

157 **URBAN
DESIGN**

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**RESEARCH IN
PRACTICE**



**URBAN
DESIGN
GROUP**



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NEWS FROM THE UDG CHAIR

Welcome to the Winter issue of *Urban Design*. I am Katja Stille, the new Chair of the Urban Design Group. It is an honour to be asked to represent a membership of passionate people who work relentlessly to create better places.

2020 presented us with unforeseen challenges and I would like to give a big thank you to Leo Hammond, our previous chair, for successfully meeting those challenges head on. The move to a virtual space has allowed us to reach a much wider and diverse audience than hitherto, something we will continue to build upon in 2021.

Through a common interest in urban design, we have brought together professionals and groups from many different walks of life. No matter whether you have a background in engineering or planning, finance or sociology, you are welcome and will help us make a difference.

Good urban design happens through collaboration and through looking beyond one's own specialism. I strongly believe that no one sets out to do a bad job or actively seeks to undermine the delivery of good places, but people may have different priorities or short-term objectives. We need to break down the professional silos and improve communication and understanding between all involved in the delivery of good places.

Every single day the urban design community creates excellent design proposals, but too often masterplans are not delivered as they were first imagined. Technical guidance, legislation, funding, taxation, land-ownership and short-term interests, to mention a few of the barriers, get in the way. I would like to use the next two years

working with our members to make it easier to deliver good places and tackling the barriers that we encounter in our day-to-day work.

The challenges of the pandemic, the climate crisis and a focus on community health and well-being have highlighted the relevance of urban design; it has become a topic discussed in the media nationally, by government and by the general public. We are in a good position, and have powerful arguments to make a difference. To guide this ambition, I would like to build on the objectives set by my predecessor:

- to be relevant
- to be positive and pro-active
- above all, to collaborate.

My day-to-day professional experience of working across a broad spectrum of projects and with a wide range of stakeholders has taught me that working collaboratively and maintaining a positive and compassionate attitude are essential to delivering the places that we all desire and everyone deserves.

RECENT EVENTS AND FOCUS

The UDG and Academy of Urbanism's joint Symposium on the 15-Minute City was a wonderful experience after some very difficult months, with inspiring examples from across the globe which are summarised on p.3-4 of this issue.

Immediately after the Symposium, we held four webinars to tackle the multitude of issues raised by the Planning White Paper. Nearly 1,000 people attended these events including architects, civil and highway engineers, housebuilders and others; their

contribution helped form the 13-page UDG response to the White Paper. You will find an article about the events on p.5-6, but in short, the UDG's response focused on the need for vision, integration, strategic urban design, a systems approach and a local housing needs assessment. Strategic urban design in particular has been a long-standing campaigning issue for the UDG and one that we will continue to pursue.

Back in March, when the country first went into lockdown, the UDG quickly responded with ideasSPACE, a weekly virtual forum for urban designers, city authorities and governments to informally come together and learn from each other how best to move forwards. Following a short break, we re-launched ideasSPACE in collaboration with our media partner UrbanNous, and UDG Executive Committee member Christopher Martin of Urban Movement. The new shorter format of one-to-one conversations with leading experts whose work is at the heart of urban issues will feature people like Sherry Dobbin on Cultural Strategy, Nicholas Boys-Smith on Design Quality and Beauty, Lord Michael Bates on Why Walking?, Carolyn Steel on Food, and more. Details can be found on our website and on YouTube channels.

Last but not least, our first virtual AGM took place in November. It has been a difficult year for many of our members, individuals and urban design practices. This has been reflected in the UDG's income, but I am happy to report that we are still in good shape.

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

I would like to invite all our members to share ideas and proposals of how we can make it easier to deliver good places. If you have ideas for an urban design event, research, collaboration opportunities, or would like to get involved with the group, please get in touch with us at: administration@udg.co.uk

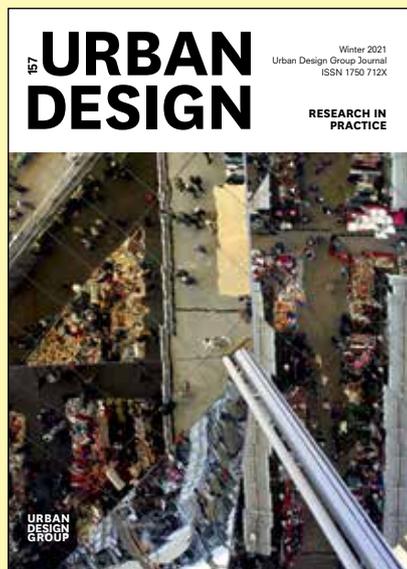
Katja Stille, Chair of the Urban Design Group and Director at Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design

1 Coffey Architects – Meringue House © Luke O'Donovan

DIARY OF EVENTS

Until further notice it will not be possible to run live events with an audience at The Gallery. There is however an online programme of events.

Please check the UDG website for details www.udg.org.uk



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A New Beginning

The year just ended will not be missed. Everybody has been affected by the pandemic and the world will take a long time to recover. History tells us that previous diseases had an important impact on the planning and design of cities: the plague led to building controls during the Renaissance period; drainage and clean water followed 19th century epidemics of cholera, typhoid and yellow fever; poor sanitary conditions led to housing by-laws and to the Garden City Movement; and in the early 20th century the fear of tuberculosis was influential in Le Corbusier's idea of the *Ville Radieuse*, which would ensure plenty of air and light in every dwelling.

At present, many questions are being asked about how people will react to the pandemic in their daily lives and how it will affect the future design of cities. This issue reports on some of the Urban Design Group's initiatives with other organisations. The 15 Minute City, a new brand name for a very old concept, is part of the suggestions put forward in recent debates, although it remains to be seen how seriously local authorities will adopt and apply it. Coincidentally, the reactions to the Government's White Paper on the future of planning indicate similar concerns. In addition, climate change is a constant threat that encompasses all others.

Finding answers when there are so many unknowns is impossible without evidence-based research. Urban design is not a precise science where hypotheses can be tested in a laboratory. The urban environment is the laboratory and practitioners do their research through their work, establishing the facts, testing their schemes and learning from them through a process of trial and error. The articles collected by Juliana Martins

for this issue cover a range of approaches by practices, and confirm that urban designers do not have all the answers, that they need to collaborate with many others, both professionals and other communities, as well as to communicate in a way that is widely shared. Although this type of research is different from the purely academic, it is no less valuable: it can benefit not just clients commissioning a scheme, but also the users of the completed project, the practice itself and the wider profession. Just as with other research, there can be blind alleys or mistakes; we have learned in the last few months that science is not infallible. The contributors to this topic show how wide-ranging research in urban design practice is, even though little is known about it.

The year finishes with at least some positive news: a vaccine may be available soon, some dangerous characters have left the political stage and, in particular, a major enemy of the fight against climate change has gone. Maybe 2021 will be worth remembering! ●

Sebastian Loew, architect and planner, writer, consultant and joint editor

HOW TO JOIN

To join the Urban Design Group, visit www.udg.org.uk and see the benefits of taking out an annual membership.

- Individual (UK and international)** £55
- UK student / concession** £35
- Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design** £85
- Small practice** (<5 professional staff) £275
- Large practice** (>5 professional staff) £495
- Education** £275
- Local Authority** £100
- UK Library** £90
- International Library** £120

Academy of Urbanism and Urban Design Group Joint Symposium – The 15 Minute City

16 – 18 September 2020, Online
(via Zoom)



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The COVID-19 pandemic has had all kinds of effects and one of them has been for the Academy of Urbanism (AoU) and the Urban Design Group to collaborate in a seminal event. The three-day event was called a symposium rather than a conference and it was of course virtual, using the magic of Zoom to get together. The title was The 15 Minute City, a subject which although not new, has been brought into focus by becoming a main objective of Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris, and widely reported in the media as a possible post-COVID solution. What it means, how and where it should be applied and the consequences on the ground were some of the themes discussed during the three days by many presenters and a large international audience.

Wednesday evening was a warm-up exercise introduced by the chairs of the two organisations – Tony Reddy (AoU) and Leo Hammond (UDG). Zoom was then used to create small networking groups chatting informally and bringing up different perspectives on the themes of the three days. Examples from other countries seem to have appeared in several groups pointing at the dangers of being too UK and London-centric.

THURSDAY

Thursday started with a presentation by keynote speaker Arun Jain, Chief Planner and Urban Designer in Bellevue, Washington State, talking from America's West Coast. Acknowledging that we are facing a whole series of crises, he suggested that we analyse what kind of services people can easily reach walking or cycling, and where the gaps are. Different social groups have different needs and we should concentrate on the more vulnerable.

A series of five minutes pre-recorded presentations followed in quick succession. Case studies showed how the 15 Minute City can mean different things: if you include public transport, London is already there; historic cities such as Leeds also achieve the standard; and, the superblocks in Brasilia



2

were built as such but have evolved into specialised districts. Making streets and open spaces more attractive was a theme repeated throughout the event, and Saskia Huizinga outlined some interesting ideas from the *Street Improvement Manual* produced by the Street Improvement Collaboration. Chris Martin talked about 'the power of nearness' and suggested charging people for making choices that damaged the environment. Integrating places of work in the 15 Minute City was dealt with by speakers advocating help for people working from home by including home-work in planning and making buildings adaptable to needs, again a recurring theme of the symposium.

How the 15 Minute City could work for different age groups was discussed. Janet Sutherland addressed the plight of older people not finding suitable accommodation in their neighbourhood and therefore staying in houses too large and inconvenient for them; however she also gave examples of good solutions.

The afternoon session started with a presentation by Professor Carlos Moreno, Scientific Director at the Sorbonne, advisor to Anne Hidalgo and the person credited with introducing her to the 15 Minute policy for Paris. He started by stating that the current situation in cities was unsustainable and asked 'what kind of city do we want to live in? He suggested that we needed to combine three concepts: chrono-urbanism (a new rhythm of life), chronotopia (multi-purpose functions) and topophilia (the love of place). In practical terms, this means for instance urban development that isn't based on moving further and faster, but helps people walking or cycling and having a healthier lifestyle. The city of proximities, which may or may not mean an exact 15 minute walk, tells us 'take your time, enjoy, don't rush'; it means one place, various uses. Moreno cited cities such as Nantes, Milan, Melbourne and Ottawa that were experimenting with these concepts. He also introduced 'the commons', the public good as a guiding idea, which the

1 Prof Carlos Moreno introducing his 15 Minute City
2 The 15 Minute City as applied to Paris, from Prof Carlo Moreno's presentation

Mayor of Paris is considering as a guide to her policies, and seems so remote from the British approach.

The next speaker was Dr Wei Yang, the RTPI's Vice-President whose subject was the 15 Minute City in China, seemingly inspired by the British Garden City. Wei outlined the changes in the Chinese planning system and gave examples of cities that base their plans on the 15 Minute concept; so for example Qing Dao is divided into liveable units (the plan looked like an updated version of Ebenezer Howard's diagram). Shanghai aims for neighbourhoods that offer everything within 15 minutes' reach, and helps the elderly in the community. It appears that reducing the carbon footprint is the motivation to return to a more local life style.

Daisy Narajan, Director of Urbanism for Sustrans and speaking from Edinburgh, contrasted her native village in Kerala where everything was available locally with the beautiful, but soulless and car-dependent, place where she had lived in the US. She described Edinburgh as wonderful but needing to improve transport and land use distribution, and put green space at the heart of the post-COVID recovery. Echoing Carlos Moreno, she thought that Scotland (and elsewhere) needed to rethink what kind of places people wanted to live in, but she acknowledged that change is difficult to achieve.

THURSDAY EVENING

An evening 'fringe' event dealt with the situation in Al Zaatari, a refugee camp in Jordan housing 100,000 people, an 'enforced 15 Minute City'. Humar Al Waer of the University of Dundee spoke of terrible stories but also positive ones. Killian Kleinschmidt from the Innovation and Planning Agency (IPA-switxboard), narrated the changes in



3



4

3-4 Tirana: Skandenberg Square before and after transformation, from Anuela Ristani's presentation

the camp where the inhabitants gradually organised their space, their economy and their governance. The transformation from a military-based layout to a more liveable one was slow and organic, but didn't happen easily. Karen Fisher from the University of Washington explained how she developed the creativity of local inhabitants to improve their self-worth.

FRIDAY

Friday started early with looking at walking, cycling and the public realm. The UDG's director Robert Huxford outlined the successes and (mostly) failures of the current highway design in Britain. David McKenna of Street Spirit Design promoted 'slow streets' and gave the example of Caernarfon's Town Square and Chester's Frodsham Street. David Harrison and Emma Griffin of London Living Streets gave a brief history of the way that urban streets have been used: after WW2 they were taken over by cars and now they have to be reclaimed for pedestrians. Gesine Junker and Laura Georgescu of Transport for London described how the pandemic has suddenly released funds to implement improvements for cyclists and pedestrians, but the short time for implementation and the

lack of consultation have been a problem, leading to conflicts and backlash.

Professor Rob Adams, Director of City Design and Projects at the City of Melbourne was the morning's keynote speaker, presenting from his home in Australia. Viewed from here, his position is admirable and enviable; assisted by a professional team and supported by the politicians, Rob admitted that not everybody would be as lucky and successful as he was! He took advantage of the lockdown to think about the future of the city. Many new cycle lanes appeared and trees were planted. People's experience during the lockdown depended on the neighbourhood: you can get everything you need at a walkable distance in Melbourne's centre and in the inner suburbs, but as you move further out, you first rely on good public transport, and then you need a car and you are more stressed. The solutions seem to be both a sensitive densification along movement corridors and at key centres in order to use land more efficiently, and a great improvement of the public realm for pedestrians. He also praised the new trackless tram as a public transport innovation. His talk was rich with examples and inspiration.

A discussion period followed, led by Lord Matthew Taylor. Barriers to the 15 Minute City included the fact that newly redundant office blocks did not necessarily make good housing and that even if they did, only very few people in Britain wanted to live in

a flat. Another issue was that applying such a blanket concept everywhere ignored local characteristics.

The afternoon keynote speaker was Anuela Ristani, Deputy Mayor of Tirana, who surprised many of us, unaware of what happened in recent years in her city, by showing the amazing transformation it has achieved in a short period of time. She started with a short history of the growth of Tirana whose population has multiplied fourfold in 25 years, with the accompanying growth in car ownership but no adapted infrastructure.

One of her first interventions was the removal of cars from Skandenberg Square, the city's main public space, and its transformation into a truly popular place. She then tackled and transformed a number of other unloved spaces in the city and most importantly, she created play areas all over the city. 'A happy kid is the best advocate for change' she said, explaining how she gained the support of the local inhabitants through children. Other measures have dealt with mobility, particularly the expansion of bike lanes to 47km, and the greening of the city, for example an orbital forest and the planting of 300,000 trees.

The last session of the day involved young professionals suggesting ways of involving children in design for the post-pandemic future. Jas Atwal, Rob Thomas and Rachel Toms presented their ideas and showed examples of work with children.

CONCLUSION

This summary of the event cannot cover the large number of questions that were asked and the many issues debated. One of the advantages of the Zoom format is that throughout the event, comments and questions appear on the chat window; in a real room these would wait until a Q&A session and their numbers would be limited. The result is more democratic but also confusing and distracting: the chat was often at least as interesting as the speaker, and following both was impossible. I wanted to stop one or the other to be able to concentrate better and missed a lot of undoubtedly valuable comments.

