprise is ironed out, but how can we design for such possibilities when the rules try to foil us?

It is here that what we are scared of? is inadequate, and more likely to reinforce the problem. It argues that risk is now so embedded because project managers, planning supervisors and auditors have a vested interest in maintaining a climate of uncertainty. Yet this identifies the symptom as the cause of the problem. The risk auditor exists to fulfil the demands of a contemporary society with an ingrained sense of vulnerability. Similarly the suggested solution of more risk-mitigation strategies to neutralise the auditor’s influence, by collaborating with clients and contractors to produce more systematic risk assessments - this avoids the problem. Instead of attempting to renew our society as active subjects rather than passive victims, this bureaucratic solution merely fiddles with risk assessments – perhaps drawing even more people into their web. Rather than endorsing different types of risk assessment, it would be more useful to challenge them on the basis that we are all at risk. Ridiculing the risk police for their demeaning view of the public is easy, and most can point to absurdities such as the banning of trees in public spaces lest they cause injury. But other manifestations of the new culture of the vulnerable public are left unchallenged. In this sense, those who support the plans for shared space in Exhibition Road might be more successful if they also argued against the recent designation of all public space throughout Kensington and Chelsea as a controlled drinking zone. After all, if we are to trust ourselves to walk amongst large moving machines in shared space, then we must be confident enough to insist on the freedom for how we use public space. Both scenarios require trusting ourselves, and taking ourselves seriously as confident, authoritative adults.

Constraints on freedom within the public sphere, and the expansion of risk-averse regulations controlling design, both result from the sense that we no longer possess the knowledge and capacity to deal with uncertainty. Trusting ourselves to exercise judgement and authority is the precondition for reinvigorating the public life of cities, and freeing design from the influence of the risk managers.

Ye Zhang, PhD candidate at The Martin Centre for Architectural and Urban Studies, Cambridge, and Alastair Donald, mantownhuman, co-author of the manifestos Towards a New Humanities in Architecture

Y.
URBANISM IN SCOTLAND

This topic arose from the activities of the UDG in Scotland in recent years and for which I am privileged to be Convenor for the group. It is great to see that the hard work of our volunteers and their activities have raised enough interest for a special issue of Urban Design to be dedicated to one country.

As Patrick Geddes stated ‘Think globally, act locally’, and it is certainly the case that while a global setting is a local planning system in the process of more ambitious, authentic and true to the landscapes of Scotland is critical to achieving more liveable urban places. Ewan Anderson of 7N describes the development of an urban framework for Speirs Lock in Glasgow – one of the SSCI exemplars. The exploration of the potential offered by the proposed Waverley train line connecting the Scottish Borders to Edinburgh is explored by Oliver Chapman Architects. Duncan Whatmore looks at place-making in projects that combine engineering and design.

Visionary and ambitious plans need ambitious leaders and positive leadership, and John Deffenbaugh explores the political leadership of Chicago – a grid city analogous in many ways to Glasgow. Dr. Lorenz Holm and Paul Guzzardo of the Geddes Institute link the place teaching of Geddes to Dundee’s creative capital, exploring a framework for place based on talent and technology.

In any debate there are always different viewpoints and different answers too, but as Daniel Burnham said small plans ‘do not have the magic to stir men’s blood’. Aim high he says, and Scotland hopes to do just that.

WHAT MAKES A PLACE?

Riccardo Marini debates the importance of different urban design approaches

Scotland is recognised as the most urban of the nations which make up the British Isles. This predisposition to urban living is exemplified by wonderful settlements as Moffat, Duns, St Andrews and its capital Edinburgh.

Sir Terry Farrell, eminent urbanist and Edinburgh’s first city design champion, has been proselytising about place-making since his appointment in 2004; in March 2008 the Scottish Government made place-making a priority, setting out a declaration of support for place-making in the reform of the planning system. The purpose of the planning system in Scotland is to facilitate good quality outcomes, and the report of the Council of Economic Advisors to the Scottish Government argues that the ultimate test of an effective planning system is the maintenance and creation of places where people want to be.

There is a lot of discussion about what place-making is and how it can be delivered. It varies from an intellectual analysis of the problems which prevent viable places from evolving, to the bizarrely dogmatic modernist reductivist mantra of ‘form follows function’ to the comfort of the formulaic New Urbanist approach; the answer as always lies somewhere in between the extremes.

What is essential is that we evolve an intellectual debate about the future of our settlements to ensure that people want to be in? Scotland needs to shift to understanding how important our cultural values? How can we prevent viable places from evolving, to the bizarrely dogmatic modernist reductivist mantra of ‘form follows function’ to the comfort of the formulaic New Urbanist approach; the answer as always lies somewhere in between the extremes.

What is essential is that we evolve an intellectual debate about the future of our settlements to ensure that people want to be in? Scotland needs to shift to understanding how important our cultural values are to benefit future inhabitants. What we have been doing for the past forty years has not really delivered the kind of places that we want. The focus needs to shift to understanding how important ‘spirit of place’ is and should be in shaping our future developments.

THE VALUE OF PLACE-MAKING?

‘Space and light and order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep.’ Le Corbusier

If labels are of any relevance, and as a society we seem to be obsessed with them, I may be defined as a modernist. Consequently I am drawn to this compelling statement by Le Corbusier; it is essential that we understand this approach as a reaction to the pomposity and staidness of architectural and social debate in the early twentieth century.

With the benefit of nearly eighty years of the modernist experiment, we should have a clear understanding that there is nothing neutral in the way that we make places. Every mark we make carries with it a set of values. It is these values that we use to structure our world. Our places are a mirror of our cultural values.

Unfortunately the rather flawed urban theories of that period have gained ascendancy because they fit the value/efficiency philosophy which drives everything that we do and that also evolved during that time. We need to regain the ability to shape our environments so that the simplistic ‘on time, on budget, therefore it is right’ approach is overcome.

Architecture is about ideas, design is problem-solving, and not solving one problem while creating others; places should develop through design, with an understanding of the genius loci and solutions that respond to it. Context is about the physical condition but also the cultural condition. Can we not see the statements that our places are making about our cultural values? How can we ensure that what we do will translate into places that people want to be in?
We are faced with the emphatic factional doughnut process best not left to a single professional. Now be condemned to live in them. The emotions that they stir up among professionals or Page and Park’s Stratton Plan; the tribal nature of positions. Take Duany & Plater-Zyberk’s Tornagrain fantasies. Littered with abysmal places which were architects’ splendid ‘Playtime’ by Jacques Tati? Sometimes designers just don’t get it - place should not be influenced by stylistic dogma. The world is conditioned by the extant Structure and Local Plan guidance, or lack of. We need to understand why and who are we shaping for people. It requires a positive use, must be designed with place-making in mind, should not be space left over, and it can often be a lot smaller. City masterplan or masterplanning is steeped in a landscape tradition which can be traced back to André Le Nôtre and his work at Versailles. True masterplanning is not about land ownership or specifically about buildings; its starting point is a true understanding of genius loci.

The current development condition in the UK indicates that place can rarely evolve from one single project. The semantics of the Master plan or development plan are real issues - the ‘red line’ approach is a specific British problem. It is naive to think, no matter how skilled you are, that the commitment you hand over just landed você - even if the landowner were willing - evolve into a real place. At this stage it is about the development proposal, which is a simple relationship between land owner and the future value of his asset; conditioned by the extant Structure and Local Plan guidance, or lack of. The kind of place-making I am calling for is based on the understanding of what is acceptable in development terms. The instruments that should deal with place-making are the instruments that define what is acceptable in development terms. The Structure and Local Plans are the critical tools to define it in the context of spatial planning. It is through these instruments that we can enable real place value to be created and shared, for all citizens.

HEIDEGGER VIA NORBERT-SCHULZ TO ROSSI – ENQUIRY BY DESIGN

As a student I was fascinated by the Italian Neo-Classicist and the modernist Rossi – Enquiry by Design. Yet this is an unfortunate and divisive association. This methodology should be the basis of our approach to planning the future of all of our places and spaces, and it is conditioned by the small stylistic imprint that it has acquired. To prove its value I have advocated that our ancestors need to make place, and that we should give Poundbury a new skin, a diverse skin akin to the real layering that is not felt like the natural DNA of Dorchester in its evolution and delivery. We need to understand why and who are we shaping for people. It requires a positive use, must be designed with place-making in mind, should not be space left over, and it can often be a lot smaller. City masterplan or masterplanning is steeped in a landscape tradition which can be traced back to André Le Nôtre and his work at Versailles. True masterplanning is not about land ownership or specifically about buildings; its starting point is a true understanding of genius loci.

The current development condition in the UK indicates that place can rarely evolve from one single project. The semantics of the Master plan or development plan are real issues - the ‘red line’ approach is a specific British problem. It is naive to think, no matter how skilled you are, that the commitment you hand over just landed você - even if the landowner were willing - evolve into a real place. At this stage it is about the development proposal, which is a simple relationship between land owner and the future value of his asset; conditioned by the extant Structure and Local Plan guidance, or lack of. The kind of place-making I am calling for is based on the understanding of what is acceptable in development terms. The instruments that should deal with place-making are the instruments that define what is acceptable in development terms. The Structure and Local Plans are the critical tools to define it in the context of spatial planning. It is through these instruments that we can enable real place value to be created and shared, for all citizens.

THE TRUE VALUE OF PLACE

We are conditioned to make choices based on false efficiencies (i.e. on time, on budget), but this is the path to very unhappy places. The current development condition in the UK indicates that place can rarely evolve from one single project. The semantics of the Master plan or development plan are real issues - the ‘red line’ approach is a specific British problem. It is naive to think, no matter how skilled you are, that the commitment you hand over just landed você - even if the landowner were willing - evolve into a real place. At this stage it is about the development proposal, which is a simple relationship between land owner and the future value of his asset; conditioned by the extant Structure and Local Plan guidance, or lack of. The kind of place-making I am calling for is based on the understanding of what is acceptable in development terms. The instruments that should deal with place-making are the instruments that define what is acceptable in development terms. The Structure and Local Plans are the critical tools to define it in the context of spatial planning. It is through these instruments that we can enable real place value to be created and shared, for all citizens.

THE CURIOUS AFFAIR OF THE NEO-CLASSICIST AND THE MODERNIST

Why then is the debate about the future of our settlements currently mired in a futile and dogmatic set of ‘genius loci’ and give room for real physical, social, and cultural growth. The true nature of the process, because it is easier than making places. But this must be seen in the wider context and against the wonderfully brave, innovative and intellectual approach that architects and planners have bestowed on the world since the 1960s. That vision of the brave new world was as flawed and as dogmatic as the New Urbanist crusade which faces us today. Land use planning is not sophisticated enough to deal with place-making issues, and we are still trapped by the reductivist approach to place where we have simplified it all to its constituent parts, and the ones which are most easily quantified dominate all that we do. Planning has to capture love, passion and happiness to become the key to resolving the intense pressures which will face us in the coming years. The instruments that should deal with place-making are the instruments that define what is acceptable in development terms. The Structure and Local Plans are the critical tools to define it in the context of spatial planning. It is through these instruments that we can enable real place value to be created and shared, for all citizens.

Enquiry by Design …should be the basis of our approach to planning the future of all of our places and spaces.
THE UDG IN SCOTLAND AND SCOTLAND STREET
Alona Martinez-Perez and Francis Newton reflect on the UDG’s rise in Scotland

The rise of the urban design agenda in the UK led to the establishment of Architecture & Design Scotland in 2005 and CARE. Similarly the work of volunteers in the Urban Design Group in a formal context and with the ‘street’ network more informally has contributed to a growing interest and awareness.

In early 2007, a group of planners, urban designers and architects met in Edinburgh to do something in the urban design scene in the city, indeed in Scotland. Our first meeting at the Café Royal attracted over seventy people, including students, practitioners, planners and architects - this spirit created the UDG in London over thirty years ago.

We had the support of Rob Cowan (now past UDG Director) and agreed that the national annual conference was to be in Edinburgh that year. This support continued with the current director Robert Huxford and the UDG Manager Louise Inglewood based in London.

The 2007 UDG Conference on urban design and Masterplanning included talks and study tours, and John Deffenbaugh obtained funding by the Design Initiative of City of Edinburgh Council to host a Scotland ‘Street’ reception. The conference involved speakers from different professions and was attended by over 120 delegates - one of the most successful conferences in the last few years.

A formal network of urban design professionals was launched in 2007 by John Deffenbaugh and myself, and quickly established a database of over 100 members, reflecting the level of interest and enthusiasm that exists in Scotland. The annual conference and the establishment of Scotland Street was a resource of knowledge on the subject, and a network of professionals interested in urban design, which the UDG aims to expand and develop throughout Scotland.

In recognition of the group’s work, I was appointed as convenor, and following John Deffenbaugh’s departure to London, Francis Newton, Jo White and Laurie Mentiplay continued as core members of the group. Events, usually held on a monthly basis typically attract up to 20 people and informal gatherings in pubs or company offices have helped to minimise overheads, whilst providing a forum for debate.

Although Scotland Street was initially targeted at younger professionals, the group quickly built up a following and has since developed into a fully fledged regional branch of the UDG, with levels of activity often greater than that of other regional groups. The scheme was marked by an ambitious lecture programme during the spring and summer 2009, featuring eminent speakers including Ewan Anderson (ZN), Adam Wilkinson (Edinburgh World Heritage), Eugene Mullan (Smith Scott Mullan), Oliver Chapman (OC Architects), Richard Williams (University of Edinburgh), Alona Martinez Perez (UDG Convener), Diarmaid Lawlor (A-DS) and Robert Huxford (UDG Director).

Following the success of Scotland Street and other regional activities, the UDG agreed to offer funding for the regions to promote events and raise the urban design agenda locally, with Scotland an exemplar in the UK. 2010 will see a programme of varied and topical events, each involving an expert speaker and facilitator, and jointly with other professional bodies. Due to the geographical nature of the Scottish region, it has been difficult to attract participants beyond the Central Belt. This could be attributed to the low number of professionals working beyond this area, because of the distances involved in travelling to an event.

Regrettably, those closely involved in UDG Scotland saw a slight wane in interest as economic circumstances began to change in late 2008, with redundancies, increased work pressures, and lower levels of work taking place. However the presence of a regional UDG has an important role to play in providing a forum for debate, a means of networking, and complementing other events put on by the larger professional organisations.

EDINBURGH TRAM PROJECT

The art of place making is still very much a collective one and falls between a number of professional stools. The need for effective urban design skills and interdisciplinary working can perhaps be exemplified by the Edinburgh Tram project, one of the largest infrastructure projects currently taking place in Scotland and the city. This was recently one of the most successful events with an urban design overview of the project given by UDG members Francis Newton, one of the lead planners for the project with the City of Edinburgh Council, and Laurie Mentiplay of SDS/Halcrow, acting as planning agents for the project. It was perhaps the contentious nature of the project which attracted such interest in the event, with its price tag of over £500 million. Construction of Line 1A is now progressing space and is likely to be completed by 2012, although Line 1B has currently been postponed due to lack of available funding and the economic slowdown.

The Tram project has also created opportunities for public realm enhancement. At Picardy Place, one of the key civic spaces along the Tram route, the involvement of the Edinburgh’s Design Champion Sir Terry Farrell has produced a significantly different design outcome. The introduction of the Tram has allowed a major vehicular interchange to be redefined, producing an enhanced public realm and clearer pedestrian linkages, with enhancements to the historic urban form through the creation of a major development opportunity at the centre of the interchange.

In many ways, the world wide web is the global front door to the perception of a country. At one stage the landing page of VisitScotland showed misty, moody mountains shouldering the assertion that ‘Scotland is the place’. This image and statement invite reflection. What is the nature of this place? What is the power of the image provokes thinking on some key principles of place; time and change, identity and authenticity, perception and expectation. Richard Florida says that successful places are authentic. This is about the creative applications of talent, technology and resource, and an understanding of time. What differentiates any place from any other where the same mix of ingredients is context. What then is the context of Scotland the place? What are the drivers of its contemporary authenticity, and how does urban design help this debate?

Scotland has, according to the first report of the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) to the Scottish Government, created urban places and developments of mediocre and indiffrent quality. The problem of poor, anywhere development is not limited to Scotland. However, the CEA assert that sustainable economic growth must be underpinned by the creation of places where people want to be. This is a challenge that is being embraced by the Scottish Government. The planning system is being reformed. The objectives of the reform agenda are to achieve a culture change, and more outcome-focused planning, which enables more sustainable places where people want to be. Scotland now has a hierarchy of policy instruments to support the reform agenda. The National Planning Framework sets a broad spatial framework for the country. Four city region plans are being prepared to co-ordinate cross boundary spatial priorities. A new shorter, clearer and more accessible Local Development Plan is promoted. This infrastructure is central to the Government’s ambition, set out in the draft revised Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) to create visionary and ambitious plans. Design is seen as central to achieving better places through planning. At national level, the design agenda is supported in a number of ways including A Policy on Architecture for Scotland, six Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs), the Designing Places policy statement, the recently published Designing Streets and the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative (SSCI). The aim of SSCI is to create exemplar projects and processes to drive forward the place and design agendas in Scotland. In March 2010, Andres Duany of Duany and Mater Zysber, champion of the New Urbanism agenda delivered charrettes in three Scottish locations: Ladyfield in Dumfries, Lochgelly in Fife and Grandholm in Aberdeen. The New Urbanism charrettes can be seen as a moment in modern Scottish planning history, a challenge in an ongoing discourse about the nature
The implementation of the Growing the Place strategy in Scotland is ongoing and involves a combination of the place-making and service delivery functions. As the economic landscape changes, we need to think increasingly creatively about place, and how a range of parties shape decisions to make places where people want to be. The initial pilot of the Scottish Renaissance Towns initiative at Neilston in East Renfrewshire has been recognised as a model of best practice in community-oriented place-making by the Scottish Government. The Ryton Inquiry into Local Government argues that the public sector has a key role, through its decision-making and service delivery functions, in shaping places. Visionary and ambitious plans must therefore be a combination of the place-shaping function of local government, positive and proactive leadership and active engagement by citizens. This is the path to sustainable visioning. A+DS has engaged in a number of place-visioning projects in Scotland. In Stirling, we worked with the local authority to facilitate a vision for the city which shaped a context for the Glasgow Canal Regeneration Plan. Working with Highlands Council we are facilitating a process which explores place concepts for Inverness, one of the fastest growing cities in the UK. As part of the Scottish Renaissance Towns Network, we are exploring the idea of place as shared space, the shared space of national and local policy agendas, the shared space of decision-making, and the shared space of delivery. Place is not the responsibility of one agency. As the economic landscape changes, we need to think increasingly creatively about place, and how a range of parties shape decisions to make places where people want to be. The initial pilot of the Scottish Renaissance Towns initiative at Neilston in East Renfrewshire has been recognised as a model of best practice in community-oriented place-making by the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. Scotland is changing. The policy and delivery contexts are changing imperatively for new ways of thinking, and new ways of doing. It is through positive engagement in this challenge that a new responsive and confident architecture and urbanism will emerge for Scotland.