On the content of the symposium, it was noticeable that in spite of participants being in different parts of the country and well beyond, the debate kept returning to London, which even in Britain is an exceptional case – privileged in its public transport system and atypical. Worse problems are elsewhere and often overlooked. Equally, when hearing about good examples from abroad, we don't seem to openly say that the main culprits for the non-neighbourhood places built in this country are a blind faith in market forces, or the lack of powers or leadership of the public sector. No tinkering with the planning system and no design codes will resolve this conundrum. ●

Sebastian Loew
With help from Tim Hagyard

The Planning White Paper – UDG Webinar Series

25 September – 16 October 2020

The Government's Planning White Paper on the future of planning *Delivering Quality Towns and Cities* has provoked numerous reactions, both positive and negative. The UDG organised four lunchtime online debates on successive Fridays, each one addressing a particular issue in the document, and all following a similar format: four or five short presentations followed by a Q&A session. The overall question was whether this proposed major shake-up of the planning system would produce or encourage better urban design.

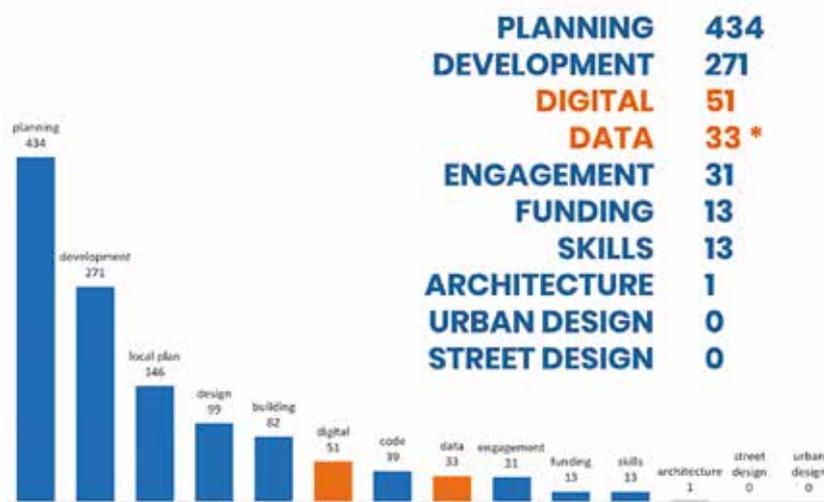
STRATEGIC ISSUES

The first session chaired by Leo Hammond, started with Wei Yang, RTPi Vice President, who wondered what was meant by the future, and suggested that the climate change emergency was the main challenge that would affect generations to come. As land that can be developed is very limited, we need to use it much more efficiently, integrating nature, people and land in a strategic approach to planning. Jenny Raggett of Transport for New Homes thought that the White Paper's division of land into 'growth, renewal and protected' categories was far too simplistic. Land for development needs to be designated on the basis of reliable data, quality is as important as quantity, and transport needs to be at the centre of the planning process. Lynda Addison of the Transport Planning Society recognised that the planning system needed improvement and, like the previous speakers, emphasised the interconnection between transport, land uses and telecommunications. While she saw some advantages in the White Paper, such as the inclusion of *Manual for Streets*, she thought it left too many questions unanswered, particularly on the sustainability of places, to enable her to give a positive verdict. Roger Evans of Studio REAL warned that to achieve the current housing targets, an area of land the size of Surrey would be needed. The current system of allocating land for development based on spreadsheets is totally unsustainable and inevitably leads to poor urban form. The alternative is an approach to urban design that starts with an urban character assessment and moves up and down the scales from the sub-regional, through the town and the place, to the detailed design.

DIGITAL FUTURES

During the second session chaired by Katja Stille, the value and importance of digital data was discussed by four speakers: Sue James of The Edge, Chris Sharpe of Digital

How often do phrases appear in the white paper?



* = not including data protection small print at end of consultation document

Futures, architect and urban designer Leslie Howson, and Liz Reynolds of Think Deep UK. They all emphasised the importance of having good quality data, accessible to all and shared by all. Data could have a great variety of applications, including communicating with the general public, but it would need resources and training for staff and the public. Who would be responsible for collecting and holding the information was also an issue raised.

DESIGN CODES AND GUIDANCE

The third session was again chaired by Leo Hammond, who reminded the audience that around 150 years ago housing byelaws were a form of design guidelines. He had several questions for the speakers and in particular asked what should we code for and how far should codes go. Professor Matthew Carmona was the first to speak warning that codes would not be a panacea and would not work for large areas, such as a whole district. He suggested that good codes were site-specific and should provide inspiration, and not be regulatory. An urban designer should be involved in drafting codes and these should be flexible, tangible and gradual. Design review would also be essential in implementing the codes. He described different levels of coding with 'design-obsessed' at one extreme and 'everything but the kitchen sink' at the other. He suggested that the best codes dealt with integrated essentials, and were pared back and site-specific. Finally Matthew expressed concern that the White Paper would not deliver what was needed. Rob Cowan of Urban Design Skills followed with similar worries. He doubted that the resources would be provided and thought that even now there were so many kinds of design guides that they confuse rather than help. He showed examples of codes that prescribe the details but not the essentials, the opposite of what needs to happen. He pointed out that, like masterplans, codes are often not implemented, and wondered how monitoring

and enforcement could be effective.

Next, Katja Stille of Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design emphasised the need to start with a clear and shared vision and to base the work on the existing local characteristics and robust information on the area. Collaboration between all stakeholders and clear communication were also essential for the success of coding. Like previous speakers, she thought that codes and guidelines had to be inspirational and achieve a balance between flexibility and prescription. Alexis Butterfield of Pollard Thomas Edwards architects described the process of developing the design code for Wing near Cambridge, starting with a vision developed with the landowner, in dialogue with the local district council. He showed sample pages from the guide and suggested that good examples use 'must' for what is mandatory and essential, and 'should' for what is recommended and desirable. To end the presentations, Trovino Monteiro of Greater Cambridge Shared Planning gave the local authority's point of view. He emphasised the importance of leadership and building consensus to ensure continuity and develop trust throughout the authority. This means that codes must be clearly connected to development control work. Like others, he was concerned with the skills available in local authorities and thought that a culture change was essential.

DELIVERING QUALITY TOWNS AND CITIES

In the fourth session, chair Katja Stille briefly summarised the previous sessions before stating that this last event aimed to consider all of the issues in the White Paper together. The first speaker Peter Studdert, an independent consultant, suggested that although the White Paper was a muddle, we needed to have a positive attitude and not reject it. He suggested that there were many unanswered questions and issues missing. For instance the White Paper says nothing on regional planning and very little on

what happens in the country. Kenji was sure that the existing system did not work, but was not convinced that the White Paper offered the solutions. Like many others, he felt that the real problem was the dysfunctional land market.

Finally Martina Juvara of Urban Silence summarised her views as five opportunities, one of which ‘pro-active planning’ was neither mentioned nor denied in the White Paper, therefore offering a possible opening. On the other hand, she outlined what was missing: dealing with climate change, the integration of transport and planning, and the levelling up agenda. She ended by stating that communities knew their context better than anyone, and needed funding and technical support.

Numerous questions were raised throughout the four sessions; the chat was buzzing all of the time, making it difficult to follow and impossible to answer all of the questions. The Q&A periods at the end of each session were also rich, showing how interested colleagues were to debate these issues. Recurrent themes were the availability of resources and skills for local authorities, the failure of the land market, the lack of coordination between transport and planning, the need for solid information and for community engagement, and the balance between prescription and inspiration. The White Paper’s vagueness and lack of answers to many questions was raised as worrying, but also as a possible reason to hope for better outcomes in the end. Together with other organisations and on the basis of the wealth of material accumulated during these four events, the UDG will respond to the government. We will have to see whether our voices are being heard and listened to.

You can see the recordings of the webinars on the UDG website:

- <https://www.udg.org.uk/events/2020/planning-white-paper-strategic-issues>
- <https://www.udg.org.uk/events/2020/planning-white-paper-digital-futures>
- <https://www.udg.org.uk/events/2020/planning-white-paper-design-codes-guidance>
- <https://www.udg.org.uk/events/2020/planning-white-paper-delivering-quality-urban-design-cities-towns-streets-and-spaces>

Sebastian Loew

1–3 Three slides from the webinars: top and middle Katja Stille and Matthew Carmona on design codes, bottom Jenny Raggett on zones

What makes a good design code?

- Balance prescription and flexibility.
- Well and clearly communicated.
- It has to be tested.

What are the important elements that need to be controlled?
 What level of detail should they prescribe?
 What language is appropriate?
 Are the requirements clear?
 Are they deliverable – technically and commercially

1



Codes can be sophisticated tools

sustainable urban design

2



4. Division of all England into three zones: 'growth', 'renewal' and 'protected': far too simplistic

Just three 'zones' fails to capture the city's social and environmental aspects of the country and fails to capture digital mapping and evidence based planning. The White Paper is clear: 'All areas of land should fit into one of these three categories'. What will be allowed in terms of 'protected'? We need to use data to make informed decisions about where to build, working across sectors.

Mapping technology for evidence based planning, yes. Just three zones? A massive over-simplification, surely.

3



resources, and some proposals such as the abolition of section 106 contributions and the automatic granting of planning consent were dangerous. Peter suggested that issues outside the scope of the White Paper such as taxation and devolution were at least as important, and that we should adopt the northern European model of planning led by the public sector.

For Helen Flage of the Homes and Communities Agency the White Paper seemed to be only about delivering housing and ignored many other issues such as nature and housing standards. She put forward ten points to be addressed in order to deliver sustainable neighbourhoods, amongst them were ‘define sustainable communities’, ‘plan strategically’ and ‘change the delivery and funding model’.

Although speakers and attendees during the four sessions had at various times covered similar points, this was an excellent summary of the points made.

Kenji Starmer of East Devon District Council presented the view from a local authority and based his talk on his experience in Cranbrook, a developer-led new town. The White Paper sees the problem as threefold: not enough housing because not enough land is coming forward; communities do not like what is built in their area; and, developments take too long. Examples of what the Government likes are pretty places such as Belgravia (but also pretty dead), or successful places like Poundbury or Upton, which took ages to be developed, had developers grumbling, and are not representative of

Climate Change Global Digest

After a hiatus in the first six months of the pandemic, a growing amount of research, strategies and action is now starting again. A number of organisations have recently issued research and strategies designed to steer a path to recovery and climate resilience. Here are a few examples of some of those recently announced.

GREEN SPACE RESEARCH

Friends of the Earth have released research looking at relative access to green space across England. Researchers ranked neighbourhoods from A (the best access to green space) to E (the least access to green space). An interactive map allows you to zoom in to understand how different places perform. This data works as a useful indicator of neighbourhoods' future resilience.

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/access-green-space-england-are-you-missing-out>

The health benefits of more ecologically rich green spaces have now been shown to include protection from disease. Research in Finland found that children who play in more biodiverse settings have stronger immune systems, and that encouraging more biodiverse habitats in urban areas could help counteract immune deficiencies.

<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/6/42/eaba2578>

CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGIES

The City of London has just adopted a radical Climate Action Strategy that will steer how the City operates and the nature of future change in the centre of London. Most significantly, the City has adopted a target of achieving net zero-carbon across the Square Mile by 2040. This is 10 years in advance of the current national target. As part of



1 Children enjoying green space

1

the strategy, the City has committed to transform the Square Mile's public realm by adding in more green spaces, urban greening and flood resistant road surfaces, as well as updating planning requirements to ensure that new developments include carbon reduction plans in their designs.

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/environmental-health/climate-action/climate-action-strategy>

The London Borough of Enfield has also made big strides, adopting a climate action strategy for the borough's Meridian Water regeneration project. The strategy has been compiled by consultants Useful Projects with the council.

The work on the environmental strategy for Meridian Water is part of the Foreground project being led by the UK Green Building Council and co-funded by EIT Climate-KIC. It will have far-reaching benefits for urban designers working in the UK as through this project a Playbook will be prepared, which will use everything learned from the Meridian Water approach to provide guidance for large-scale development schemes across the country.

<https://www.meridianwater.co.uk/news/2020/10/15/meridian-water-environmental-sustainability-strategy-adopted>

<https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/environment/enfield-climate-action-plan-2020-environment.pdf>

The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and the London

School of Economics recently released their Green + Gilt proposal. The proposal is targeting the run-up to the COP26 climate summit in November 2021 and seeks to build on the UK's tradition of leadership in climate action and global finance. The Green + Gilt proposal suggests that 'the urgent need to rebuild the economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic provides the government with an opportunity to issue a sovereign bond (gilt) that supports both a green recovery and social renewal'. The proposal advocates creating funding for projects that contribute to a resilient, net zero economic recovery.

https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/the-green-gilt-how-the-uk-could-issue-sovereign-bonds-that-deliver-climate-action/?mc_cid=d66cb52a18&mc_eid=9b390b92e1

BREAKTHROUGH PROJECT

In Sittingbourne in Kent, a breakthrough project has started construction. Six zero-carbon homes are being delivered on a vacant site in the Murston area of the town. The three-bed family homes for rent are being delivered by Public Sector in partnership with NetZero Buildings. Homes England is part-funding the scheme and modern methods of construction are being used to deliver airtight forms with well-insulated walls. Photovoltaic solar panel roof tiles are also being used, so that the properties generate their own electricity. Whilst it is a relatively small-scale project, the development will demonstrate how zero-carbon family housing could be more easily delivered at scale.

<https://environmentjournal.online/articles/work-begins-on-zero-carbon-neighbourhood-in-kent/>

In other news, HS1, the high-speed train line that links Kent and London, is to become the first railway to run entirely on renewable energy. HS1 have confirmed the Renewable Electricity Guarantee of Origin (REGO) certificates required to allow them to report zero-carbon emissions across both their trains and stations.

<https://www.offgridenergyindependence.com/articles/22025/hs1-becomes-first-railway-to-run-entirely-on-renewable-energy>

Jane Manning with Julie Fletcher, Joanna Wright and Mitch Cooke

Key sources of information and further reading. Simply hold your smartphone over the QR code whilst in camera mode and you will be taken to the relevant web page.

FoE Green Space research	Finland biodiversity research	City of London strategy	Meridian Water Strategy
Enfield Climate Action Plan	Green + Gilt proposal	Sittingbourne zero-carbon homes	Renewable HS1

Windrush Square, Brixton, London

A highly valued public square that aims to reconnect a series of public spaces and honour the area's dynamic multi-cultural community

In each issue of *Behind the Image*, one of our contributors visits a contemporary public space from around the world. The photography tries to reveal an alternative perspective on a familiar precedent, famous space or place. These images illustrate how the public space works in

practice: exploring its features (designed and unintended), and the way it relates to the surrounding context. ●

Lionel Eid, George Garofalakis,
Rosie Garvey and Alice Strang



In-use: The space is left open for flexibility, clear sight lines and pedestrian routes, with a minimum of objects and planting. One of the central elements is a large sculpture used as seating, a meeting place and for informal play. (Photo by Davis Landscape Architecture)



Rethinking road layouts: The historic photo to the left shows the former Tate Gardens and road layout where the space effectively functioned as a roundabout. By closing one street, in front of what is now the Ritzy cinema, a more coherent public realm has been created, with activities spilling out into the square.



Design around an existing asset: A central, mature tree is retained as a key feature in the space. Steps with ramped access create a slightly elevated platform around the tree to protect the existing roots and provide various places for seating.



Soft landscaping: The southern half of the space is retained as a grassed and treed area with diagonal paths across it to accommodate pedestrian desire lines. Pleach trees help to shield the space from the traffic of Brixton Hill and create more intimate, covered seating areas.



Thresholds and connections: wide and textured crossing points help to plug the square into the wider city, overcoming the barrier of busy roads.