The full regeneration framework as it might evolve

The first thing to be tackled was the underpass underneath the M8 flyover. This new link will be the gateway point - the pedestrian threshold connecting a large area for North Glasgow back to the city centre. It is an extraordinarily hostile environment, dark, noisy, dirty and intimidating. The proposal widens the underpass considerably, transforming it into a flowing, red resin surface that doesn’t constrain those using it to a single confrontational route. It will be illuminated by a ribbon of coloured aluminium flowers, flowing 6m up in the air drawing the visitor through the space, in deliberate contrast to the solidity of the concrete and a memory of Phoenix Park that once stood on the site. It is loud, but needs to be.

Growing the Place aims to replicate this process. A form of accelerated urban evolution, emulating the process of colonisation by bohemian menageries of positive engagement in the city’s core, is the way they transformed it into a flowing, red resin surface that doesn’t constrain those using it to a single confrontational route. It will be illuminated by a ribbon of coloured aluminium flowers, flowing 6m up in the air drawing the visitor through the space, in deliberate contrast to the solidity of the concrete and a memory of Phoenix Park that once stood on the site. It is loud, but needs to be.

Growing the Place strategy initially focused on two principal objectives: improving the severed connections in the city centre, healing the scar of the M8 flyover and instigating catalyst initiatives to kickstart regeneration, targeting initial investment on a series of limited public realm and arts-based initiatives.

Camer Market, Hoxton and Greenwich Village...were regenerated through the way they were inhabited, rather than through any sort of planning.

The global recession is causing widespread suffering and hardship but, in some respects, it may turn out to be a good thing for the future development of our towns and cities. A harsh medicine perhaps, but in recent years the lower value uses which enrich the urban realm have been increasingly squeezed out by the dominance of speculative development driven by easily available finance. The recent drop in land values and the tight constraints on planning now allowing these changes back into the game. The regeneration framework that ‘s Architects is developing for Speirs Locks is an exemplar of new ways of thinking, and new ways of doing. It is through positive engagement in this challenge that a new responsive and confident architecture and urbanism will emerge for Scotland.

GROWING THE PLACE IN HARD TIMES - SPEIRS LOCKS, GLASGOW

Ewan Anderson describes an unusual approach to development

The implementation of the Growing the Place strategy initially focused on two principal objectives: improving the severed connections in the city centre, healing the scar of the M8 flyover and instigating catalyst initiatives to kickstart regeneration, targeting initial investment on a series of limited public realm and arts-based initiatives.
The new link under the Theatre Arts (GAMTA). This is already creating a large footprints and cheap space that they could have shifted out of control around the turn of this century, when things swung out of equilibrium. The Speirs Locks project, which has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Glasgow City Council, was recently designated as one of eleven exemplar projects in Scotland under the Scottish Government’s Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative (SSCI). The SSCI is concerned with raising aspiration levels to achieve quality place-making and more sustainable forms of development that meet the demands for new homes. Whilst this positive recognition is encouraging, the project is a long term endeavour that needs to be constantly tuned and nurtured. As is the case with the Camden, Hoxton and Greenwich Village precedents, the issue of gentrification and the social exclusion of existing communities will always be there. Increasing land values are an intrinsic part of the strategy as they are ultimately what will fund it all and pay for the front-loaded public realm initiatives. But the aim is to grow value in the widest sense, economic, cultural and social, and to continually manage and encourage diversity to avoid killing what has created it. The challenge is how to have forces in a positive way for the civic wellbeing of citizens and the prosperity of their town or city. This is how successful places have always evolved. It just seems that we have shifted out of control around the turn of this century, when things swung out of equilibrium. The Speirs Locks project may be an indicator of a successful city and a very popular place to live, as indicated by a raft of lifestyle studies, and so it is worth considering what makes Edinburgh such a successful place. In our view, this is inextricably linked to its high urban density and easy access to the dramatic landscape on which the city is built. Having identified this particular catalyst for success, we began to investigate the circumstances that could help other cities and contribute to the general debate around these issues. Most economists have identified the knowledge industries as key to our future economic prosperity, Richard Florida in The Rise of the Creative Class (2002) identifies the conditions for such success and discusses the relationship between attracting modern industries and access to activities such as hill walking, running and mountain biking. We must therefore explore the physical characteristics of an urbanism which would support such objectives, and look at the levels of physical and physiological benefit from open space experiences, how they are accessed and the lifestyle choices they create. Walks in the park, a bus to the seaside and a weekend in the mountains are all part of this equation.

Alistair Scott and Eugene Mulvan explore the physiological requirement for open space within contemporary society

The relationship between urbanism and open space has been central to urban planning for millennia and each generation has derived its own response to issues such as transport and recreation. Throughout Europe there is a developing concern with this issue, often in direct response to the legacy of other places and cities. Thinkers such as Jan Gehl, have been instrumental in addressing this situation and we now have a multitude of government guidance on the virtues and techniques of place-making. This is all excellent progress, but it needs to be informed by a wider debate on the relationship between urbanity and landscape to underpin a successful twenty-first century community. Our basic prognosis is that access to nature, particularly the wild and romantic type is an under-recognised aspect of the current urban debate. Organisations such as Greenspace Scotland recognise the advantages of green infrastructure on health and social issues, while many philosophers, artists and poets have looked to nature for inspiration. This urgently needs to be considered at all levels, from planning policy to architecture. Wild open spaces are central to Scottish culture. Scotland has an urbanised population, historically living in dense towns and cities, contrasted with an often-inhabitable landscape. This chimes impressively on our own terms, to the extent that the classic tourist image of Scotland could be distilled into two themes, one of the sophisticated city and the other of the wild mountain or seascapes.
People have an inherent desire for experiencing the wild in a wide range of forms. Photograph: Mango Photography

A view from our study tour to Hammarby Sjocherd. Image by Michael Wolchover

Alistair Scott and Eugene Mullan are Edinburgh based architects and urban designers at Smith Scott Mullan Associates

There is a cultural view that dual centre living is harmful to social equality

The successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is a issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.

This is a fascinating line of enquiry, which we believe could produce radical solutions to both urban and rural challenges and link to many of today’s key agendas. However, it is an issue surrounded by myth and entrenched positions and we hope that these issues will become more talked about and openly debated.

In response to this challenge, we are currently involved in two of Scotland’s six Urban Regeneration Company areas, and have prepared an Urban Design Strategy and Master plan for Stranraer Waterfront, in Dumfries & Galloway, as illustrated.

If the successful nation of tomorrow must provide easy and meaningful outdoor experiences to its hopefully educated and creative urban population, we have begun to explore a range of solutions, even if they are directly against many current preconceptions and policies. There are no standard answers and each city and its rural hinterland needs to seek the best local answer, which could range from a bus service with a bike track to new adventure villages.
Cristina González-Longo looks at the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh

Current urban design initiatives like the Renaissance Towns and proposed planning codes in Scotland follow imported models based on generative design methods, New Urbanism and community empowerment. There however recent and important built experiences in Scotland that have already prefigured the character of the urban fabric; these therefore have the potential to inform the elaboration of current and future Scottish urban design thinking in a more sustainable manner. Such an experience is the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, the biggest project in Scotland in recent decades, and a project with strong architectural impact and innovations, whose urban contribution and legacy have not been discussed fully.

TRADITIONAL URBANISM

A substantial parameter of the project ever since its political inception was its urban impact. The Holyrood site was selected with a strong intention of regenerating a dormant part of the city, creating a park and a civic or parliamentary square and opening the site to Arthur’s Seat. In his competition entry for the design of the new Scottish Parliament Building, Eribert Miralles made valuable observations about Edinburgh and Scotland, stating, ‘Scotland is a land…it is not a series of cities’ and his main intention was that ‘The Parliament sits in this land’ not in the landscape, like the adjacent Holyrood Palace.

Miralles was very explicit in his design about his intention to follow a traditional approach to urban design in the site. Traditional in the sense that it was the result of attentive and sensitive observations of the city’s attributes, evolution and the specific site, and went on to say: ‘The Parliament building should be able to reinforce the qualities of the place. He made clear his intention to follow the traditional urban design approach in Edinburgh, which relates buildings to the topography and infrastructure, as also to be sympathetic to the scale and character of the Royal Mile. Miralles found inspiration from the character of the city before James Craig’s New Town: public spaces emerging organically from a close relationship with the topography and the land like the Grassmarket, employing a contemporary architectural language, where the designer interprets the forces that create such spaces.

Even at the micro-scale of its design, the Scottish Parliament was not just approached as a building, but as an urban project. It includes a series of small scale buildings, in keeping with the character of the Royal Mile, creating a small city within the city, with individual buildings, streets, working and gathering spaces. The site is appreciated in all its complexities, making references to the city and the country, and extracting the essence of the site: an integration of buildings, land and views.

CONSERVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Edinburgh is a historic city with urban values of international importance as the UNESCO World Heritage site designation confirms. It was inevitable that a whole layer of history would be cancelled with the demolition of the former brewery buildings in the site, but their remains were poetically (or dramatically) caged and displayed in the landscape. Despite reports against it, Miralles made an even stronger step in conserving the history of the site by making the seventeenth century Queensberry House an integral part of the project. It was his belief that listed buildings are not an anachronistic inconvenience, but a strong foundation and reference for new developments within the city and their character should be transmitted to current and future generations.