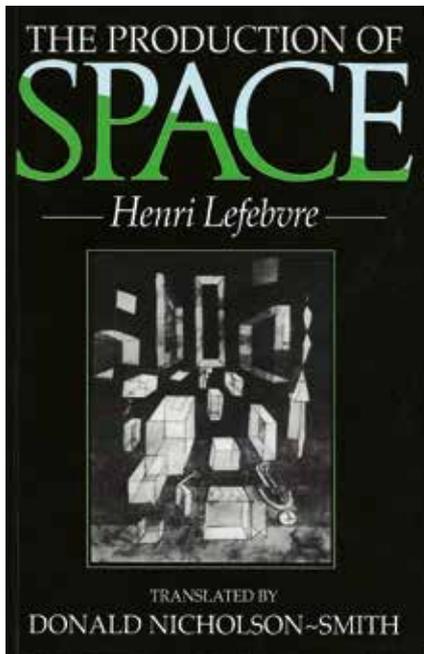


Textures and detailing: A variety of textures and materials, including elements of text detailing the history of the Empire Windrush journey, add interest to the square. A relatively busy floor material palette complements the minimal furniture and planting.



Off-peak: Clever and creative lighting casts beautiful shapes and ensures the space is well lit to help prevent antisocial behaviour in the evenings. (Photo by Gross Max – designers of the space)

Reflection: As a truly public space that is owned and managed by Lambeth Council, Windrush Square provides an inclusive setting for the surrounding civic buildings and continues to be an important gathering place for meetings, rallies and public events.



Urban Design Library #36

The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith 1974, Blackwell Publishing

I finally read *The Production of Space* in my first year as a PhD student at the Bartlett School of Planning. A group of friends were joining a reading group organised by a colleague from the Geography school, and Lefebvre's book was their first choice. As a trained architect, my understanding of space was a hybrid between Cartesian geometry and artistic inspiration, an idea carefully translated into an object. The premise that '(Social) space is a (social) product' (p.26), offered an intriguing and different perspective, so I joined in.

Two aspects of the book struck me right from the start. One was the depth of the philosophical references that appear as brief comments in the text and as footnotes. I often found myself picking up one of such passing comments and following it down a long thread of related ideas before continuing with the reading. The other was the peculiar prose style that I linked to its translation into English, until I learned that Lefebvre used to dictate his thoughts without ever reviewing the final document. The combination of these two factors makes the reading of the text slow, but also extremely enriching and perfect for group discussion. Picking my colleagues' brains to decipher what Lefebvre was trying to convey in his musings about space also revealed the strong influence that our own backgrounds and disciplines have on the way that we see the world around us.

Lefebvre does not waste time as he

lays out his key concerns about space from the very first pages. In a concise review of Western thought about space, Lefebvre tells us how our common understanding of it has been dominated by a Cartesian logic, one that renders space as a mental entity separate from social or physical reality. One might wonder why these philosophical reflections should be a matter of concern. As Doreen Massey pithily put it some 25 years later, 'The way we think about space matters. It inflects our understandings of the world, our attitudes to others, our politics'. Similarly, Lefebvre makes this point through a triple proposition:

- 1 understanding space as a mental entity separate from reality serves a political purpose, one that shapes the forces and social relations of production
- 2 such understanding presents it as 'disinterested knowledge' (p.9) which conceals its political role
- 3 this mental space grants the disciplines concerned with it (i.e. architecture, urbanism, social planning) control 'of the future, or of the possible' (ibid.).

With the aim of the book established, the dense writing gives way to a more expansive style. As Lefebvre himself recognises, these propositions need 'to be expounded, supported by logical arguments and shown to be true' (ibid.). The remaining 355 pages do precisely that.

To test his propositions, Lefebvre calls for a new epistemological approach to space, one that looks at it as the ever-changing outcome of a production process, in which social and physical realities interact with the mental. Drawing on Marx's interpretation of Hegel's dialectical method of knowing, as well as Nietzsche's concept of the 'eternal return', Lefebvre presents space as the evolving product of a never-ending dialectical relation between mental space (i.e. its Cartesian conceptualisation), physical space (i.e. nature), and social space (i.e. itself a product of the dialectical relation between perceived, conceived and lived spaces).

Recognising the complexity and novelty of the social space idea, Lefebvre elaborates in detail the meaning of its triad in the first two chapters:

- Perceived space refers to how we perceive the world through our senses, through being in the world:
- Conceived space, which is the dominant space in every society, refers to how we understand space through our knowledge. This knowledge, as Lefebvre explains, is 'a mixture of understanding and ideology' (p.41).
- Lived space overlays physical space and makes symbolic use of its objects. It refers to the meaning that we attribute to space.

In this way, the triad mirrors the same dialectical relation between, and similar roles of, the natural, mental and social realities of space. In this way, the sentence '(Social)

space is a (social) product' (p.26) reveals the inextricable relationship between space and society, which in turn explains Lefebvre's claim that 'every society... produces a space, its own space' (p.31).

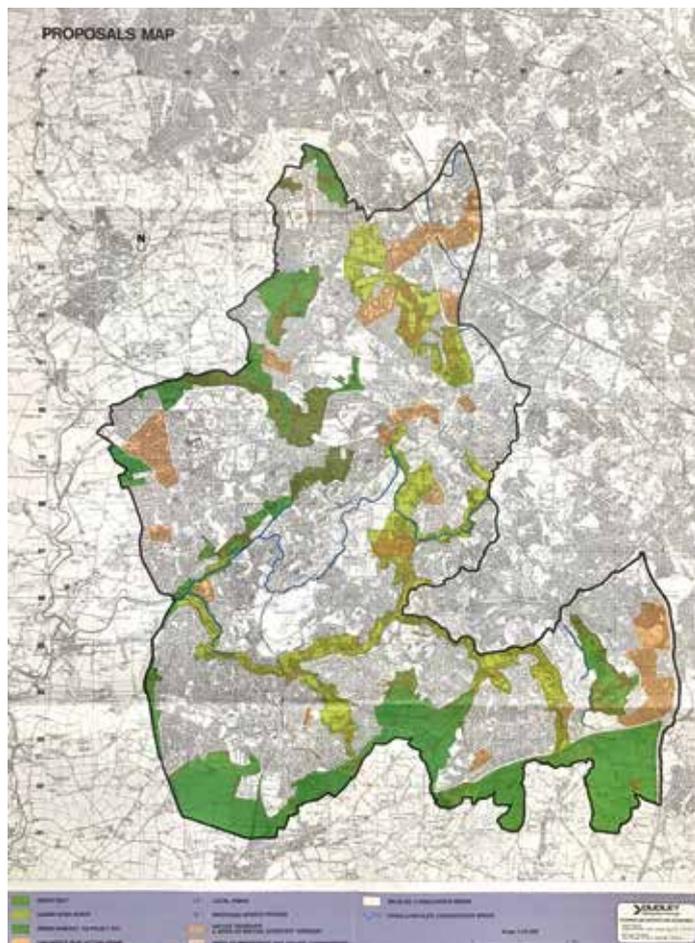
Lefebvre argues that capitalist societies produce abstract space, which is characterised by the dominance of mental space over the natural and social ones. In this dialectical relation, the mathematical logic underpinning mental space, reduces the world around us to a homogeneous grid where all that matters is the relative position of the centre, which in turn determines the value of each location. William Alonso's land use economics comes quickly to mind when reading Lefebvre's description of abstract space. Lefebvre discusses in detail the material implications that this abstract space has for our daily lives. Prime locations and suburbs are expressions of this abstract space, which reduces the historical richness and social diversity of places to an exchange value that is a function of their relative position to the centre. Coastal areas are reduced to mass tourism destinations. The rural becomes an urban subordinate.

The Production of Space offers a profound analysis of the political role that an understanding of space plays on the way we shape and relate to the places we live in. After reading the book, the world around us acquires a different meaning as if a veil has been lifted from our eyes. The social space triad has framed the analysis of conflicts in the use of public spaces. In my case, Lefebvre's dialectical method helped me understand vacant land as the necessary planning tool of a land allocation process that creates uneven land scarcity, a very different conclusion from the one I imagined at the start of my PhD research. This is a book that dares us to think about space differently. For that reason alone, it is a book worth reading. ●

Dr Sonia Freire-Trigo, Urban planner, architect, lecturer UCL

READ ON

- Chomski, N. 2012. *Occupy*. Penguin Books.
- Coleman, N. 2015. *Lefebvre for Architects*. London: Routledge
- Freire-Trigo, S. 2020. *Vacant land in London: a planning tool to create land for growth*, International Planning Studies, Vol.25 (3) pp.261-276
- Leary-Owhin, M.E. (ed.) 2018. *Urban Planning and the Spatial Ideas of Henri Lefebvre*, Urban Planning, Vol. 3 (3) ISSN: 2183-7635
- Vaneigem, R. 2003 [1967] *The revolution of everyday life*. London: Rebel Press



1 Recreation & Open Space Subject Plan adopted by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, May 1989. Source: Dudley MBC.

My Favourite Plan: Paul Watson

Dudley Green Infrastructure Plan,
Dudley Metropolitan Borough
Council, 1989

... but it was not called that! Its correct title was the *Dudley Recreation & Open Space Subject Plan* prepared and adopted in the mid-1980s under the planning regime of the time.

It established, for the first time on a statutory basis, a network of green spaces across the borough important for their landscape, recreational and nature conservation value and potential, for the shape that they gave to urban structure and for the role they could play in urban regeneration.

WHY I LIKE IT...

The Plan placed green infrastructure issues on the map, literally and metaphorically, and demonstrated their vital role as a basis for strategic as well as local policy development.

It was presented in A0 poster format with a plan on one side, and text, arranged to be read as an A4 fold-out, on the other; it was therefore easily digestible (albeit supported by technical appendices for the avid reader) and its place on many walls served as a daily reminder of its messages, not just

of its policies and proposals, but also of the importance of multi-disciplinary working and of holding decision-makers to account.

It broke what was then new ground, and it had real power and influence in the development of planning practice and in wider policy development and resource allocation. It also set the tone for policy-making in the Black Country and beyond for decades to come.

WHAT TO LEARN FROM IT...

By establishing a green infrastructure network and urban structure upon which to base regeneration and development decisions, the Plan illustrates the importance of urban design in spatial planning, at the strategic as well as the local level.

It demonstrates that a three-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach to two-dimensional plan-making is vital for success. The Plan emphasises the importance of land use as an essential component of place, and that plan-making is much more than allocating land for development. It provides the fundamental skeleton for place-making and the priorities for investment in infrastructure grey, green and blue, and it sets the agenda for zoning, masterplanning and design codes.

Finally, it shows what can be achieved by a small committed team (thanks here to Chris Green and Steve Winterflood), that not only can leave a lasting legacy but also become life-long friends. ●



Current Position

Planning and urban design consultant advising major players in the development industry, as well as promoting smaller scale interventions in urban and rural areas, and supporting local community groups

- HS2 Design Review Panel
- Design Midlands Board and Design Review Panel
- Design Council BEE

Education

- BA Hons Psychology
- Dip Town Planning
- MRTPI

Experience

Extensive public sector practice at all spatial levels and across a wide spectrum of contexts; most recently Strategic Director of Regeneration & Development for Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

- Past President of Planning Officers Society
- Adviser to government departments
- External Examiner for University of Birmingham

Specialisms & Ambitions

Continuing to find creative, attractive and pragmatic solutions to planning and urban design challenges and taking advantage of opportunities available.

A Design Quality Unit for England: Five Ingredients for Success

Matthew Carmona gets inspiration from Europe to suggest a way forward for design quality in England



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The recently published Planning White Paper contains a commitment to set up a new national body to support the transition to a more design-focussed planning system. It rightly confirms that the transition required will be long-term, necessitating a dramatic up-skilling within local planning authorities, supported by appropriate national and local leadership on design. It is envisaged that a key role of the new body will be 'to help local authorities make effective use of design guidance and codes, as well as performing a wider monitoring and challenge role for the sector in building better places'.

The proposal picks up on the idea for a Design Quality Unit for England advocated in the pamphlet *Delivering Urban Quality, Time to Get Serious*. Launched in May, the consortium behind the pamphlet (which included the UDG, the Academy of Urbanism, Place Alliance and others) made the case for a body that is long-term and authoritative 'with the ability to reach across Government departments and its agencies, bring together and harness the energies of the wide range of professional, industry, campaigning and advocacy organisations and experts in this field, whilst influencing developers and local government and helping to give ordinary citizens and communities the confidence that design quality really matters'.

In a new pamphlet *Towards a Design Quality Unit for England*, an enlarged consortium sets out proposals for what the mission, tools of engagement and modes of delivery of such a new body might be. It is written in the spirit of encouraging and helping to shape a public debate, not of having all the answers, and draws inspiration from practices around Europe explored by the Urban Maestro project. This

collaboration, between UN-Habitat, Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte (BMA) and University College London, is examining the informal tools of urban design governance across Europe. From the various practices, it is possible to extract five key ingredients for success which, in the pamphlet, also underpin ideas for the Design Quality Unit.

1 Long-term culture change and the immediate challenges of implementation

Across Europe, the quality of the built environment is increasingly being given a greater cultural significance. The *Davos Declaration* of 2018 called for a high-quality *baukultur* (literally building culture) for Europe. It argued for 'recognising the crucial contribution that a high quality built environment makes to achieving a sustainable society, characterised by a high quality of life, cultural diversity, individual and collective well-being, social justice and cohesion, and economic efficiency'. This should be done whilst being 'aware of a trend towards a loss of quality... evident in the trivialisation of construction, the lack of design values, including a lack of concern for sustainability, the growth of faceless urban sprawl and irresponsible land use, the deterioration of historic fabric, and the loss of regional traditions and identities'. As *A Housing Design Audit for England*, showed these qualities are all too familiar to us here.

The idea that how we shape the built environment also shapes the culture in which we live and work is not new, but the desire to systematically move it beyond woolly aspirations and into the life-blood of the national (and international) debate is new. In early 2020, for example, the Swiss government adopted their first Federal *Baukultur Strategy*, which clusters the *baukultur*-related operations of the different federal offices together and defines binding goals for the state, relating to how it will exploit its role as developer, owner, operator, regulator, sponsor and role model over the coming years. Such initiatives are about building a culture of great place-making and design in which sub-standard or mediocre is no longer good enough.

2 An independent, national voice to support programmes that are evidence-based and grounded in a willingness to challenge poor practice

For decades, attitudes to design quality have waxed and waned in government in England (alongside attitudes to town planning), and, perhaps as a consequence, local government and developers don't take policy statements, no matter how enlightened, nearly seriously enough. The need is to shift place quality permanently from the 'nice to have' category into the 'expected' or 'routine' category as it is increasingly in many parts of continental Europe.

To inject a new commitment to its *Baukultur*, in 2006, the German Federal government approved an act establishing the Federal Foundation for *Baukultur* based in Potsdam. The Foundation is an independent organisation, funded by the state and working in partnership with it to promote *Baukultur*, although not dictated by it. Whilst the Foundation promotes public discussion through events, networking and publications, its main focus is on the production of biennial reports on the state of German *Baukultur* which it has the

- 1 Publications of the Bundesstiftung Baukultur, Germany
 2 Delivering Urban Quality, Time to Get Serious Planning and the Environment
 3 Foundation committee, Nationale Stiftung Baukultur, Switzerland

right to present to the Federal Cabinet and Parliament, and to which government is required to respond. As one of the few organisations with such power, the Foundation is taken very seriously by government. Such a voice is a powerful force for positive change.

3 Local and national expertise harnessed through a networked approach

Whilst an influential national voice can shape the national conversation about design and the culture of and priority given to design quality, ultimately delivery has to be local. Experience from around Europe suggests that a small and agile national team can have a huge impact, but only if they reach out to work with an inclusive network of local partners.

In the Netherlands, several mechanisms encourage a networked approach to the governance of design. The Dutch *College van Rijksadviseurs* (government advisors on architecture and urbanism) initiated a system of spatial quality teams (Q-teams) across the country. Set up by local or provincial authorities and national agencies, they provide independent advice on spatial developments and urban development plans. Meanwhile *Architectuur Lokaal* Foundation, an independent centre of expertise and information on architecture and urbanism, is supported by four ministries (heritage, town planning, environment and transport) to act as a link between national policies and local practices. They facilitate local stakeholders – public and private – to deliver national policies and act as a conduit of local experience to inform national decision-making. The foundation links to the country's extensive network of architecture centres (35 in total) and *bouwmeesters* (city architects). Delivery has to be local, and so trying to do too much from the centre will not succeed.

4 Enhancing design skills as the fundamental starting point for place quality requiring the hands-on enabling of practice locally and dedicated affordable training

A key feature of many continental European countries, when compared with the UK, is a much smaller division between their architectural and planning professions. This leads to a greater integration of design thinking into planning and a heightened urbanistic sensibility within architecture. However, even where design sensibilities are generally higher, mechanisms still need to be found to supplement variable local skills and capacity.

The French Councils of Architecture, Planning and the Environment (CAUE) for example provide a wide range of professional enabling, negotiation and advice to stakeholders. CAUEs exist in almost all French Departments for the promotion and development of architectural, urban and environmental quality. Besides developing guidance about architecture, urban design and heritage, they support clients (public, private and community) with free educational and technical advice on the different phases of a project and building work. The CAUEs are represented by a national federation through a network organised regionally and nationally. CAUEs can also enter into partnerships with other organisations that help to deliver their objectives of raising awareness and building capacity within



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localities. Without the right urban design skills in place, the best will in the world is unlikely to deliver place quality.

5 Tools to be engaging, innovative, inspiring and collaborative, avoiding duplicating or undermining what others are already doing

Beyond the hard regulatory powers of governments, there is a wide range of soft powers that can be used constructively together to guide, cajole and encourage desirable outcomes. The Urban Maestro project has revealed significant innovation in the field of urban design governance across Europe, encompassing the full gamut of informal urban design governance tools. These range from those focussed on building the culture of good design through analysis, information and persuasion, to more active tools concerned with directly influencing and improving particular projects or places through rating, support and exploration.

Architecture & Design Scotland is the national advisor on design in Scotland. Realising that its greatest influence comes at the start of the development process, it has reshaped its tools of engagement to inject a strong design emphasis at that point. Its approach to design review, for example, has seen a shift away from a combative design panel towards a more measured, iterative and collaborative process of nurturing and enabling well-designed buildings and places, and involving communities in the process. It has launched a Pre-Design service to ensure that place-making is at the heart of local housing strategies. This is done by building the right conditions for better design outcomes, and it has worked with others to develop the *Place Standard* assessment tool, which provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place and its physical elements, allowing users to consider all the elements of a place in a methodical way. The latter has now been widely adopted around Europe.

BORROWING IDEAS, TRYING THEM ON FOR SIZE

Whilst we can look for inspiration from elsewhere, ultimately everywhere is different politically, in our market and development processes, and in our cultural and governance traditions. Despite this, surveying best practice from around Europe tells us firstly that we are not alone. The concern for urban quality is widely shared and seen as a legitimate and vital interest of intelligent government. Secondly, there are no definitive paths to guaranteed success. Everywhere is different, we have a lot to learn from each other, and we shouldn't be afraid to borrow ideas and try them on for size.

To deliver on the five ingredients for success in England will undoubtedly require a new national body, a Design Quality Unit, with enough capacity itself (at its core) to harness the considerable expertise that already exists around the country but in a more concerted and directed manner. Whilst we live in uncertain times, one certainty is that if we fail to invest in a well-designed built environment, we will be greatly impoverished as a result. We can avoid that, but we need to make this small and critical national investment now! ●

Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning & Urban Design, Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

Should Residential Care Homes Survive the Post-COVID New Normal?

Paul and Debbie Hewson argue for the integration of homes for the elderly in urban centres



1

Between January and August 2020, 14,412 deaths were reported in care homes in England and Wales where the underlying cause was given as COVID-19. This compares to a five-year average for influenza and pneumonia of 2,956 deaths. A total of 22,093 deaths were reported in the 85 years old and over age range where COVID-19 was mentioned, compared to a five-year average of 32,236 deaths where influenza and pneumonia were mentioned. There was no reduction in influenza and pneumonia deaths, but the COVID-19 deaths were in addition. The National Audit Office estimates the direct cost to the UK Government at £210 billion for the first six months of the crisis. Price Waterhouse Cooper estimated that the crisis had removed a quarter of the UK's GDP, with all of the effects on employment and tax income that follow. Clearly people desperately wish to get over this crisis. However, at the time of writing (October 2020), it is increasingly clear that there will be no quick return to normal. Indeed, many people see the pandemic as an opportunity to reset and return to a better type of normal. Here we

are proposing a new normal, which will be better for the elderly and better for society.

COVID-19 is a new disease and we will all be discussing how best to deal with it for some time. Conflicting views range from letting the virus run its course through to strict lockdowns. The John Snow Memorandum argues that to let the virus run its course is just not feasible, and that some intervention is needed to limit its spread. The problem is that interventions also cause pain: in addition to the economic pain mentioned above, a specific emotional pain results from the visiting restrictions on care homes.

TOWN CENTRES AND THE NEW NORMAL

This article discusses the place of urban design in the elderly's health, safety and happiness. In the UK and elsewhere, one urban development seen in the guise of the 'new normal' has been pop-up cycle lanes. These represent a significant effort to reallocate road space away from cars to more active forms of travel. Whilst the initial motivation may well have been for social distancing

(allowing people to keep distant from one another for source control reasons), it has other implications. Ample research suggests that cyclists spend more money locally than car drivers; Carlton Reid in *Forbes* magazine in 2018 summarised Transport for London's (TfL) work estimating this increased spend as 40 per cent more than motorists¹, and quoted a TfL director 'This research... shows the link between creating enjoyable spaces, where people want to spend time, and the results for better business'.

Such issues were already important before COVID-19 as high street retailers had been struggling for some time. Solutions were also under discussion: for example the articles in *Urban Design* 154 rehearsed the development of the high street that was needed pre-COVID-19. It could be argued that during the pandemic, better urban design could have helped to reduce the death toll in care homes. Part of the current political debate about COVID-19 argues that the elderly and other at-risk people could be isolated from society to allow economic recovery. Our view is that we should build a society where the elderly are so integrated that this doesn't make sense, and that risk mitigation for the elderly would fall to the whole of society. Clearly much of the science is still being debated, such as face coverings, screening, ventilation and viral load. Noting that the deaths from influenza and pneumonia are always high in the over 85 age group, we suggest that some aspects of these protective measures will last beyond COVID-19 and that a traditional, somewhat isolated care-home is not a facility that we should support in the new normal. We believe that situating residential care in the heart of town and village centres can afford a greater degree of independence to care home residents. Independence is known to have benefits on longevity and quality of life. Moreover, we believe that this co-location can help to revitalise town and village centres and help to bolster the retail sector.

INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

There are already some examples of this practice around the world. One is the retirement village, of which there are many excellent examples in New Zealand. However, these are age-segregated. It can be argued that mixed age care facilities where child

1 Mobility for all: cycling around Hogeweyk dementia village, The Netherlands

2 Leisure for all: dancing in a bar in Hogeweyk dementia village, The Netherlands

care and senior care can be combined, contribute greatly to society², leading to economies of scale and, far more importantly, providing a more fulfilling environment for older people. 'In the 1950s, it was theorised that adults have a need to contribute to the next generation, and that doing so can give older people feelings of accomplishment or success, rather than stagnation, as they age. Intergenerational activities show elders that they are valued as individuals that still possess lifelong skills, rather than just being passive recipients of care'.

Perhaps the best model for elderly care in the new normal is the Hogeweyk dementia village in the Netherlands, a dedicated facility which aims to fully replicate a small urban environment for its residents. Clearly, there are huge safety and welfare considerations in developing an urban setting that allows people with dementia to roam freely, but the evidence suggests that this enclosed village does indeed enable them to have a very full and active life.

The argument is that rather than create new dementia villages, we should adapt some or all urban centres along the lines of Hogeweyk. There are many excellent examples in the UK of care homes that offer a great service. Some are located near town centres and make use of local facilities. However, for most non-elderly people without family to visit, the very elderly live out of sight and out of mind. Evidence of this isolation comes from the fact that some commentators wish to isolate the elderly, and remove COVID-19 restrictions from the remainder of the population. That either demonstrates a lack of awareness of how interconnected we all are, or implies a rather undesirable disconnect in society. Amongst generational labels (Boomers, Millennials, Generation X), it is striking that care homes are, to a considerable degree, populated by people that Americans might call the Greatest Generation. If we believe that they are indeed the Greatest Generation, why are they shut away in facilities where they only connect with specific visitors? Why is an early response to COVID-19 to remove access to visitors, rather than an urgent search to find solutions to make visiting safe, such as outdoor dining areas with patio heaters (warmth and ventilation)?

TOWN CENTRES FOR ALL

In short, why don't we require that care home facilities become the anchor features

of our town centres³? To put this another way, why do we only consider intergenerational justice in terms of finance and not access to sociable urban living spaces? It is already known that non-retail businesses co-located in town centres contribute to their viability. Out-of-town shopping centres have an economic viability thanks to their free car parking. In-town shopping areas' viability is not necessarily based on retail as the primary objective, and town centres offer a resource and identity that goes beyond retail. So why not give care homes pride of place in this setting? They bring visitors and workers, and may provide residents who, on occasions and with appropriate assistance, would enjoy a stroll to a café. The case for care home residents seems easy to make. The importance of control to longevity has been repeatedly demonstrated, and recently it has been shown that you are more likely to live to 100 years of age if you live in a walkable neighbourhood.⁴ Indeed, we could encourage and incentivise older people still living at home to take up premium city centre locations, with the added benefit of allowing community carers to work in town centres and provide a better service with less time spent travelling between clients.

To make a town or city centre work in this way requires some thought. Paving styles, street furniture and signing would need to be adapted to be dementia-friendly. Signing doesn't just mean formal signage, but visual clues built into the urban space than enable navigation. Solutions will no doubt require that dementia sufferers are only permitted to go out of a care home with an enabler; some kind of physical barrier surrounds the centre; technology is used to track vulnerable residents; and retailers within a cordon are trained to help people with dementia. None of these proposals are free; providing enough enablers would be the most expensive option, but it seems reasonable that retailers would receive some payment for being trained to support people with dementia. This would be a small investment in terms of the improvement in quality of life that could be offered by making a city centre truly dementia-friendly.

CONCLUSIONS

Retirement complexes and villages are attractive to many, and dedicated care will remain essential for some. However, there are reasons to believe that walkable urban living, mingling with other generations and



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having a purpose can be life enhancing for older people. This then becomes a policy and urban design issue. In the UK, since 2016 the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) showed that the care sector was not financially healthy: 'cash extraction and debt-leveraged buyouts have created an unstable, fragile residential aged care sector – absolutely not what's needed to provide high-quality, secure care places that will be home for many Britons'.

We should use this opportunity to put older people in a place of honour at the centre of communities and see urban design as part of the solution. Living accommodation, as in retirement villages, could range from separate apartments to communal dwelling. Older people in the centre of the communities would bring more footfall into town centres, and could be combined very visibly with childcare. The policy question becomes one of mandating this provision through planning. The urban design challenge becomes one of arranging suitable provision to make this safe. ●

Dr Paul Hewson CStat CSci worked in evidence-based practice and currently leads a co-operative providing ethical insight from data.

Debbie Hewson worked in community care for a decade and is currently responsible for service quality.

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Practice-led Research in Urban Design

The use of research, understood as the production of knowledge through a systematic and rigorous process, is not new in urban design practice. Indeed, research is often part of the design process (e.g. on site-specific historical morphologies). But more elaborate forms of practice-led research, are burgeoning, particularly in the UK. A growing number of urban design practices are enthusiastically adopting research as part of a research-led approach to design itself, or undertaking stand-alone pieces of commissioned research. The 2016 RIBA report *Knowledge and Research in Practice* provides a good overview of how research permeated the work of 17 architectural and urban design firms.

Yet little is known about this type of work. How is this knowledge created, used and shared by practices and in practice? What is the value of research for practitioners? And what value does research bring to design and to the urban environment?

This issue of *Urban Design* explores these questions through a combination of articles that critically reflect on practice-led research in the UK and abroad, and across private, public and educational settings. It aims to interrogate, understand and expose how urban design practices undertake research and incorporate it in their work, exploring their motivations, innovative approaches, tools and methods, areas of enquiry, and ultimately the challenges that they face.

The topic opens with an overview of motivations and distinct approaches to practice-led research by Kathryn Firth, drawing on examples from Europe and North America. She makes the case for more collaborative efforts between practitioners and academics to further applied research.

The following three articles report on examples of research by leading practices in this type of work but with distinct sizes and approaches. Nicholas Goddard writes about the role of research in Arup's urban design work along three key lines of enquiry: the development of practical tools, the identification of major trends shaping the future of the built environment, and learning from practice. Dhruv Sookhoo provides an in-depth discussion

of the project *A New Kind of Suburbia* by Metropolitan Workshop. He describes their approach and innovative research design, focusing on the Homestead concept to reflect on the role of research in uncovering and catalysing practice knowledge, and lessons for future practice-led research projects. The final article in this set by Oliver Goodhall and Lili Lainé looks at We Made That's research into industrial areas in London, showing the crucial role of research in revealing 'the back of house' function of these places, and steering alternative approaches to urban economic development.

Neha Tayal's journey through emerging practice-led research in India uncovers a range of innovative work across three main themes: engagement with communities, sustainability and identity. She advocates scaling up these efforts to address the complex challenges facing this rapidly developing region.

In a similar vein, Lucia Cerrada Morato and Becky Mumford report on their award-winning public sector-led research into the lives of residents in high-density schemes in Tower Hamlets. The article elaborates on the methodology used, how the research informed a design guide, and the advantages of in-house research.

The final article by Louie Sieh, Alain Chiaradia, Stephen Jones and Fiona Waters reflects on a collaboration between practice and academia to develop a Value Gradient Map. The authors outline how this tool articulates values in urban design, and reflect on its benefits for design collaborations and teaching, and the role of this tool to enable research about urban design performance.

Rather than imposing a concept of research into practice, this issue sees practice-led research as research done 'by practitioners in practice about practice'. The aim is thus to explore what is considered research by practitioners and what forms it takes, contributing to a better understanding, even if partial, of what practice-led research is, its diversity and value for urban design. ●

Juliana Martins, guest topic editor and lecturer at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL)



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A Fruitful Coupling

Kathryn Firth makes a strong argument for research and practice collaboration

Urban design and architecture practices are increasingly engaging in topical and timely research. They are however mostly motivated by reasons that are distinct from those that catalyse research in an academic context. Research undertaken by practices both targets a different audience and requires output in a different format.