Once the values of the site were established, the site was transformed with a process of opening the end of Canongate, and, with the demolition of the Brewery, bringing back the long distance views. The deconstruction of the built environment of the site was balanced by reinstating the appearance and surroundings of Queensberry House and by bringing the land back to the city, with the land as another building material, that gets further carved to create the amphitheatre of the debating chamber.

Going beyond the city’s usual constraints that primarily impose sandstone, the buildings use a limited palette of concrete, granite, slate, oak, glass and steel with a rich contemporary language, full of references to Scottish architecture and a strong ethos of quality, ethical resourcing and durability. The spaces were laid with generously sized stairs, transparent corridors, and a central foyer as the real hub of the complex. The spaces work in a way that the social interaction happen in a sheltered but open space. Although from outside it looks opaque and compact, the inside is transparent and fluid. The symbolism of the buildings and spaces in between is remarkable as are its rich iconography with elements of magic and myth.

The project was developed through a series of physical models - an excellent tool to understand the complexities of the urban fabric and how they inform design. This instrument allowed a three-dimensional understanding of the proposals and their impact on the city that eventually informed its qualities.

IMPACT

The project was influential from the outset and brought urban design in Edinburgh and Scotland to a higher level of aspiration - what Miralles defined as a ‘mental place’, beyond the physical realisation. Similar to Siddes’ Ramays Gardens at the top of the Royal Mile, which was conceived as a cloister for knowledge, Miralles created this ideal city of democracy one hundred years later at the foot of the Royal Mile; with the same vignon of Kahn’s Bangladesh Parliament and in a pattern that is appropriate to the city of Edinburgh and its environment. Inward-looking self contained developments that have an external urban contribution to the city; sheltered streets with short and long views of landscapes. Both understood history and climate, and transmitted aspirational social and physical models based on the context and the relationship between the citizens, the city and its governance.

This approach of designing physical and mental places is clearly the result of a complex intellectual process that is essential when such urban layers and aspirations are combined. To engage the local community in the process of urban design is very important, but not sufficient. Consultation with users and the community, generative design methods, design charrettes and stepwise design could be part of the urban design process, but are not a substitute for the role of the designer. Urban design is a complex discipline that requires a strong knowledge of a variety of subjects like infrastructure, construction and energy, and it needs to be supported by a strong city leadership: this is what can make good cities and towns.

As a generator of a strong urban scale, the Scottish Parliament is more comparable to a visually, emotionally and culturally rich Baroque urban project, driving the integration with its context, than an intellectual exercise of a Renaissance genius. It does not try to revive measured methods or models, but to push the boundaries of design and physical restrictions, offering more of a playful shell to civic aspirations. Thousands of local people, tourists and ‘architectural pilgrims’ from all over the world visit the Scottish Parliament every year; the vision that this project reflects should encourage them to discover the rest of Edinburgh and Scotland with new eyes. To take the spirit of the project forward, and all of the learning involved in its realisation, will also help to make new large ongoing and proposed developments such as Dundee Council Civic Offices, Tornagrain in Inverness, City Square in Aberdeen, the provision for the 2014 Commonwealth Games and Maryhill Glasgow, Caltonage, St James Quarter and the Waterfront in Edinburgh other ‘mental places’.

The debate about urban design in Scotland has just started; analysis and discussion on future projects is necessary for the sustainable approach that Scottish cities and towns should take. Scotland is a unique country that still to be explored in urban design terms. We do not need to look for imported models; the response is, as Miralles understood, in its own buildings and its land.
BORDERS TOWNS – WAITING FOR THE TRAIN TO ARRIVE
Oliver Chapman examines what new and historic rail connections could mean

The Edinburgh City Region’s predicted labour shortfall of 18,500 people by 2015 increases the need for affordable housing within its reach. As a result, towns in the Scottish Borders are tackling the challenge of how to grow into larger, better connected settlements, but without losing local identity and simply becoming dormitory towns. The current lull in development is an opportunity to reflect on how this can best be done when the economy eventually picks up.

One response to this future demand is the planned revival of the Waverley Railway Line, which previously linked a population of 200,000, and was a victim of Beeching’s axe with the line finally closing in 1969. This ambitious infrastructure project, the spirits of University of Edinburgh’s Architecture Department students have the same parallel design briefs, as part of their final honours degree projects. The students have the same technological reality has not however dampened the ambition of the Victorian station builders. The line was a victim of Beeching’s axe with the line finally closing in 1969. This ambitious infrastructure project, the spirits of University of Edinburgh’s Architecture Department students have the same parallel design briefs, as part of their final honours degree projects. The students have the same...
Urbanism in Scotland

Duncan Whatmore asks whether focusing on the wrong deliveries is why place-making still goes wrong

Urban design initiatives that are led by criteria other than pure urbanism (can one ever have pure urbanism?) seem to have difficulty in getting their priorities straight: notably so where the work is transit-oriented. This gives rise to the popular confusion as to whether transportation is an objective in its own right, or whether it can catalyse other urban incentives. Although urbanists enjoy the Pavlovian vilification of transport designers, we need to remember that the worthy activity of place-making involves considering the movement strategy. We all have our private collections of traffic inanities to shake our heads over, but we are all complicit by disassociating these mirthsome follies from anything that our own sphere of activity can influence.

In the Scottish central belt town of Paisley, seven miles west of Glasgow, a renewal initiative for the Town Centre North area focused on the part of the town severed from the rest of Paisley by the railway viaduct running through Gilmour Street station. This was tied into a planned rail link to Glasgow Airport as a mechanism to encourage an area over-populated with surface car parks, vacant sites, rotting tenements and random buildings: churches, cafes, garages, failing shops, bewilderingly scattered as though a perfectly normal town had been purged.

One reason for this was readily apparent - the generally-launched gyratory system which encircles this part of Paisley with its magnanimous curves, too accommodating to force its participants’ broad vehicle sweeps to become deflected by the network of pre-existing streets subsumed beneath this highway Colossus.

Was the perceived reliance the town’s (and region’s) had on this lethal paisley cravat that there was extreme reluctance to tackle anything as radical as its removal, or even dilution by making it into a two-way street, or even reconnecting the network of streets left as part of the Paisley’s legacy of fine towns planning.

The accord that was arrived at was a balance between the retention of the road (which you struggle to cross on foot is a road, not a street) and the original street grid, safeguarding it from becoming subsumed within a new, non-invasive form imposed by any mushrooming development seeking to enjoy easy train access to the airport, rather like Paddington or Kowloon before it. This is now less likely, as the link between the Inverclyde line branch to Glasgow Airport has now been cancelled. The town’s original streets lines and rural stations set in woodland, but like the community woodland projects where native deciduous trees are being planted in large parts of Scotland, we may have to wait a long time before we see things emerge out of the ground.

Off the steroids lest it damage the very delicate organism it is seeking to sustain. Solutions pop unbidden into our minds as to how we should link higher density places to mixed-use centres attached to transport nodes, but we need to be able to control – or tame – the generator for this activity, to prevent it becoming a river washing away the life of the place that it was created to nourish.

There are fine ideas about what needs to happen in Glasgow’s East End around the Commonwealth Games site. There are proposals for communities to rise out of the muddled wastes of South Dalmarnock, and bright new workplaces to be founded in Shawfield. These are likely to find success now that the Commonwealth Games has given an impetus to build on existing infrastructure (river, rail, roads) but will need to be leavened…
with a sensitive approach to how these new transit corridors (streets, one hopes) will provide fertile breeding grounds for places.

Similarly in The Three Towns (and confusingly to some, the Five Towns) of Irvine Bay, there are moves afoot to rediscover the heart of the towns and to try to plug them back together with each other and with their splendid coast. This time the impetus does not come directly from new infrastructure, but rather from a realisation that the places have suffered a collective amnesia and need to remember what they are like. Part of this involves, in the instance of Ardrossan, an attempt to redefine the heart of the town, envisaged by a vast superstar market whose car park squares on the centre of the street, where there should be a focal point of the whole community. Its free coffee refills are scant recompense for the disjointed street frontage imposed by a serpentine 'engineered' road (the street actually stops where the check-out and the little Bob The Builder ride begins) leading, in a bold sweep to the ferry terminal, where passengers are able to process back past the stacked trolleys and carried Corosas to where the town’s centre should be. One hopes that the brief that gave rise to this non-place has been superseded by one that seeks to revive the town’s character, and there are signs of emerging confidence that the URC has grasped the need for an integrated place.

This is symptomatic of a hierarchical difference, an unwillingness to allow any appropriate prioritisation of place-forming issues. This is why so many of us have had difficulty with traffic engineers’ world views, a rather more rigorous place mapped by inflexible and insane constraints. This is changing now as doubt is creeping in over the necessity and desirability of these devices of control, with a proper role for urban designers to influence the success of properly integrated places, where people might be made scapegoat for a collective failure to engage with context.

WHERE’S THE MAGIC: CIVIC AMBITION IN GLASGOW AND CHICAGO

John Deffenbaugh explores two major cities.