In the first instance it is perhaps useful to define research. The underlying impetus for all research, whether in an academic or practical context, is a desire to learn, discover and ultimately share and exchange knowledge. Taking a rather traditional approach, one can posit that research occurs along a sliding scale, with archival historical investigation at one end and the live, experimental, indeed laboratory-based research at the other. Within this dichotomy, academia tends towards the former and practice towards the latter. Of course, there are instances where these distinctions are blurred, for example historical inquiry may be relevant to the research of a practice, especially if it justifies conformity with, or a departure from, a particular spatial form or strategy.

While knowledge for knowledge's sake is laudable, ultimately a design practice is at its core a commercial enterprise and, as such, must sustain itself. That is not to say that within a practice there is not a genuine thirst for knowledge. However, research in the context of an urban design practice is an investment and therefore must reap some measurable benefit, either directly or indirectly. Research is a marketing tool. Urban design practices are driven to place themselves uniquely as experts in topics that give them an advantage when seeking public and private sector clients. Not dissimilar from academia, practices strive to find a niche area of expertise or an approach to a topic which is

under-explored. Research is promoted internally by a design firm if the practice leaders believe it will improve the practice's competitive standing.

While research may require some upfront investment, I would contend that it is ultimately good for both the internal growth of a practice and its public profile. In addition, and of paramount importance, practice grounded in research must inevitably improve the quality of urban projects and interventions.

SCENARIOS AND TOPICS

Practices of all scales are undertaking research. Larger established practices think it is important not to be judged as entities too cumbersome to be innovative. Research conveys the message that they are thought-leaders, often able to draw on the advantage of having several disciplines under the umbrella of a single organisation. The motivation for small practices is, similar to what might drive them to enter competitions, a way for a practice to raise its profile and demonstrate to potential clients that they have a deep understanding of particular issues or trends and, most importantly, can translate this into physical projects.

1 Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Chobham Manor London: PRP's multigenerational housing



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There are several scenarios in which a practice undertakes research. In one scenario, the practice integrates research into an actual live project, reducing the practice's need to fund the work. The advantage for the client is that this work will help to ensure that the project is forward-facing, indeed future-proofed and, where relevant, will put the client ahead of the competition. For example, every project undertaken by the practice Space Syntax is essentially research that feeds into future projects and the body of data on a geographic area. The practice models human behaviour with respect to movement. In fact, in 2018 they launched the Great Britain *Space Syntax OpenMapping* web-based dataset that includes pre-processed measures of spatial accessibility for cities, towns and villages.

Many practices encourage and sponsor professional development, seeing this as a way to keep employees current and equipped to respond to social and cultural trends and technological advancements. This endeavour can take the form of research that is then ultimately applied to a live project. At the London Olympic site, the Chobham Manor neighbourhood introduced multi-generation housing. The practice PRP had done significant research into household configurations which highlighted the need for a housing typology where several generations of a family could co-habit. Several of East London's ethnic groups have a strong tradition of the extended family, making the introduction of a typology specifically catering to this structure very welcome. To the delight of the developer these homes sold quickly and easily.

A further scenario is what is often referred to as research-led urban design. A practice chooses to focus on a topic that may have surfaced in relation to project work or may be an area that the practice sees as appropriate for business development. This approach is the most pro-active but is less common and often requires some resource investment on the part of the practice, unless it is able to get grant funding or sponsorship. Lateral Office describes its practice process as a commitment to 'design as a research vehicle to pose and respond to complex, urgent questions in the built environment', engaging in the 'wider context and climate of a project – social, ecological, or political'. This Canadian practice has focused considerably on the far north Arctic and the contemporary pressures that its indigenous people are under. This research then embeds itself in propositions addressing topics from transformations in infrastructure to access to food. In the case of the Caribou's Pivot Stations project, strategically located research stations are proposed along the caribou's migratory routes. The station creates a microclimate allowing for a fresh forage field.

Research under the auspices of an urban design practice can take many guises in terms of process and output; the ultimate outcome, however, must translate into marketing and communications collateral. To this end many practices use their work to illustrate the approach to topical issues and themes.

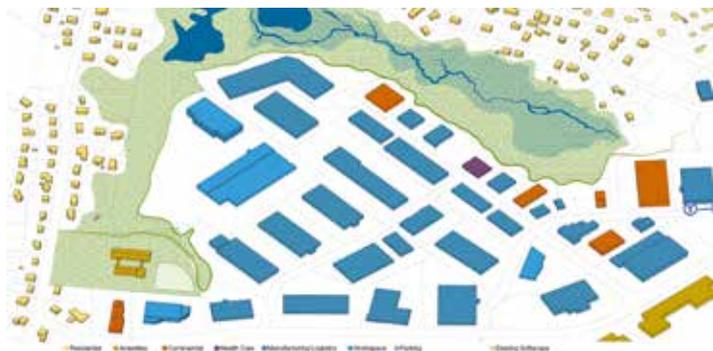


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2 Mae architects' research for the GLA into new models of urbanism: the future of retail and housing
3 San Francisco, Market Street: an example of ways to measure impact on public life at eye level, Gehl Studio San Francisco

Mae for example, has published numerous reports that range in subject from well-being to housing quality. In some instances the research is funded by a public entity such as the Greater London Authority (GLA) but often practices use the report as a moment to stand back, assess and share the principles underlying their work. This serves to both provide guidance to potential clients and to promote their work.

Design practices generally have the tools to speculate on the spatial interpretations of socio-economic issues. They are well versed in sending people into the field or to a site to observe the use of space. Practices are also adept at employing web-based and digital tools, from GIS to OpenStreetMap, to seek and display information. Referring back to the sliding scale, the city is the laboratory for research. NBBJ Boston sponsored a summer research project: interns worked with staff studying how light industrial areas could be intensified, with uses and a public realm that would promote integration with adjacent residential neighbourhoods and public transport. This work, while founded on a specific case study, ultimately became a marketing tool, as interest in the retrofit of industrial areas in the greater Boston area increased.



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Research undertaken by practices tends to focus on topical issues that will have an impact on clients in a tangible way. These include broad concerns such as climate change, sustainability, healthy communities, equity, and now a very timely challenge: designing for pandemics. Topics may address matters more directly related to spatial practice including land use mix and intensification, repurposing shopping centres or defunct industrial buildings, and new affordable housing typologies. These subjects are often viewed through the lens of the specialism of a practice, whether that is healthcare and higher education campuses, residential neighbourhoods, town centres or urban precincts. Arup, for instance, produces *Research Review*, an online publication that ‘explores innovative approaches to challenges in the built environment’. An issue may for example focus on water, transport and energy, highlighting Arup projects that have employed specific technologies or approaches. The research is often funded by industry partners or clients. A similar pro-active approach is taken by the Gensler Research Institute.

COLLABORATION: THE NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

Embarking upon the exploration of how these diverse contexts are impacted by the pressing issues of our time, some practices have realised that the research could benefit from the input of expert in other fields. Practices find – or indeed, must admit – that they are not equipped to cover the optimum breadth and apply the best methodology to a research topic as it requires skills that their staff is not proficient in. To this end, practices forge partnerships and productive alliances with people and organisations in other disciplines.

These might include private consultant practices, charitable entities, quangos, or higher education institutions. The relationship may take several forms: the research may be a collaborative endeavour, a set of experts outside the practice may act as a resource or sounding board, or research may be commissioned. The latter approach can lead to tensions as private sector research can taint the purity that academic research lays claim to. This is less of an issue in the realm of urban design than, say pharmaceuticals, but nonetheless a consideration, especially when a private developer is the sponsor.

The relationship is reciprocal: practice-led research can benefit academic research. Academic research is susceptible to becoming too self-referential, of being detached from the so-called real or practical world. Practice-led research can ground

Collaboration across disciplines is an approach familiar to responsible urban design practices. Good urban designers know which questions to ask, but they also know they do not have all the answers

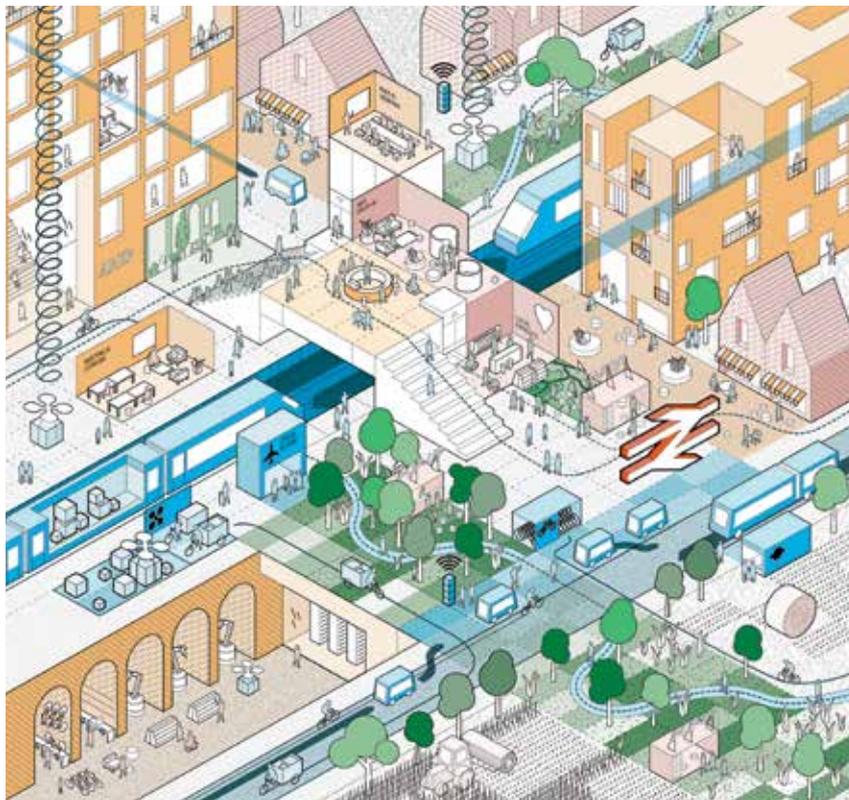
the theoretical and provide empirical case studies. As many practising urban designers also teach, this occurs to an extent already, both implicitly and explicitly. From a pedagogical perspective, research provides a fruitful intersection of practice and academia. Research that investigates a practical issue but is informed by more than market realities can take a more holistic and aspirational tack, resulting in outcomes that might not have surfaced in the context of private practice.

With support from foundations, Gehl Studio and J Max Bond Centre for Design for the Just City (founded by Professor Toni Griffin) conducted a study entitled *Public Life and Urban Justice in NYC Plazas*, investigating whether the design of public space has a positive impact on public life and urban justice. Their methodology was a combination of desktop research, field observations and interviews. These methodologies should and do find their way into the learning environment.

Collaboration across disciplines is an approach familiar to responsible urban design practices. Good urban designers know which questions to ask, but they also know they do not have all the answers. Research catalyses practices to draw on intelligence beyond the usual roster of project consultants, to look at academia as well as other institutions for partners. Academics, cultural historians, public health experts and sociologists might be collaborators in addition to, or instead of transport planners, economic development consultants and engineers. Knowledge exchange between a wide array of fields and expertise is undeniably beneficial to shaping urban environments. Indeed, in our current context, where we are confronted by pandemics and a heightened and overdue awareness of societal inequity, applied research deserves the collaborative efforts and energy of designers and academics from diverse disciplines. ●

Kathryn Firth, architect and urban designer based in London and Visiting Instructor at Harvard University

4–5 NBBJ’s suburban industrial retrofit: existing (top) and proposed (bottom)



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Research to Support a Practice's Work

Nicholas Goddard describes how Arup's research helps their work for clients

Arup has spent more than 70 years at the forefront of the built environment. Research continues to play a central role in how we think, work and grow. As a firm we regularly partner with academic institutions, industry colleagues and the public sector to develop or test early stage methods, technologies and materials in real world applications and a multitude of engineering and consulting disciplines.

The quality of Arup's approach is ensured by the principles of Arup University:

- Explore and Learn encourages the generation of new knowledge, and the consideration of potential future scenarios and innovations; and
- Ask and Share enables us to identify the right expertise within the company and disseminate our knowledge and skills as they are generated.

The development and shaping of the built and natural environment is a knowledge-intensive industry. The Urban Design team at Arup recognise the evolving and complex nature of creating long-term value for our clients. The generation of new knowledge and ability to draw on an international body of work enables us to deliver this. Enabled by our ownership structure and informed by the values set out by our founder Ove Arup, the use of research in our urban design practice forms the key element of our approach. Not only does this help our clients to define and realise their objectives, but it ensures that Arup helps to shape a better world in the process.

Here are three reflections on how research is fundamental to the practice of the studio.

DEVELOPING PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR URBAN DESIGN

We understand that the development of a city is not linear, and as such we strive for flexibility in the output of a masterplanning project, enabling the design process of a masterplan to extend throughout a development project and accommodate the unexpected changes that society and the economy demand of it. There has been an increasing need from clients to test this flexibility, with the requirement to iterate further scenarios and respond to changes in almost real time. Through internal research investment in the digital skills of the team, we have been able to develop a sophisticated parametric design tool that we call the CAT (City Algorithmic Tool).

The first set of innovations of several years ago seem, in retrospect, rather anodyne but by standardising elements of our design in Rhino 3D CAD files, we were able to describe the geometric parameters of street, plot and building volume in Grasshopper (a visual programming language plug-in for Rhino). That meant that when presented with a new massing scenario or change in the quantum of a particular use, we had programmed the masterplan model to respond, and were able to cost-effectively provide a new set of project data to our clients, ensuring the quality of the output rather than substantially revisiting the initial deliverables.

Once the fundamental logic underpinning the tool had been established, the second phase of the development has been to add sophistication to the building elements. By introducing a library of building typologies, we can test the effects of changing the use mix ratio, building typology or residential density. The distribution of typologies can be optimised to achieve potentially different objectives at the masterplan scale of the project, such as the ground floor area, width to depth ratios, or proximity to an asset such as a bus or metro stop.

Further research investment is helping to add sophistication to this tool in two additional ways. Firstly, by drawing on the project and research work from the wider world of Arup, we are working to link other parameters relating to energy efficiency and building orientation, or wind and built form. Secondly, in collaboration with Arup Architecture, the buildings typologies library is being expanded to incorporate a wide range of commercial, industrial and residential buildings.

Whilst the process of developing digital tools will no doubt continue, it is important to keep in mind that the tool is not the end in itself. The purpose of investing in this research is to provide the design team with the opportunity to concentrate on the intangible qualities of place, whilst delivering a level of sophistication that would otherwise be unachievable.

1 Arup's sketch of the Living Station concept for Network Rail



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ALWAYS LOOKING FORWARD

The Foresight approach (as opposed to forecasting) does not seek to predict the future but speculate about what is happening now that will shape it. It is an approach that encourages horizon scanning to identify a range of trends and innovations that will shape the future of the built environment and allow our firm and our clients to stay ahead. As well as a dedicated team of consultants and researchers, it also provides an approach for developing a strategy and vision for clients. This approach contextualises the impact of global trends and helps stakeholders to make decisions now that build resilience for the future. This is particularly pertinent in the current moment, as we seek to settle into a post-pandemic world, whilst making the fundamental changes required for cities and society to address the climate crisis.

Working with Network Rail, we used these techniques to develop the Living Station concept for how stations, large and small, need to evolve and play a proactive role in shaping the neighbourhoods that they serve. Looking forward, stations should act 'as the centre of movement for people' (principle 1), not just a portal onto the rail network, but a nexus of a multitude of sustainable modes that serve transit as a service, making the interchange function the priority for the design of a station, rather than the technical constraints of the rail infrastructure.

Railways are likely to remain the conduit for commerce, goods and people. However, as commuting and trade patterns become significantly more fluid, there is a role for 'stations supporting inclusive growth' (principle 2). By broadening the offer of station services, a wider section of society can be enabled to access the value of human connection through work and through play, rather than it being limited to a few.

'Stations as the heart of a healthy community' (principle 3) sees a civic approach to the public spaces and services surrounding and leading to the station. This makes health and well-being features the core 'welcome moment', for those that use the station and its surroundings.

Of course, the current slump in demand in rail travel presents an ambiguous future for the rail network, but as we find an equilibrium during and after the pandemic, new routines will be formed and embedded. The Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) has described the three conditions required to effect long-term intentional change as: there being demand and capacity for change before the crisis; where the crisis itself sees demand for change rise and our response prefigures the change in some ways; and, when we see practical policy programmes ready to take advantage of an openness to change.

Living Stations prefigures some of the change that we are seeing and provides a framework within which institutions and communities can respond to this great acceleration. The Urban Design team are looking forward to taking this systems approach to thinking about the value of infrastructure and neighbourhoods and helping places to adapt to the future.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

The idea of the convergence of disciplines and activities to generate innovation is one that is well understood in the world of business and research. More than just a hollow proposition, it is a notion that the Arup Urban Design team actively seeks by



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learning from, and with, its clients. An example of this is the work undertaken with the Wellcome Genome Campus in South Cambridgeshire to develop and expand their world-leading research facility.

The Wellcome Genome Campus, as the world's foremost genomics research institute, had considered its needs in order to retain its critical mass and first-mover advantage in the international research environment. It is seeking to deliver further space for innovation, basic research and commercial partnership programmes; capacity for the expansion of existing institutions on the campus; capacity to accommodate large-scale commercial businesses at speed; a visitor and education centre for the public and secondary school students; and, new homes for campus workers and the community, with the associated facilities to attract global talent and make it a real place.

The spatial articulation of this complex set of requirements was developed by Arup and was achieved by a thoroughly researched understanding of learning environments, labs and workplaces. *Campus of the Future* research informs us that the most successful innovative environments are created through an intense co-location of facilities that are visually and physically permeable, and that provide spaces to nurture collaboration between individuals and groups. Arup's research on the future of labs and workplaces informed an approach that ensured the fixity of highly specified built assets required for research, in equilibrium with the super-flexible workplace demands that start-up and scaling-up businesses require.

The Arup Urban Design team and the wider Integrated City Planning team do not to presume to know even the questions that will be asked of them, as we adjust to the ongoing challenges, in the short, medium and long term. However, we are confident that our continued curiosity, openness to ideas and pursuit of excellence will equip us to deliver for our clients. ●

Nicholas Goddard, urban designer in Arup's Integrated City Planning Team

2 South Cambridgeshire's Wellcome Genome Campus: Arup's places of working
3 Wellcome Genome Campus Masterplan

A New Kind of Suburbia

Dhruv Sookhoo describes how one practice has developed and used its research



Metropolitan Workshop committed to a programme of practice-based research in 2019. As an expanding practice, a more structured approach to capturing, evaluating and disseminating the value of our work with external audiences was considered beneficial, as well as engendering a shared sense of purpose and identity across our studios in London and Dublin. Like other practices, we undertake research during the design process to define problems, drive evidence-based solutions and evaluate project outcomes, in anticipation of improved performance, demonstrated value, and professional recognition within competitive emerging markets. This is reflected in on-going research and dissemination about methods of construction and new models of home ownership, in collaboration with leading practices and universities.

Our first project *A New Kind of Suburbia* sought to learn from our growing portfolio of suburban housing projects and reflect on future directions in suburban design and development. While research goals for this project cannot be separated from the commercial interests of our practice and our collaborators, the motivation for conducting what became a complex research project was multifaceted. At its most ambiguous, it was a vehicle for reflection to enhance our work as architects, urban designers, and researchers. We envisaged our research programme as a dialogue between designers, developers and policy-makers, intended to refine our long-term thinking and doing, in relation to emerging and pertinent practice topics. We intended *A New Kind of Suburbia* to offer room to think more deeply about our

shared work with collaborators in relation to suburban place-making, and by doing so enrich our creative endeavour within the practice.

More concretely, we recognised that while most people in the UK continue to live in suburban places, suburbia is poorly defined and the varied experiences and aspirations of suburbanites are commonly taken for granted by the housing market. We anticipated that we would better understand the challenges faced by existing and new suburban residents and be well positioned to create design-led responses that harness social and technological innovations to improve residents' quality of life.

RESEARCH DESIGN FOR PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

Free from the constraints of academic settings, research practitioners can pursue pertinent research questions not envisaged at the outset at a pace determined by their employer. Practice-based research is liberated from funding applications, reporting requirements,

1 *A New Kind of Suburbia*, Postcard by Metropolitan Workshop



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and formalised peer-review against pre-defined concepts of research quality. This enables practitioners to prioritise forms of research and dissemination that have meaning to their practice. However, the flexibility of operating outside conventional research processes creates specific challenges. While a detailed exploration of how to manage research procedure and quality within a practice setting are beyond the scope of this article, it is useful to look at how we selected research methods to direct our inquiry, assemble and generate pertinent cases and perspectives, and integrate the analysis of elements to form a coherent whole. Without external constraints, self-initiated practice-based research has the potential to drift, particularly when the practice is busy, the process generates interesting opportunities for collaboration with new and existing partners, and the distinction between research and everyday practice is experienced in a productive blur.

In *A New Kind of Suburbia*, we adopted multiple qualitative methods of data generation and analysis, including:

- case studies prepared by the practice and exemplar projects by others, to explore what constitutes good quality suburban development and how to achieve it;
- participatory methods with industry experts, such as exhibitions and focus groups, intended to enhance analysis by introducing different perspectives, particularly in relation to emerging social needs; and
- interviews with industry experts and members of the practice, enabling participants to reflect on their formative experiences of suburbia and their ambitions for existing and future suburban places.

An important consideration in selecting these methods was to ensure that everyone within the practice and external contributors could participate in the research project without requiring research training. However, to fulfil our professional development objectives we collected data by means familiar to practitioners, while offering guidelines to enable deeper, structured reflection on practice and its outcomes. The project deliberately emphasised the value of different perspectives and experiences as creators and residents of suburban places.

The most interesting of the methods used was to invite practice members to submit auto-ethnographic accounts of their experiences of suburban development. Their experiences were used to explore the architect as suburban resident, and reflect on how their aspirations for suburban places translated into their professional work. A small project team coordinated and analysed individual contributions; they were supported by studio members who produced practice publications and mounted exhibitions to act as primers for participatory events.

Through our London studio we held an exhibition and invited responses from industry experts, as a starting point for a stimulating and wide-ranging round table of practitioners and academics with an interest in suburbia, its challenges and the future of its design, development, construction and use. Our Dublin studio developed a condensed and complementary project exploring the suburban experience and future opportunities for suburban residents in the Republic of Ireland.

A New Kind of Suburbia generated a large amount of rich and varied data, still under analysis. A series of case studies prepared by long-standing members of the practice revealed the significance of a new concept, the Homestead, in their understanding of suburban design quality, and how they aim to manage design considerations during the place-making process to achieve quality in collaboration with practitioners and communities. The Homestead is freely discussed by the practice to communicate general ideals, but the value of the research process was in demonstrating its site-specific application and its perceived value in different contexts. Uncovering this implicit practice knowledge and making it accessible was beneficial for our development, as it enabled new studio members to understand a concept frequently adopted in projects.

Within the research project, communicating knowledge embodied within the Homestead enabled invited experts to scrutinise its usefulness, propose refinements and recommend new ways to harness its underlying capabilities. While the Homestead was envisaged as an adaptable development framework to structure responses to new suburban communities, experts saw its value in considering how best to plan for intensification, integrate new infrastructure and uses, and bring rigour to proposals for the formation and stewardship of communal green spaces.

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESTEAD IN USE

Our starting point was our experience of the design process and its outcomes through our built projects and design artefacts (i.e. drawings, models, planning

2 The Homestead concept adapted for Engie



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documents, samples). Studio leaders assembled practice case studies from competition submissions, commissioned masterplans, and completed projects that they felt best demonstrated Metropolitan Workshop's thinking in relation to suburban design and development.

New to the practice, what became apparent to me was the role that previous research undertaken by the practice played in framing perspectives on enhanced suburban design. In 2013, the practice successfully competed in a RIBA ideas competition sponsored by The Wates Group, which sought new typologies capable of offering flexible homes and neighbourhoods to meet the long-term aspirations of those privately renting. In response, the practice proposed the Homestead, as an adaptable unit of development that arranges a variety of interchangeable house types around shared green space, including communal gardens and allotments.

The Homestead aimed to create a new type of suburban development, efficient in form, responsive to changing market conditions in relation to density, typology and tenure mix, and capable of optimising private and public space to enhance the public realm. It was hoped that these characteristics would engender a sense of belonging, and offer homes and neighbourhoods in which people could live independently for longer, in healthier, familiar environments. When first envisaged, it translated the concept of the urban block into a suburban setting, and used it to evaluate and challenge conventional suburban development processes and the often poor opportunities offered to residents. However, its lasting value has been:

- as a thinking tool to create a shared understanding between studio members;
- to help to articulate collective aspirations for suburban places; and,
- to enable their participation in decision-making by identifying the fundamental design dimensions.

As a precedent, the Homestead acts as an ideal against which to evaluate challenges and seize new opportunities when designing new suburban communities. At a conceptual level, the Homestead has recently offered a robust basis for the development of a design guide and specification for Engie, an energy company concentrating on the generation and supply of low carbon energy, services and regeneration. This design guidance proposes a new suite of modular homes, compatible with a range of modern methods of construction, offering a high degree of customisation, and able to effectively integrate smart

The Homestead is a vehicle to coordinate and purposefully vary house types, altering density and tenure mixes, and to enable site optimisation at different scales

infrastructure to ensure that homeowners benefit from affordable, lower carbon energy. This commitment to construction innovation was a direct response to a growing awareness of the poor design and build quality common in the speculative suburban housing sector.

The Homestead is also a vehicle to coordinate and purposefully vary house types, altering density and tenure mixes, and to enable site optimisation at different scales. This clarity is intended to support developers to undertake accurate appraisals, account for design changes, and importantly estimate the management costs necessary to realise and sustain the public realm and secure Engie's vision for active green neighbourhoods.

The inherent risk with any scalable development solution is that if applied indifferently to the nuances of context, it may reduce the benefits envisaged for local communities. However, the Homestead has proven adaptability in new settings; the transparency it gives enables discussions about how to manage basic design parameters and ensure contextual appropriateness, while encouraging variation with masterplans to be delivered in phases by different architects.

At Mayfield, a proposal for a new market town for 20,000 people in Mid-Sussex, the Homestead was adapted into different configurations, with increasing densities towards the proposed town

3 Mayfields, Mid-Sussex. Homestead adapted for a new market town.

4 Swindon: Oakfield Village, Nationwide's first housing development; view from the park



centre. The masterplan offered an opportunity to examine the robustness of the Homestead concept within a rural setting, characterised by the Weald's agricultural buildings, ancient woodland, hedgerows, lanes, and bridleways. The practice reimagined the suburban Homestead as a rural Wealden Farmstead, grouping detached, semi-detached and terraced houses and apartments around a communal garden like vernacular typologies.

At Oakfield Village, Swindon, the Homestead informed the creation of a walkable neighbourhood, and offered a visual means of explaining the character of the place to future residents during community participation. Similarly, at Campbell Park North in Milton Keynes, the Homestead was used as a concept to interpret local planning policy for homes to be set within varied parklands, and manage house type variation.

An early outcome of the research project was to clarify the underlying design principles that the Homestead embodied, including:

- creating characterful places based on variety
- balancing neighbourliness with ownership through shared amenity, with an understanding of the requirements of the development process, and
- promoting technological innovation.

These principles will be recognisable to those involved in design governance and masterplanning. But the value of the Homestead to our practice is that it gives form to these objectives early on by enhancing our communication with clients and communities alike. The Homestead serves as a precursor to site-specific design, and offers practical benefits such as testing generic planning policy, or structuring discussions about physical characteristics and short and longer term management considerations.

The Homestead is more than an efficient typological device. It is part of a culture of design practice rooted in the thinking and practical knowledge of longstanding collaborators and mentors. *A New Kind of Suburbia* was an invitation to new members of the practice and external partners to engage with this legacy, and to address new societal challenges.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A New Kind of Suburbia is part of a continuing programme of self-initiated research, and it generated valuable lessons for future research. These include the need for sufficient time for reflection, written analysis and dissemination between forms of data generation, in order to adapt the research process in a more informed and purposeful way. For example, developing our exhibition and its accompanying paper was valuable in curating outputs and stimulating discussion with other experts. But what

we perhaps failed to recognise was that the exhibition itself was the product of several research methods, all supporting practical and theoretical perspectives on suburbanisation, housing quality and the role of the architect.

There is a tension between practice-based design cultures that value the immediacy of the visual display, and academic conventions in which written systematic analysis predominates. Put simply, as architects we prioritised delivering an exhibition capable of stimulating deliberation, and perhaps as researchers we overlooked that the exhibition, if not each exhibit, is a product of several methods.

The outputs from each method deserved detailed analysis to explore their significance for the project and its participants, and an opportunity to reflect on the value of the research overall before moving on to further data generation. The challenge for our self-initiated programme of research is to adapt research tools to our practice setting. This will enable practice members and external collaborators to participate in an informed and rigorous way, without stifling the design culture that the research programme is seeking to explore and develop. ●

Dhruv Sookhoo, head of research and practice innovation at Metropolitan Workshop and Chair of the RIBA Housing Group

5 Milton Keynes,
Campbell Park North

Back of House

Oliver Goodhall and Lili Lainé go behind the stage curtain to discover the many interconnections between London's creative industries

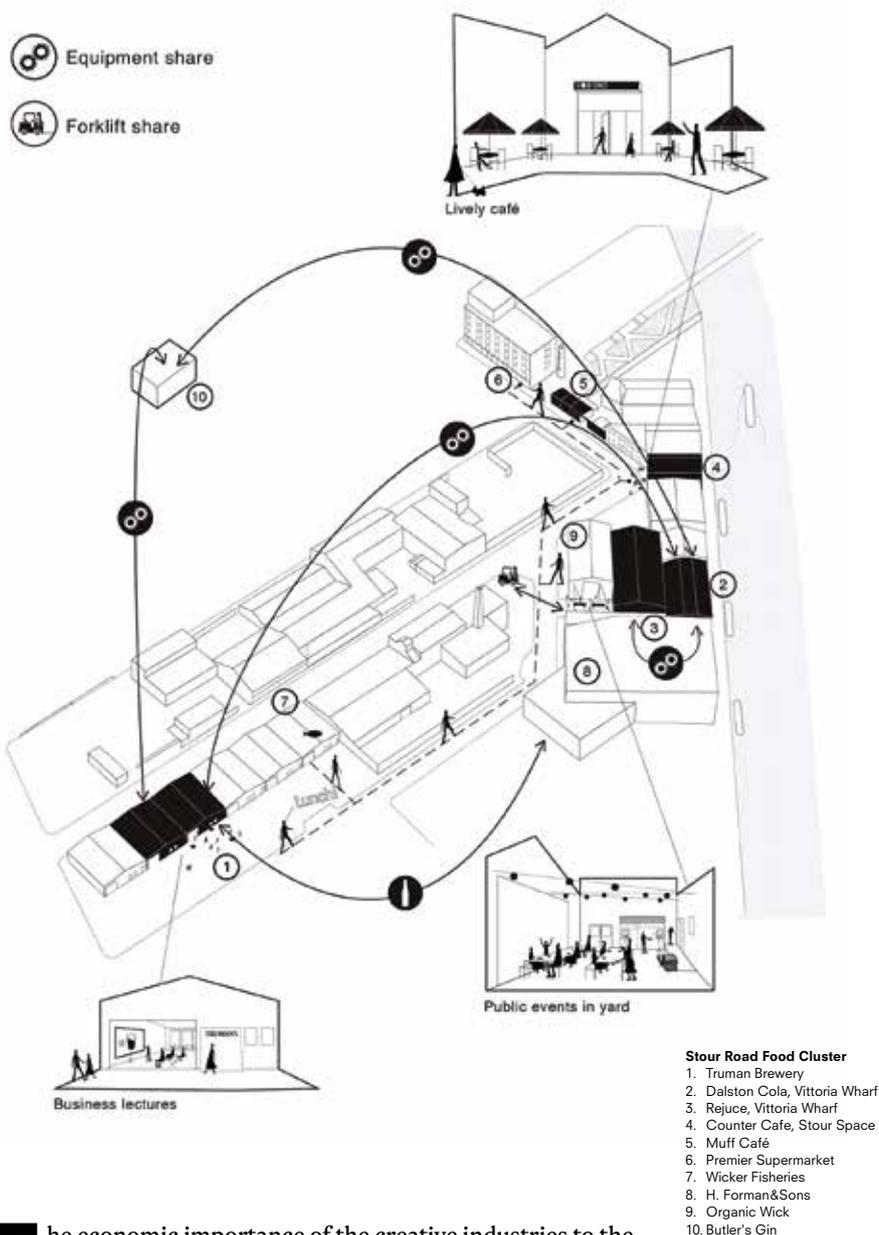
workspaces, from converted warehouses to newly built industrial spaces and small-scale design and artist studios. These support and sustain a huge array of activities within the creative and cultural sectors, as well as more broadly. This is what makes London tick; it breeds the city's success.