The last time my family embarked on a group bike ride together, the result was disastrous. Struggling across the tarmac, with the Golden Gate Bridge a wobbly two-stroke behind the kids, I confess to some fair share of pedalling behind me) makes for a good story but is not something I’d be in a hurry to repeat. So my father’s suggestion that we embark on another cycle ride during a recent family holiday was greeted with scepticism by all. After some convincing, we were soon cycling along the shore of Lake Michigan. With skyline on one side and nothing but sand and water on the other, I found myself drawing the conclusion that Chicago is simply the best city in the world. Within the coming days, and without leaving town, we would experience the shore line of Southern California that affected many centres of industry throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Glasgow included. Today, Glasgow’s city centre is unrecognisable and accurately described by the city’s marketing slogan as a ‘Bustling, Underground City.’ However, if Glasgow’s transformation were the equivalent of the speedy hare, Chicago’s is proof that slowly but surely really does beat the turtle.

Chicago’s civic leaders, or more pertinently leader, guided the city through the economic collapse that affected many centres of industry. Chicago is the electric city of Manhattan, but with the friendliness of, er, Glasgow.

At this point, I should confess that my motives for making this comparison are not altogether objective: I have many happy memories of Chicago, while as a Glaswegian, I am in my nature to shamelessly promote my native city whenever possible. However, I’ve never found this too big a chore because Glasgow, like Chicago, is a wonderful city. To emphasise that this is not just local patriotism speaking, Jonathan Glancey wrote in the Guardian (1999): “Big city Glasgow, Big in a way that Chicago, London and New York feel big. Something to do with the scale and ambition of its principal buildings, the determined grid-iron plan of its central streets, its bustling black cabs, a 24-hour bustle, underground railway (‘the Clockwork Horse’), and the city’s local accent as distinct as that of Bow or the Bronx.”

This summer’s trip got me thinking about the comparisons between Chicago and the Scottish city I grew up in. The recent edition of Urban Design celebrated one hundred years since Daniel Burnham produced his Chicago Plan. Within the Scottish context, there is an important relationship between Chicago and Glasgow - Glasgow’s city centre grid formed the basis of the Chicago grid, and Chicago reciprocated by providing inspiration for many of the architects of new buildings in Glasgow, a phenomenon which Charles McKean labelled as the ‘Americanisation of Glasgow.’

Although hailing from this former European City of Culture, I’ve never professed to be much of a culture vulture, and so it is no surprise that I have no idea which concerto the Chicago Symphony was performing during an outdoor concert in the city’s Millennium Park. This wasn’t disinterest, more distraction by our spectacular setting, sitting on a grassy knoll, glass of wine in hand and with the colossal metallic forms of Frank Gehry’s stage in the distance, it struck me that there is no similar venue in Scotland, or indeed the UK. What’s more, it is a focal point of a city that could ever exist here. The nearest equivalent in Glasgow would be a musky-smelling tent in George Square. To me, this symbolises the vastly different scales of civic ambition between the two cities. Many would assert that Chicago has more in common with New York or London than Glasgow, but behind the glamorous skyline, Chicago is at heart a post-industrial city that has successfully moved from manufacturing to service provision in the same way Glasgow has.

Glasgow has achieved this through culture-led regeneration powered by one-off high profile events such as the Garden Festival and its reigns as European City of Culture and UK City of Architecture. I recall the blackness of the city centre prior to the Garden Festival in 1988, an image which seemed to reflect the widespread perception of the city as dangerous and depressed. Today, Glasgow’s city centre is unrecognisable and distinctly as that of Bow or the Bronx.”

Chicago’s civic leaders, or more pertinently leader, guided the city through the economic collapse that affected many centres of industry throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Glasgow included. Today, Chicago is continuing to thrive under similarly strong leadership. There is a tangible sense that the mantras of Chicago’s Daniel Burnham continues to permeate every aspect of the city’s endeavors. Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir the blood of men and probably will not themselves be realized. From the magnificent skyline to the vitality of its streets below, and from its cultural institutions to its nightlife, the city feels determined to provide all you could possibly want from an urban “entertainment” center.

By contrast, Glasgow feels weighed down by fear of the remarkable and the extraordinary. While it is a unique and wonderful city, this would seem more to do with the spirit of its people and historic urban fabric, rather than the activities of more recent city fathers. Little plans such as a café in George Square appear in the local press only to disappear a few weeks later. The leader of Glasgow City Council, Steven Purcell, commented; “Laid that he scrapped the George Square café because it would cost as much as a new primary school elsewhere in the City.” So, how does Chicago manage to deliver quality civic facilities and a functioning education system? I would argue that the key difference between Chicago and Glasgow is civic leadership. Chicago has been shaped by the Daley dynasty; first by Mayor Richard J from 1955-1976 and then by his son Richard M since 1989. The Dalies have mixed philanthropy, benevolence and willfulness to transform Chicago from a city that could have gone the way of Detroit or Cleveland to the eight most influential city in the world, according to the World Cities Study Group. By contrast, Glasgow has not had the benefit of such focused leadership, relying more on party-political consensus and a ‘democratic’ process that has similarities to one-party rule but without the strong leadership of a mayoral framework. While Glasgow’s memorable Lord Provost, Pat Lally, may have provided a clear public face during his term, he was inevitably subject to the political machine around him that sapped the energy of leadership.

Richard J Daley used this machine to his advantage, maintaining close control of Chicago’s political system through job patronage. The title of Cohen and Taylor’s 2000 biography provides an indication of Daley’s prominence: American Pharaoh; Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation.

While other major US cities teetered on the brink of insolvency, Daley’s grasp of public finances ensured that Chicago and its region remained the largest, richest and the last in the nation still at the forefront of the economy, despite the economic downturn.

Chicago: The Doubt, Anish Kapoor, Millennium Park

Chicago: Temporary stage set up in George Square for events

Chicago: The Pritzker Music Pavilion at Millennium Park by Frank Gehry

Chicago: Millennium Park by Frank Gehry

Duncan Wedderburn, urban designer based in Edinburgh


Issue 114 – Spring 2010 – Urban Design – 31
illinois in the city's downtown area. The cost was borne by state taxpayers, but city residents would be the main beneficiaries. He was also able to direct suburban taxpayers’ money towards city healthcare facilities. Most significantly, he pushed through legislation which transferred financial and administrative responsibility for welfare from the city to the state. As Mike Royko notes in Boss: Richard Daley of Chicago: 'In short, Daley expanded city services and shifted a large measure of the costs to the state, the county, and the Chicago area suburbs.'

Chicago offers Glasgow plenty of food for thought, but without robust civic leadership, that is what it shall stay.

In this respect, similarities to Glasgow's position emerge. The city's tightly drawn governmental boundaries means that it suffers from a low tax base and significant deprivation, while also providing public and leisure services to a much wider and more affluent region collectively, home to over half of Scotland's population. Most notably, Glasgow boasts several world class (and free) museums, funded, in part, by the city's immediate taxpayers. Applying Daley's philosophy of city building may create a more equitable approach to the funding of public services between the city and its affluent suburbs. Were Glasgow able to spread the cost of its public services more equally amongst the wider population they serve, it would allow the city to direct its civic infrastructure.

Mayor Richard Daley died in 1976 during his sixth term in office. The city would be served by four successive mayors over the coming years, each only lasting a single term. It was not until 1989, with the election of Daley's son, Richard M Daley, that Chicago would gain a leader of longevity. Should he remain in office beyond 2010, Richard M Daley will exceed the record set by his father as Chicago's longest serving mayor.

He was described by Time Magazine in 2005 as having an imperial style, similar to that of his father, but his approach to governance reflects contemporary values and thinking. Rather than using job patronage to maintain direct control over city functions, as his father did, many of Daley’s appointments have been leaders in their field. The result is that Chicago is now one of the most visited and livable large cities in the world – the relationship between appropriate leadership and successful outcome is apparent.

Chicago’s most recent success, the creation of Millennium Park, illustrates the benefit of leadership. In his book, Millennium Park: the Creation of a Landmark (2006), Timothy Gilfoyle asserts that the park embodies the historical legacy of Richard M Daley, the influence of corporate philanthropy, the use of culture as an engine of economic expansion, and the nature of political power in Chicago. The park began with a plan to construct an underground car park topped with grass. Daley saw the opportunity to create a millennium marker and expanded the grassy top to a full scale extension to the adjacent Grant Park. The City would fund the car park, while the private capital would be sought for the park above. The courting of private corporations and philanthropists yielded $125m, in part attracted by the star designers involved in the project. Opened in 2004, the park contains Anish Kapoor’s sculpture, Cloud Gate, Frank Gehry’s music pavilion, an enclosed theatre for music and dance, as well as an ice rink and numerous eateries. The facility exemplifies the appeal of strong leadership to private capitalists and opportunity to direct private capital toward public benefit.

Nowhere would this be more beneficial than in Glasgow, which has used cultural activity as a cornerstone of its urban regeneration since the 1980s. Glasgow’s mechanism of utilising large scale and one-off events has undeniably transformed the city’s fortunes and public perception, but this has come at a price. Each such event was incredibly costly and funded by a range of public agencies. The Garden Festival has left a derelict site on its riverfront site, which has remained largely vacant since 1988. Chicago’s example of capturing private sector funding and the creation of lasting cultural assets has been shown to provide greater holistic benefits without the inevitable peaks and troughs of one-off events. However, this is only possible with a strong and accountable figurehead in place.

Urban design is as much about a city’s governmental and political context as the physical characteristics of its urban environment. As Chicago proves, one directly affects the other. Chicago offers Glasgow plenty of food for thought, but without robust civic leadership, that is what it shall stay. Both possess powerful political machines; the Democratic party dominate Chicago as Labour does in Glasgow. Both have a proud working class heritage, and both have a reputation for the character of their people. Unfortunately, outside London, there is no place for electoral majorities in British politics. Perhaps this will change at some point, bringing the UK into alignment with continental cities. As Chicago demonstrates, a strong leader, reinforced by a strong political machine but constrained by public accountability can bring about positive change. Millennium Park was created in Britain’s urban areas. Until then, it’s back to the musty tent in George Square for me. ◆

PAUL GUZZARDO, DESIGNER AND MEDIA ACTIVIST: I’ll start this with a call for an epistemological headlock and rant against the shrink-wrapped city.

LORENS HOLM, DIRECTOR, THE GEDDES INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH: Time to propose a new spatial practice, one that takes heed of the knowledge environment.

PG: I want the spotlight off Larry Page and Sergey Brin – those Google titans – and flash it on Geddes and the City. So here’s a Geddes quote, 'The general principle is the synoptic one, of seeking as far as may be to recognise and utilise all points of view and so to be preparing for the Encyclopaedia Civica of the future.'

LH: And another, ‘Town plans are thus mere noose diagrams, they are a system of hieroglyphics in which man has written the history of civilization, and the more tangled their apparent confusion, the more we may be rewarded in deciphering it.’

PG: The dilemma in the terra-perabyte world is getting deciphering gear on the street. Without that the city is less and less a stage for knowledge creation and synthesis. We need new place making action plans. We need new interfaces on the ground linking the city space, and data-landscapes. Place making that takes no heed of the evolving knowledge environment is thus limited scope – new crossover noose. We need a millennium marker and expanded the grassy top to a full scale extension to the adjacent Grant Park. The City would fund the car park, while the private capital would be sought for the park above. The courting of private corporations and philanthropists yielded $125m, in part attracted by the star designers involved in the project. Opened in 2004, the park contains Anish Kapoor’s sculpture, Cloud Gate, Frank Gehry’s music pavilion, an enclosed theatre for music and dance, as well as an ice rink and numerous eateries. The facility exemplifies the appeal of strong leadership to private capitalists and opportunity to direct private capital toward public benefit.

Nowhere would this be more beneficial than in Glasgow, which has used cultural activity as a cornerstone of its urban regeneration since the 1980s. Glasgow’s mechanism of utilising large scale and one-off events has undeniably transformed the city’s fortunes and public perception, but this has come at a price. Each such event was incredibly costly and funded by a range of public agencies. The Garden Festival has left a derelict site on its riverfront site, which has remained largely vacant since 1988. Chicago’s example of capturing private sector funding and the creation of lasting cultural assets has been shown to provide greater holistic benefits without the inevitable peaks and troughs of one-off events. However, this is only possible with a strong and accountable figurehead in place.

Urban design is as much about a city’s governmental and political context as the physical characteristics of its urban environment. As Chicago proves, one directly affects the other. Chicago offers Glasgow plenty of food for thought, but without robust civic leadership, that is what it shall stay. Both possess powerful political machines; the Democratic party dominate Chicago as Labour does in Glasgow. Both have a proud working class heritage, and both have a reputation for the character of their people. Unfortunately, outside London, there is no place for electoral majorities in British politics. Perhaps this will change at some point, bringing the UK into alignment with continental cities. As Chicago demonstrates, a strong leader, reinforced by a strong political machine but constrained by public accountability can bring about positive change. Millennium Park was created in Britain’s urban areas. Until then, it’s back to the musty tent in George Square for me. ◆

LH: For Geddes the evolutionist (student of Huxley), the city was an artifact in the continual evolution of intellect. But centuries mark the city as a flow of people, manhole covers mark it as a flow of sewage. For this reason he was conservative in his approach to the renovation of the city. He advocated surgical interventions to destroy as little fabric as possible. Yabusha rusu planned intellectual suicide, tantamount to the loss of the Library of Alexandria. We need to invent the spatial notation to mark the city as a flow of data and discourse.

PG: But a new tool set, a new systems approach is essential, or as Geddes would say ‘the principle is the synoptic one.’

LH: We need to develop a spatial system of form-types and grammar, and a strategy for location, in another register, it is not miles away from the question of the coherence of the city addressed by Aldo Rossi in his theory of types, or of Palladio in his pages of villa plan forms. What are the abstract principles, and what elements repeat endlessly in different circumstances? What are fixed and what contingent? How do we represent the city to ourselves as a flow of ideas, knowledge, love, money, political affiliations. We are looking for nothing less than a new vision of coherence and cohesion on a par with Nolli’s vision of Rome. Nolli showed us that the city was an infrastructure of surfaces, continuous, plastic, inside-outside. The cartography that allows us to map the knowledge environment.

LH: The question is: where are we going to place the spotlight off Larry Page and Sergey Brin – those Google titans – and flash it on Geddes and the City? So here’s a Geddes quote, ‘The general principle is the synoptic one, of seeking as far as may be to recognise and utilise all points of view and so to be preparing for the Encyclopaedia Civica of the future.’

PG: In another register, it is not miles away from the question of the coherence of the city addressed by Aldo Rossi in his theory of types, or of Palladio in his pages of villa plan forms. What are the abstract principles, and what elements repeat endlessly in different circumstances? What are fixed and what contingent? How do we represent the city to ourselves as a flow of ideas, knowledge, love, money, political affiliations. We are looking for nothing less than a new vision of coherence and cohesion on a par with Nolli’s vision of Rome. Nolli showed us that the city was an infrastructure of surfaces, continuous, plastic, inside-outside. The cartography that allows us to map the knowledge environment.
... an attempt to map the city because Geddes left us a tool chest of serious urbanism. The barrier that separates city and game is quite a thick line, but there is no indication that it is coming off. Geddes's approach to the city is something happening 'off street' that draws as much to the game culture as much as to the city culture. It has money and smarts. It is computer literate, experiencing the world in new ways. 

The question is how can we grab the gaming phenomena and use it to transform civics?

PG: How do we build a wiki on the street? There is something happening 'off street' that draws me. It has money and smarts. It is computer literate, experiencing the world in new ways. A version of Geddes's agency is about mediating spaces and communities. Gallerygoers either side of a street could communicate across it and trigger image and sound files that could be dispensed from position points in the space.

LH: The stage is the street. We have to reclaim it as an agent against the programmed annexe inherent in most city planning, which turns the city into a spectacle for tourism, for business, for raising tax revenues, above all for amusement and investment. Its hyper-real flytrough tropes turn the city into a display whose effect, intentional or otherwise, is to seduce us; to turn us away from the difficult issues confronting us, issues about our relation to our environment, built and natural, which, if we could reflect upon them, would have a hope of solving. New needs to surface to confront bad times.

The question is how can we grab the gaming phenomena and use it to transform civics?

PG: How do we build a wiki on the street? There is something happening 'off street' that draws me. It has money and smarts. It is computer literate, experiencing the world in new ways. A version of Geddes's agency is about mediating spaces and communities. Gallerygoers either side of a street could communicate across it and trigger image and sound files that could be dispensed from position points in the space.

LH: The stage is the street. We have to reclaim it as an agent against the programmed annexe inherent in most city planning, which turns the city into a spectacle for tourism, for business, for raising tax revenues, above all for amusement and investment. Its hyper-real flytrough tropes turn the city into a display whose effect, intentional or otherwise, is to seduce us; to turn us away from the difficult issues confronting us, issues about our relation to our environment, built and natural, which, if we could reflect upon them, would have a hope of solving. New needs to surface to confront bad times.

The question is how can we grab the gaming phenomena and use it to transform civics?
The Heart of Doha project is an exception rather than a rule. This regeneration Master plan demonstrates that economic, cultural and environmental sustainability can be achieved in the Middle East through innovation, creativity and responsible professional practice. Set back from Doha Bay, and close to the seat of government at the Emiri Diwan, lies the Heart of Doha site.

**CONTEXT**

Following the discovery of oil and gas in the 1930s, Doha’s growth from a fishing and pearl-diving village to a large sprawling city has been rapid and impressive. The rapid expansion of this city was made possible by the private car. Increased car-ownership has brought widespread Western-style suburban development which has weakened the city’s centre of gravity. The traditional social fabric of the *fereej* was displaced by uncoordinated suburban development.

The Heart area has been divided into eight mixed-use districts and contribute to sustainability goals of the Master plan by reducing car use, promoting walking and cycling and encouraging the use of public transportation. These high-quality public spaces will weave together the public realm network, which has grown up with motorcars cannot be underestimated. In order to create tighter streets and a fine urban grain, the impact of private cars and delivery vehicles has to be mitigated. A substantial basement infrastructure is thus created to cope with these modern demands whilst maintaining a strong public realm network above ground. Lastly, environmental sustainability [LEED] can be achieved much more effectively at a Master plan level than at an individual building level. By positioning buildings closer together, deep shadows are created to shade adjacent buildings and thus reduce the overall cooling load during the shoulder seasons of March to May and August to October. This also creates a shaded and comfortable public realm for people to enjoy.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

There are three key lessons learnt from the Heart of Doha project. First, the success of this project can be attributed to a good brief from the client Dohaland, an excellent project team and a glib edged peer review panel which includes eminent professors from MIT, Harvard and Princeton Universities. Second, the cost of retro-fitting a city district which has grown up with motorcars cannot be underestimated. In order to create tighter streets and a fine urban grain, the impact of private cars and delivery vehicles has to be mitigated. A substantial basement infrastructure is thus created to cope with these modern demands whilst maintaining a strong public realm network above ground. Lastly, environmental sustainability [LEED] can be achieved much more effectively at a Master plan level than at an individual building level. By positioning buildings closer together, deep shadows are created to shade.