The complexity and intricate relationships that exist between sectors, businesses, workers and geographies are difficult to reveal and demonstrate. Catching and steering change requires confidence in which levers should be pulled, and an understanding of how the public sector can intervene effectively. The inter-connectivity of the sectors involved – economic development, culture, regeneration – does not always easily map through to the structures of local government decision-makers. Unlike other city-shaping issues such as housing, transport or waste management, the economy is less tangible, consisting of an array of interdependencies which cannot easily be captured (and therefore planned for). But our team has been trying.

Employment land reviews, drawing on forecasts of economic trends and anticipated business needs to recommend the safeguarding or release of different types of floor space, are the main tools used by local authorities to inform planning policy formulation and assess development proposals. Whilst these forge a robust and logical link between land use policies and anticipated business needs, they can often overlook the interdependencies that exist between businesses in different sectors; the complexity of supplier, customer and employee relationships; and the broad range of stakeholders involved in the day-to-day functioning of local economies. These overlooked aspects can be qualitative or soft considerations that relate to operational, social or cultural behaviours.

Greater fidelity of understanding is required to make good decisions. That intelligence, in our case driven by our urban research team, is a rigorous reminder to architects and urbanists working in cities. This has been a way of working for our practice for some time now.

Reflecting on it, we do not know how else you can reasonably design. Surely you observe, study, interrogate; then speculate, test, iterate; then shape, design and construct. How do you arrive at successful

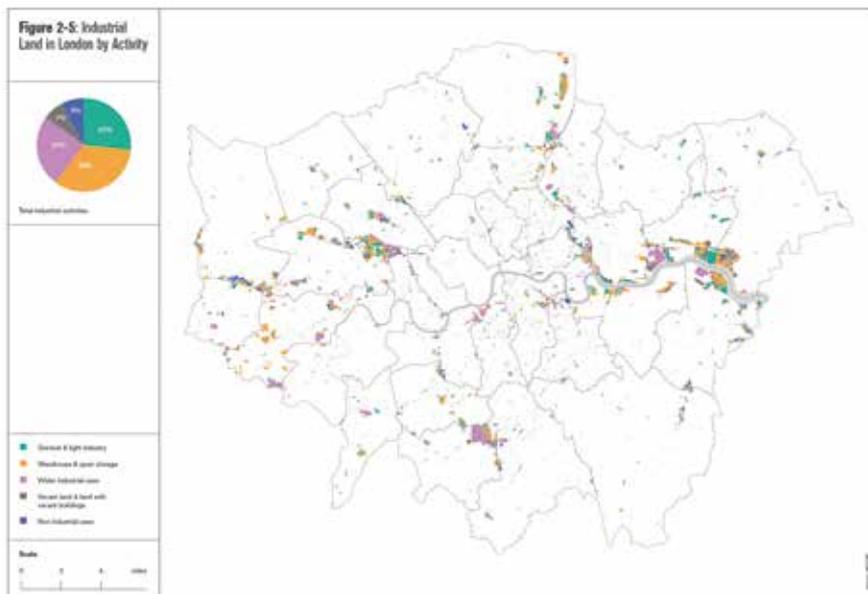


- Stour Road Food Cluster**
1. Truman Brewery
 2. Dalston Cola, Vittoria Wharf
 3. Rejuce, Vittoria Wharf
 4. Counter Cafe, Stour Space
 5. Muff Cafe
 6. Premier Supermarket
 7. Wicker Fisheries
 8. H. Forman & Sons
 9. Organic Wick
 10. Butler's Gin

The economic importance of the creative industries to the London and UK economies is well researched and understood. But these industries do not operate in isolation and their daily activities rely on a mix of different kinds of businesses. London's 'creative supply chain' – the set of goods and services that at various stages support creative consumption or production – is easily forgotten and not always well understood. These supply chains go deep into areas that people might not expect.

Much activity exists out of sight, off stage and 'behind the curtain'. Making and manufacturing can be found in many different parts of the capital, reflecting a wide range of sectors and specialisms. Combined with logistics and other light industrial urban services, these play a vital role in London's economy, delivering the goods and services so essential for the capital to thrive. We all know that the city is home to a diverse range of

1 LLDC Economy Study, Stour Cluster. Image by We Made That



Getting ahead of data through site visits, observations and discussion with local businesses allows us to get a more nuanced understanding of the areas' make-up and businesses' activities

parts of the urban fabric if you miss out any of these steps or simply choose to land at what you want as a designer? To embed research as a way of practising seems to remove ego from city-shaping. There's simply no space for it when quietly assembling evidence and argument in the background.

UNCOVERING AND OBSERVING FIRST HAND

Industrial areas in London have not been particularly well understood. Contrary to the stereotyped mono-culture of dirty uses such as breakers yards and car mechanics, industrial areas host a huge variety of businesses, from larger wholesalers and logistics uses serving central London's residents and economies, through to small photography studios and manufacturers which form an integral part of London's much-envied creative industries. It is probably fair to say that most people have no idea what is made and assembled in their local area and what happens in those big sheds.

It is difficult to gain an appreciation of the scale, purpose and 'behind the curtain' activity of these businesses without observing them first hand. The urban research team at We Made That has completed granular employment audits of over 1,400ha of employment land, 3,500+ businesses and 52,000+ jobs in London, including auditing artists' workspace, creative studio space, dance performance and rehearsal facilities across the capital. We have sought to reveal the activity, businesses and people behind the statistics. This includes commissioned studies with clear research outcomes, but it is also a mode of practice that underpins strategies, masterplans and delivery projects. We always look first.

In different locations, we have used data collected from many weeks of surveying and hundreds of interviews with businesses to give an insight into what people make and the facilities they operate from, and to expose the local links and contributions made by a particular business to others in their area. In these studies, a mix of granular survey and interview data is used to get under the skin of what happens in local economies. It is fieldwork and it requires time spent on the ground, as well as a keen eye to reveal links. The interdependencies between

businesses and their contribution to London as a whole are drawn out, and the productivity and resilience of these areas are highlighted.

In areas of rapid change, statistical data is useful to give a means of comparison and a basis upon which future scenarios and trends can be built, but it is not sufficient to understand the full ecologies of places. The data is out of date by the time it hits the desk. Getting ahead of data through site visits, observations and discussion with local businesses allows us to get a more nuanced understanding of the areas' make-up and businesses' activities. There is often a large amount of activity missing from statistical information.

Statistical data relies on Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) which is industry defined rather than activity defined. Business clusters are therefore often overlooked in the categories commonly employed, and we found this to be a recurring issue when it comes to creative supply chains. For example, where do you think one of Europe's largest purpose-built underwater film studios, used for shooting Harry Potter and James Bond films, is located? Answer: a quiet industrial estate on the outskirts of Basildon. Where do you think hairpieces for blockbuster films such as Matt Damon's *The Martian* and *Lord of the Rings* are made? Answer: a local authority-run workspace in Tottenham. Such gems and activities that can be celebrated are often concealed in the data or missing altogether.

Gathering data on site through door-to-door assessments is time-consuming, but such a process of fieldwork and ethnographic study feels irreplaceable by big data. The methodologies that we have developed allow us to compile precise, centralised and accessible quantitative data on businesses and employment. The information gathered includes figures on employment and productivity, operations and supply chains, and more qualitative data around the physical attributes of the area and premises, business tenure, connectedness to other local enterprises, social networks, business needs and plans for the future, and business views on the area. In other words, hopes, fears and dreams!

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

While there is much to celebrate, London is losing space for production and industry. The need to house a growing population within a constrained city-region and the resulting loss of industrial land are reducing the city's capacity as a place of production, and will ultimately threaten London's position on the global cultural stage. The interrelationship between industrial workspace, creative production and cultural consumption in London can appear both fragile and amazingly resilient to change.

2 London, Industrial land by activity. Credit: AECOM, We Made That, Cushman & Wakefield, Maddison Graphic

The auditing process and studies can help to play an important role in explaining the trends and patterns in data, particularly at a local level. Talking to local businesses, collecting the views of the broad range of stakeholders involved in the day-to-day functioning of local economies will not only enhance an overall understanding of the local economy, but it is also likely to reveal the value, beyond pure economic value, that businesses and organisations provide, such as social or environmental value. Particular activities are cherished by communities: some contribute to local economic diversity and, more broadly, underpin the human vitality that characterise local economies. At present and in the context of COVID-19, these ecologies of activities and supply chains have been stretched.

The creative industries in London spend an estimated £40bn within wider supply chains in London alone. About 50 per cent of this expenditure falls outside the creative sectors, including inter alia manufacturing wood or metal products, specialised construction activities, the wholesale of textiles, and logistics and distribution. Over 112,000 creative jobs could be lost in London this year but a further 42,000 jobs are at risk in London-based supply chains outside the creative industries.

Our studies show how enterprises and individuals are reacting. There are good lessons to be learned about local and individual initiatives that could be replicated or built upon to increase collaboration, innovation or resilience. In Hackney Wick for instance, a cluster of food businesses were able to share a forklift truck between them, reducing capital expenditure for each of them as individual enterprises. This small example demonstrates the advantages of sharing equipment between co-located businesses at a neighbourhood level. Such shared resources and skills will always be economically and socially important.

INFLUENCE, POLICY AND IMPACT

We believe that representing the diversity of urban economies opens up alternative, more inclusive approaches to urban economic development, based on recognising, supporting and nurturing a spectrum of activity. Mix is good for cities, it always has been. Even more so than before the current pandemic, urban strategies for circular economy principles, for dealing with the climate crisis and to add social value need to be drivers for change.

Articulating this and shaping decision-making at a city level has driven us to take up progressive thinking in relation to London’s industrial places, including proposals for industrial intensification and co-location. This began in 2015, when we developed the Mayor of London’s *Industrial Land Supply and Economy Study*. This study was among the first to highlight the emerging need for a changing approach to industrial uses in London. Now, as we shift into new thinking about space for production activities, we recognise their significance for businesses and for London as a whole, as well as the pressures faced by local authorities and policy makers to allow for the intensification of such uses.

Adopting a holistic approach to the creative industries must be rooted in a recognition of the interconnected relationships between creative production and cultural consumption. London’s world-class cultural institutions rely on a range of production and support activities spanning across sectors, workspace typologies and locations. Our hope is that by allowing these enterprises to step forward from behind the stage curtain, we can reveal their value to the city and secure their future as part of the capital’s invaluable diversity. ●

Oliver Goodhall co-founding partner at We Made That, a research, urbanism and architecture practice
Lili Lainé, urban researcher at We Made That and leader of the urban research unit



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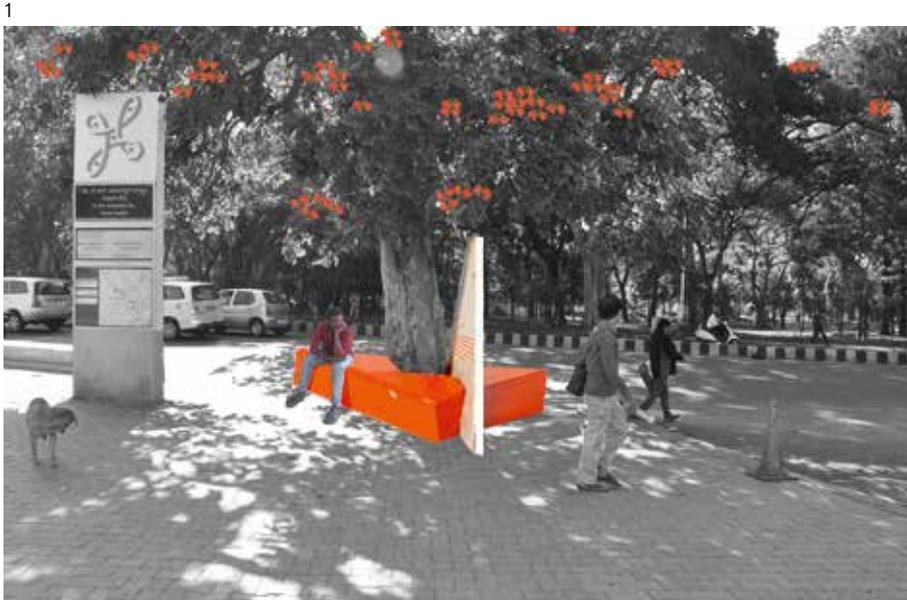


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3 Charlton Riverside, London. Photograph by Philipp Ebeling
4 Tottenham Creative Industries, long-established making in Tottenham Green Workshops. Photograph by Philipp Ebeling

Critical Practice-based Research in India

Neha Tayal describes emerging approaches in architectural practice



PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

Research as a tool is mostly used in isolated pockets. Often, research that can inform strategic issues, such as welfare, habitat and conservation, is conducted in controlled environments such as by foreign-funded think-tanks, government-aided institutions or self-funded collaborators. The final products in such cases are often not shared widely.

Most urban development research is conducted and commissioned by the public sector to inform large-scale transport and other infrastructure. These inform developments such as townships in city peripheries developed (not designed) as satellite towns to major cities, or the 100 Smart Cities Mission aiming to deliver affordable housing, open spaces and better infrastructure for expanding populations and economies shifting from rural to urban areas. Several of these projects are commissioned from and led by international practices or large established studios.