The Heart of Doha project is an exception rather than a rule. This regeneration Master plan demonstrates that economic, cultural and environmental sustainability can be achieved in the Middle East through innovation, creativity and responsible professional practice. Set back from Doha Bay, and close to the seat of government at the Emiri Diwan, lies the Heart of Doha site.

**THE MASTER PLAN**

Using historic maps and photography, key elements of the old city’s fabric were identified. These included alignment of the main thoroughfares, lattices of narrow and shady pedestrian lanes (*sikkats*) which criss-crossed the city, and the route of the old wadi* which flowed to the sea. Along with exploring the historic street patterns, it became clear that climate was also written in the urban grain with many lanes and sikkats positioned on a north–south axis to channel the cooling sea breeze, and to maximise shade from the hot and bright sun. Understanding the past provided an invaluable intellectual reference for the Master plan. Important historical streets and structures were retained and integrated with a north–south oriented street grid for car access. This Western-style gridded city-paradigm is combined with an intricate lattice of sikkats drawing references from Islamic patterns and organic morphology. Reading the historic figure ground and studies of Arabic urban form have inspired the concept of ‘sculpting the void’ whereby public spaces are ‘carved’ out of the solid mass of the private domain. This idea forms the bedrock of the Master plan and serial visions are set up to bring surprise, delight and beauty back to the urban core.

The re-creation of an intricate urban neighbourhood also helps to address concerns about the loss of community spirit in the city. The lack of residential accommodation and amenities in the centre had contributed to people moving to villa-type developments in outlying suburbs. This suburban style of living has seen people lead increasingly insular lives which are dominated by the necessity to drive everywhere. The

* Master plan solution creates a sequence of mixed-use and densely planned urban neighbourhoods, inspired by the organically clustered family domain - the *fereej*, with beautiful and generous-sized homes which have easy access to all the services and amenities. The heart area has been divided into eight distinctive districts which include Musheireb Place (Musheireb translates into English as water channel), which is named after the old wadi and forms part of the retail core; the Heritage Quarter with its historic Eid Ground and adobe houses; the Diwan Quarter adjacent to the Emiri Diwan which contains civic and commercial offices. By contrast, at the Al Kahraha North neighbourhood, new family homes are proposed. Respecting the Qatari culture, important layers of privacy are created through a series of the clustered courtyards which form the nucleus of the bareen or family network and helps strengthen the sense of community.

Revitalised public space will be the key to success in this dense part of the city. Plans include new squares and courtyards where people can gather in cafes or shops and stroll in shade and comfort along streets and sikkats. Features in the new streetscape will have strong resonance with the past, incorporating colonade forms, shading canopies and water features reminiscent of the old wadi. They will create a microclimate and provide welcome respite from the intense light and heat. These high-quality public spaces will weave together the eight mixed-use districts and contribute to the sustainability goals of the Master plan by reducing car use, promoting social interaction, boosting the city’s economy, and improving the built environment. Surrounding these public spaces will be beautiful buildings that draw inspiration from the past. A new language of local architecture is to be evolved by architects selected by a panel of judges, including Aga Khan professor of Islamic architecture, through a process of international competition. Collectively, the architects will engage in a creative dialogue to find a new language that addresses the tensions between history and modernity; unity and diversity and public and private realms.

**Glossary**

The heart area has been divided into eight distinctive districts which include Musheireb Place (Musheireb translates into English as water channel), which is named after the old wadi and forms part of the retail core; the Heritage Quarter with its historic Eid Ground and adobe houses; the Diwan Quarter adjacent to the Emiri Diwan which contains civic and commercial offices. By contrast, at the Al Kahraha North neighbourhood, new family homes are proposed. Respecting the Qatari culture, important layers of privacy are created through a series of the clustered courtyards which form the nucleus of the bareen or family network and helps strengthen the sense of community.

Revitalised public space will be the key to success in this dense part of the city. Plans include new squares and courtyards where people can gather in cafes or shops and stroll in shade and comfort along streets and sikkats. Features in the new streetscape will have strong resonance with the past, incorporating colonade forms, shading canopies and water features reminiscent of the old wadi. They will create a microclimate and provide welcome respite from the intense light and heat. These high-quality public spaces will weave together the eight mixed-use districts and contribute to the sustainability goals of the Master plan by reducing car use, promoting social interaction, boosting the city’s economy, and improving the built environment. Surrounding these public spaces will be beautiful buildings that draw inspiration from the past. A new language of local architecture is to be evolved by architects selected by a panel of judges, including Aga Khan professor of Islamic architecture, through a process of international competition. Collectively, the architects will engage in a creative dialogue to find a new language that addresses the tensions between history and modernity; unity and diversity and public and private realms.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

There are three key lessons learnt from the Heart of Doha project. First, the success of this project can be attributed to a good brief from the client Dohaland, an excellent project team and a glib edged peer review panel which includes eminent professors from MIT, Harvard and Princeton Universities. Second, the cost of retro-fitting a city district which has grown up with motorcars cannot be underestimated. In order to create tighter streets and a fine urban grain, the impact of private cars and delivery vehicles has to be mitigated. A substantial basement infrastructure is thus created to cope with these modern demands whilst maintaining a strong public realm network above ground. Lastly, environmental sustainability [LEED] can be achieved much more effectively at a Master plan level than at an individual building level. By positioning buildings closer together, deep shadows are created to shade.

**Glossary**

* Fereej [Arabic] - the concept of fereej is indigenous to traditional Arab cities. For the untrained eye the fereej urban form appears organic and disordered. In fact, the fereej concept embodies the dynamic family-based social structure and it expresses the collective identity of Arab society as well as individual family identities within it.

* Wadi [Arabic] - a wadi is a naturally-formed dry valley that floods briefly during the occasional heavy rainfall in the desert.

**THE HEART OF DOHA MASTER PLAN, DOHA, QATAR**

AECOM describe an intricate design solution fitting the void

| Traditional fereej |
| Sikkat connectivity |
| Wider city connectivity |

| Master plan intention: sculpting the void |
| Traditional fereej |
| Wider city connectivity |

| Master plan solution: creating the void |
| Traditional fereej |
| Wider city connectivity |

| Contrasting scale between Main Square and sikkat |
| Grid and Lattice |
| Historic street references |

The Heart of Doha project is an exception rather than a rule. This regeneration Master plan demonstrates that economic, cultural and environmental sustainability can be achieved in the Middle East through innovation, creativity and responsible professional practice. Set back from Doha Bay, and close to the seat of government at the Emiri Diwan, lies the Heart of Doha site.

**CONTEXT**

Following the discovery of oil and gas in the 1930s, Doha’s growth from a fishing and pearl-diving village to a large sprawling city has been rapid and impressive. The rapid expansion of this city was made possible by the private car. Increased car-ownership has brought widespread Western-style suburban development which has weakened the city’s centre of gravity. The traditional social fabric of the *fereej* was displaced by uncoordinated suburban development.

The Heart area has been divided into eight mixed-use districts and contribute to sustainability goals of the Master plan by reducing car use, promoting social interaction, boosting the city’s economy, and improving the built environment. Surrounding these public spaces will be beautiful buildings that draw inspiration from the past. A new language of local architecture is to be evolved by architects selected by a panel of judges, including Aga Khan professor of Islamic architecture, through a process of international competition. Collectively, the architects will engage in a creative dialogue to find a new language that addresses the tensions between history and modernity; unity and diversity and public and private realms.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

There are three key lessons learnt from the Heart of Doha project. First, the success of this project can be attributed to a good brief from the client Dohaland, an excellent project team and a glib edged peer review panel which includes eminent professors from MIT, Harvard and Princeton Universities. Second, the cost of retro-fitting a city district which has grown up with motorcars cannot be underestimated. In order to create tighter streets and a fine urban grain, the impact of private cars and delivery vehicles has to be mitigated. A substantial basement infrastructure is thus created to cope with these modern demands whilst maintaining a strong public realm network above ground. Lastly, environmental sustainability [LEED] can be achieved much more effectively at a Master plan level than at an individual building level. By positioning buildings closer together, deep shadows are created to shade.

**Glossary**

* Fereej [Arabic] - the concept of fereej is indigenous to traditional Arab cities. For the untrained eye the fereej urban form appears organic and disordered. In fact, the fereej concept embodies the dynamic family-based social structure and it expresses the collective identity of Arab society as well as individual family identities within it.

* Wadi [Arabic] - a wadi is a naturally-formed dry valley that floods briefly during the occasional heavy rainfall in the desert.
ENHAM ALAMEIN, HAMPSHIRE

Tibbalds explore the future of village housing

Is it possible to successfully extend a place that has evolved over centuries and due to ‘special’ circumstances, in only 20 years?

A ‘POCKET’ LED APPROACH

The history and growth of the village is such that most of it has been developed as reasonably discrete ‘pockets’ of land over the past 100 years. These tend to have a distinct character, have been planned as a group and are clearly of their own time. These also create the irregular external edges of the village that enables the settlement to sit comfortably within the landscape. The Master plan responds by locating and organizing new development in discrete land parcels, that form an irregular external boundary, and that have distinctive design languages and concepts, all supporting the strong ‘model’ village tradition. In practice this means that whilst there may be common technical resolutions, the pockets should not look the same and are more likely to be successful if each parcel has a separate identity responding appropriately to the rural tradition.

A ‘VILLAGE’ HIGHWAY NETWORK

Today, development requirements are very different to those in 1918. In particular highway engineering standards and minimum density requirements are influential in shaping our environment. It has become clear that a rural ‘village’ character would be impossible to achieve using standard highway treatments of kerbs, footways, lighting, materials, road alignments and junctions, that are not in character with the characteristics of Enham as it is now. The other challenge is dealing with the needs of the village’s disabled residents. In response the Master plan proposes a route network of lanes that are low key and informal and new focal spaces to provide a range of integrated linkages and connections. There is also a network of disabled friendly routes, away from the existing narrow lanes, that will make for more integrated movement around the village.

GROWTH INSTEAD OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Rural places are rarely full of designed landscape. One of the special qualities of Enham now is the network of informal to semi-formal open spaces that sit along the main organising spine of this linear village. They provide varied visual amenity within the village and allow pedestrian and wheelchair movement to be away from the fairly busy road that passes through. The spaces also link to other routes and connections laterally and form a pattern that is richer and more varied than is obvious at first. The Master plan has evolved this idea for linked spaces, providing new ones, reintegrating existing links and seeking to ensure that the existing character is retained and enhanced, rather than being smothered.

LOCALY SPECIFIC URBAN DESIGN

The proposed development is also intended to draw upon and reinforce the strong character of the village. Through character testing we have learnt that this means not following an urban grid approach and seeking to relate much more closely to the existing site, links and characteristics. In some areas established urban design rules are questioned (rural areas rarely conform that simply anyway), so that distinct development character and locationally specific place-making has been the key drivers.

SUSTAINABLE HOUSING THAT IS ‘OF ITS TIME’

Whilst this may be a challenge for the twenty-first century when buildings can look however they want, it has been important to consider how the new housing can be contemporary in the way that the Charity’s existing housing stock was when it was built. This character related to vernacular housing and also contemporary thinking from the Garden Cities movement, albeit on a much smaller scale. There is much we have learnt about the way this translated into well composed and group built forms, and the relationship of buildings to the edge condition. A key consideration has also been how technical solutions to sustainability problems can inform buildings now, in the way that environmental concerns shaped vernacular architecture in the past.

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO THE CHARTY’S HOME

The Master plan and design proposals for Enham Alamein are based on a careful understanding of the village, the site and its needs. In order to ensure a long term future for its home the Charity have embraced a concept that accepts the need to build something new, without thinking that this means leaving behind the qualities and characteristics that are so liked about the village now. This is heavily place-based Masterplanning, specific to this village and setting out to challenge convention in terms of the potential and reality of rural design and rural life.
Future, Change and Choices
Strategic planning for built environment professionals


This very user-friendly book defies the conventional wisdom that the developed world is the font of all advanced knowledge. Robinson shows what is possible in a world of traumatic changes from apartheid to multicultural democracy, in an institutional vacuum, under extreme pressure of poverty, population growth, unemployment, violence, high expectations and lack of finance. Meant as a teaching aid for built environment professionals, the book divides into two parts: strategic planning approach and methods, and the case studies which illustrate how these tools have been used in practice.

The chapters on strategic planning provide a synthesis of current methods, ranging from role playing, stakeholder analysis, Delphi, PAGA, SWOT techniques, to scenario building and devising strategies, for the best chance of a positive outcome. He stresses the importance of robust planning frameworks, but warns that they need to act as a critical tool with clear links to implementation, as well as accommodating speed and flexibility, essential in its rapidly changing world. Some of this urgency combined with reflection and robustness could well improve planning elsewhere.

Throughout his writing Robinson stresses the importance of forward linkages between large scale, long term development visions and practical, pragmatic ways of seizing opportunities when they present themselves. In his turbulent world a good starting point for change is to build scenarios as frameworks of strategic perspectives which identify pivotal issues, uncertainties, actors and drivers for change.

These principles are revealed in the three cases of transformations in which he was a leading force: the metropolitan planning of Durban led by the private sector in the vacuum after apartheid; the transformation of a company town; and the challenging Cato Manor, an enormous site near Durban city centre where slums had been brutally cleared and planners were assisting urban reconstruction after apartheid, confronted by new land invasions and a wide range of dysfunctionalities. The latter project shows the importance of spatial strategies, continuous dialogue with the local population, mobilising funding, the imperative of rapid “hard” results, such as housing and infrastructure without losing sight of “soft” contributions to local economic and civic development.

Produced within a tight budget, the book contains only succinct illustrations. The diagrams on strategic planning are useful but more maps and plans would have been helpful to convey the scale of the spatial changes under way in South Africa and the results achieved by this innovative and pragmatic approach to planning and space making.

A City of One’s Own - Blurring the boundaries between private and public

This collection of twelve research articles encompasses issues which preoccupy twenty-first century society: planning, housing, security, health, education and citizenship.

Historic examples of these issues mainly from the USA, France and the UK are examined and focus on the shifting boundaries between the public and the private sector. The findings are reassessed around Jane Jacobs’ view of the city as a melting pot of diverse peoples.

Some of the themes addressed here are: the private/public divide; the tension between, on the one hand, the need to address demographic, environmental and economic (including climate change), economic, socio-spatial and institutional. It provides a good account of the planning that has been tried in the past – and failed – and highlights the need for appropriately institutional and regulatory frameworks, including community participation, the monitoring and evaluation of plans, and the refocusing of planning education. This text is peppered with cases studies which are neatly presented in green boxes, but it is a pity that these are not illustrated with plans and photos.

The book includes appendices indicat ing the demographic statistics of the world’s largest cities. Readers will be interested to note that the population of London will remain at 8 million for the next 20 years while Mumbai will increase from 16 million to 24 million (overtaking Mexico and Sao Paulo), and Kinshasa from 9 million to 14 million. And where will these expanding cities find their water and power supplies? Now that is an interesting question......

Tim Cockbain

The Urban Housing Handbook

Entitled a handbook, this does not begin to convey what this beautifully illustrated volume offers. The authors have produced a thought-provoking text which eliminates the gap between architecture and urban design and shows, through examples, how the two are interdependent. They also manage to impart a vast amount of information even though they have selected a very limited number of examples. Thirty types of housing from all over the world built between the mid nineteenth and mid twentieth century are analysed in detail and each one is juxtaposed with one contemporary example. Readers can dip in, search for specific information or study the whole book. From the outset the authors clearly state that they are not interested in architectural style, but in the typology of urban houses and their relationship to the morphology of the block. They therefore chose four housing types with three defining components: the street, the courtyard and the dwelling. The four types are courtyard houses, row houses, compounds and apartment buildings and the authors acknowledge that many of their examples are ambiguous. These categories are helpful and the examples arguably cover most urban typologies before modernism changed the relationship between buildings and urban space.

Each example starts with a brief introduction, followed by a short history and an explanation of the development process involved (for instance land ownership and planning context). The urban configuration and architecture of the building are then described; scaled plans, sections and photographs allow for a good understanding of each type. In addition, a small diagram places the example in its particular type, with basic information on plot coverage, plot ratio and density. With each example a recent building is shown as a contemporary interpretation (but in no way a copy) of the previous one, briefly analysed and the similarities and departures from the model explained. So the late twentieth century city villas of Sophienhöfe at Dresden and the preceding Würfelhaus from the late nineteenth century Dresden are both freestanding buildings in a structured urban block, but resemblances between them end there; looking at the two side by side is fascinating.

Finally a series of scale figure-ground plans show an array of morphologies and grids resulting from the typologies devised. Two tables also compare the development process and the densities. So, a handbook? Yes, but also much more - a source of inspiration and information for anyone interested in urban design and architecture.

Sebastian Low
The death on the Rea

This column seems to become the Digbeth Diary, and I probably risk being seen as so enthusiastic and optimistic as to be no interest in anything happening beyond the end of the next street. That’s not true, but the quarter in which I work does have a cultural life which I find quite fascinating, and that’s very different from anything happening beyond the end of the quarter. But it was very serious, and standing in the garden, sheltering from the rain, I felt how seriously I should take the lesson of the Digbeth Diary.

There the lesson ended. We trooped down the swollen river, to The Anchor on Bradford Road, a pub with its windows and doors all glass, where it was very cold, and the reeds were dripping Rea Garden, and the drizzle fell. Pu-tu-pu-tu.

Raymond Williams wrote in his笔记 on the Ruins of Empires: ‘A culture is the realisation of a human ordering of the world, a construction of meaning, of life, that entropy and decay are a natural part of the processes of human life: they do not happen incidentally. A culture is the making of the world and the self in the world. This is the realisation of human possibilities in the world. This is the historical process of human life.’

I was quite moved. Probably I was too young to be moved in a way I should now be moved. This is a great age for landscape and garden studies, a time when we are all conscious of the complex layers of history, the transparency of the past, the criticality of the present, and the unfolding of the future. We have elaborate rituals of ground-breaking, tape-cutting. But with some exceptions, the past is not really recognised, euphemistically the Custard Factory, called somewhat the Rea Gardens.

The site in question is currently being used as a car park, and the buildings are beginning to be cleared. The area is developed in the right way for the city, which has authenticity, grit, great potential of Digbeth better than anyone else could imagine.

I was quite moved. Pu-tu-pu-tu.

In other cities it would have been sanitised by conventional development.’

There the lesson ended. We trooped down the swollen river, to The Anchor on Bradford Road, a pub with its windows and doors all glass, where it was very cold, and the reeds were dripping Rea Garden, and the drizzle fell. Pu-tu-pu-tu.