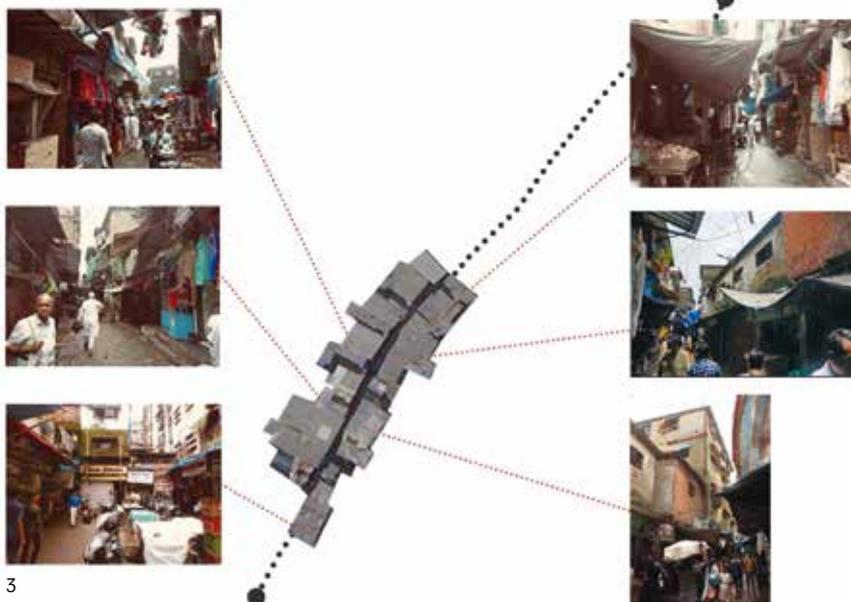
The current regulatory framework is quantity-led and rule-based rather than quality-driven, and does not demand rigorous investigations and robust outcomes for new development. This lack of incentive, in turn, does not provide encouragement for patrons, clients and practitioners to undertake research-based evidence, surveys, consultation or technical investigations, given funding and time constraints.

Another useful reference for examining the contemporary architecture landscape concerns regional places such as Ahmedabad, Mumbai or Delhi. These develop around educational institutions, such as the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) and the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), and mostly function as pockets within related geographies. Other clusters focus on explorations around sustainability (Auroville), or tech-economy and multinationals (Bangalore). It is not clear how much exchange takes place between these regional clusters. Research carried out in academia is largely limited to theoretical explorations and rarely makes it to applications in practice. Recently however, some institutions have

In times of unprecedented change driven by factors such as the economy, technology and networks, it is unparalleled growth and unplanned development that have driven mainstream architectural responses in India in recent decades. The industry estimates that about only two per cent of built environment projects are designed by architects. In this rapidly developing country where architecture can play a critical role in defining the future, the value of research is largely unexplored.

Contemporary discourse regarding practice-based research in architecture and urbanism in India is multi-faceted and diverse. There are legacies from pre- and post-independence history as well as new models. This article explores some of these emerging approaches.

1–2 Katte, a platform under a tree, is a ubiquitous typology across India. A student project applying the concept to Bangalore



3

developed research wings that collaborate with practices to deliver projects, which is good practice.

Architectural discourse in publications is rhetorical and focuses on showcasing studios, well-designed public buildings or privately commissioned high-end homes, mostly suitable for consumption by other architects. Research into problem-solving and adding value to projects struggles to find a platform for dissemination, unless in individual practice’s publications. The challenge is that architecture is seen as an exclusive discipline divorced from the masses, and its perceived usefulness to the general public is very limited.

EMERGING APPROACHES

Although it is easy to be enamoured with the production of and discussions about extraordinary design rather than the everyday, there are emerging practices resisting the politics of mega-projects and the spectacular, and trying to engage with relevant problems in architecture, urbanism and planning, seeking innovative solutions informed through research. Motivations for some of this work include:

- engaging with communities to bring awareness or a collaborative design culture
- sustainable practices looking to the past with regards to indigenous methods, materials and techniques, and designing for future adaptation, and
- dialogue and attitudes addressing continuity and identity in a complex context such as India.

COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION

Partnerships and collaboration can be a very effective way of working towards a common goal by pooling resources and knowledge. Projects can be a good precedent for identifying a problem and bringing in relevant expertise to address it. Some collectives cut across sectors, disciplines and institutions, and involve varying degrees of participation with the community.

The Collective for Spatial Alternatives (CSA) is an association of urban researchers, academics, professionals and community organisers involved in spatial and environmental research and planning. CSA is committed to a collaborative work culture involving community inputs working on themes such as redevelopment, urban renewal, public policy and influencing public opinion.

CoLab, the Mumbai-based Bandra Collective, is an interesting colony of architectural firms [The Busride, Samir D’monte Architects, Sameep Padora & Associates (sP+a), Urban Studio, Abraham John Architects, Architecture BRIO] working on its own initiative with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) to reimagine a part of Mumbai and its public realm,

3 Homegrown streets and hybrid typologies in Dharvi, Mumbai, engaging with people to seek adaptive ideas. Credit: Urbz

a good precedent for local initiatives.

Spacematters studio collaborates with various governmental, inter-governmental and independent organisations, SPA and universities in Japan, Norway and Sweden, and has undertaken research experience exchange with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA).

There are other hybrid models such as the Gubbi Alliance, a self-funded collective of habitat professionals and researchers spread across the country, which seeks to bring sustainability into mainstream architectural practice. Having started with a workshop, Gubbi has continued to carry out research and engagement. Hunarshala, another collective that came together in post-earthquake reconstruction work, is using applied research and engaging with local artisan knowledge to empower people to shape their habitats and provide environmentally friendly, disaster-safe places.

CLIMATE AND CONTEXT

In addition to these collaborations, several individual practices have adopted a niche agenda, focussing on sustainability and reconstruction as the theme that cuts across their architectural interventions. SEEDS, a non-profit organisation, took on the housing reconstruction initiative in Assam after the devastating floods of 2017, and built houses using indigenous bamboo as part of a community-driven flood response programme, in collaboration with a local organisation the North-east Affected Area Development Society (NEADS). The development was formulated with a vision to build resilient communities through participatory design, illustrating a model of contemporary vernacular architecture.

Research into using local knowledge, indigenous materials and methods is also an area where many small practices are making major efforts. Architecture BRIO is looking at low-cost shelters for the homeless, using environmentally friendly and sustainable ideas via the Billion bricks project. Wallmakers is a studio dedicated to indigenous materials such as mud and waste as the main building components, creating functional buildings with high quality aesthetics. Compartment S4 is a group of architects collaborating to connect various perspectives towards shared objectives in the housing sector; they do this by collating ideas from across the field, and disseminating them via publications. They are also investigating local materials and techniques around systems and processes that can be reused.

Biome Environmental Solutions, led by architect Chitra Vishwanath, is a multi-disciplinary Bangalore-based design firm focused on ecology, architecture and water. They consider the impact on land, energy and architecture, integrated water systems and social responsibility



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The usual methodologies are still relevant: to identify a question; to carry out multiple iterations through different media to seek options; and, to look for solutions through rigorous investigation

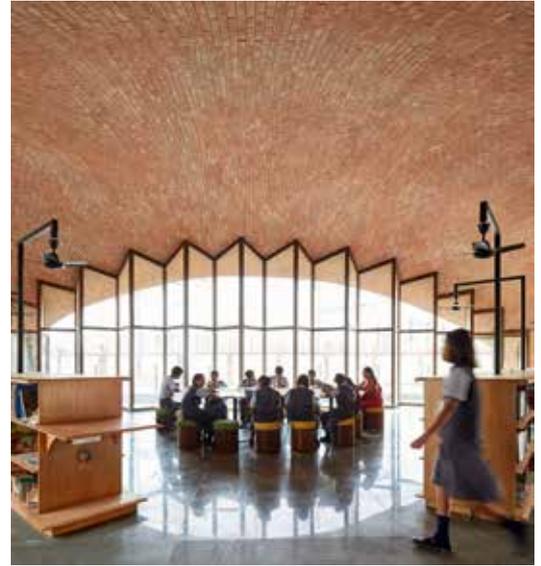
to deliver and exchange collaborative design based solutions. Anupama Kundoo's practice is focussed on research and experimentation with materials that have low environmental impact and are appropriate to the socio-economic context. For an accelerated development context, where the models for urbanisation and infrastructure are at loggerheads with the environment and the climate emergency, it is critical that these approaches are scalable and can be re-employed when required.

CHARACTER

With a rich socio-cultural life and heritage, forms of knowledge and perception play significant roles in shaping the meaning and value of architecture in India. Ideas come from people and provide a dynamic notion of the built environment, a fluid concept encompassing the familiar, which can provide a critical brief for place-making. These have been explored in the past, in architecture and urbanism by B.V. Doshi, Charles Correa and other prominent figures, and some practices are adding value to identity and diversity debates, which is complex and transcends scale.

Old constructs relating to familiar concepts such as 'homes, streets and neighbourhoods' can be researched and interpreted for contemporary consumption, rather than being literal translations. Samvad Studio aspire to contemporaneity articulated through design as a process and an outcome. Their approach is to theorise and research the architecture of diverse users, context and scales, and to learn from, apply or reuse it in new architecture and space typologies. The Katte project is a good example of creating continuity between the past and present, by redesigning a strategy and toolkit for platforms around trees in Bangalore, which are a popular urban insert in Indian villages and cities, functioning as key social spaces. The project, which started as an assignment for architecture students, seeks to re-interpret this typology in the urban context of Bangalore, retaining the principal elements – platform and the tree.

Sameep Padora & Associates (sP+a) aim to respond to India's vast breadth of socio-cultural environments that require different engagement approaches. The studio actively engages with research, collaborations and collective models of practice as



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symbiotic streams feeding into each other. In seeking continuity between materials and celebrating local craftsmanship, Studio Lotus and Anagram architects are experimenting with brick architecture and historical patterns and references.

Leading on an approach to researching existing places and engaging with people, Urbz is an experimental action and research collective specialising in participatory planning and design. Their research into home-grown neighbourhoods and streets, and the conservation of ground floor uses within an established informal neighbourhood is interesting. They are also conducting workshops for future homes typologies based on findings from their interventions on existing places. Based on their credentials, Urbz has been commissioned by the city of Lausanne to conduct consultation to help guide the development of two major public squares. Whilst internationally, professionals are grappling with questions of evolving and redundant land uses such as retail and commercial and their impact on activity on local high streets, lessons could be drawn from Indian cities, which are always buzzing with activity, despite the harsh climate.

SCALING UP OPPORTUNITIES

The examples discussed here are from niche practices that consider architecture not as a product but as a process, a narrative or an experiment, sometimes bordering on speculation. For some, research is implicit, interwoven into the narrative of the studio and its projects, but at times it is a stand-alone product, divorced from design projects. The usual methodologies are still relevant: to identify a question; to carry out multiple iterations through different media to seek options; and, to look for solutions through rigorous investigation. There is no lack of creative practices, collaboratives and individuals keen to find answers to contemporary questions of place-making and liveability.

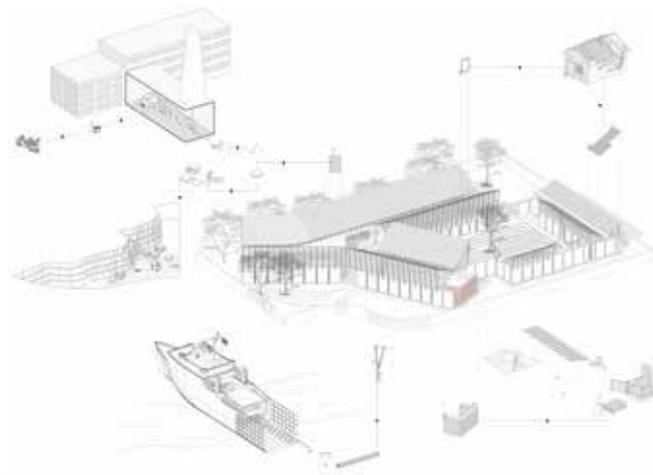
4–5 Maya Somaiya Library. Kopergaon India: an exploration into material efficiently using Rhino Vault developed by the Block Research Group at ETH, Zurich. Sameep Padora & Associates. Photograph by Edmund Sumner

However, the themes being researched, the problem-solving aspects, the efforts, the tools and the products all need scaling up. As patrons and the nature of funding dictate the form that a project takes, room for research may be scarce, or the final outcome may be in an inaccessible format, not fit for practical use as a shared resource or for dissemination. The opportunity for better translation of research outcomes into tangible projects that can inform future trajectories must be found.

Research and theory are informed by the insightful investigation of realities on the ground and the discovery of new ideas, now aided by digital tools, data-based evidence and technology. With new partnerships between sectors, practices, regions, schools and institutions, there is immense potential for incorporating more research-based solutions in realising projects and refining regulatory processes. In order to respond to evolving paradigms, architectural practice must improve engagement with other discourses of an inter-disciplinary nature, such as the environment and social life, and play a role in exposing narratives that can influence a better future. Public dialogue is also very important to consult, collaborate, disseminate and exchange ideas that are scalable, adaptable and can be reused.

The efforts to negotiate complex challenges to do with urbanisation, climate emergency and natural disasters, and the lessons that research can bring, need more attention and to be brought to the forefront. The question that we should try to answer is how can architecture have a greater role and influence in driving the future narrative? For a rapidly developing nation, building appropriate capacity and training a generation in the various modes of engagement with practice, research and dialogue are critical. ●

Neha Tayal, urban designer and visiting tutor at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London



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6-7 Jetwana Buddhist Centre in Maharashtra, India, reviving local building traditions and exploring the idea of a regional paradigm by Sameep Padora & Associates. Photograph by Edmund Sumner

7

Planning to Manage Densification

Lucia Cerrada Morato and Becky Mumford describe local authority-led research into residents' quality of life

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has one of the highest housing targets in London. With limited land available for new development in the borough, significant emphasis has been placed on optimising housing density to deliver new homes. Increasingly, planning policy and guidance has supported the delivery of housing at high densities, resulting in the emergence of very high density residential development across the borough. This includes residential developments with more than 3,000 habitable rooms per hectare and building heights exceeding 30 stories.

The high density narrative has continued in the draft *London Plan*, which unlike its predecessor does not set out target density ranges, and instead leaves upper density levels open. This requires a design-led approach to optimising sites, and places great emphasis on design quality to achieve high quality buildings and places.



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1 Tower Hamlets area. Photograph by Jim Stephenson



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However, there is limited consensus of what life is like for residents living in these environments and, as a result, limited policy or guidance on what constitutes high quality at the national, London or local level. How do families live at high densities? What would living in these homes be like given climate change? How can management better support residents' quality of life? In response to this context and motivation, Tower Hamlets' Place Shaping team initiated one of the largest and most comprehensive pieces of research into the lives of residents living at high density and in tall buildings, which informed the development of design guidelines. The team won the RTPI's 2020 Research Award for Planning Practitioner.

APPROACH

To appreciate the diversity of residents' experiences and to function as a robust evidence base, the project required an extensive and multi-faceted methodology. First, nine representative case studies were selected; this sought to ensure that surveys captured a wide range of experiences and forms of density. The selection process included densities from 1,100 habitable rooms per hectare (h/ha) to over 3,000 h/ha, and heights from 10 to more than 30 storeys. The case studies were located throughout the borough, had been occupied for a minimum of two years and featured a mix of tenures. A range of building typologies were also selected.

To begin the research process, a post-occupancy evaluation was conducted with residents of each of the nine case studies. In order to get a fair representation of residents, tight sample quotas were used. This required a good mix of people living in different parts of the building, different flat types, different tenures, etc. as well as demographic quotas based on age and gender. A door-to-door survey method was chosen to meet the quotas specified above and to get a good response rate. As a result, a response rate of 40 per cent from 560 residents surveyed was achieved, far exceeding the depth of similar work. In three schemes, all of them privately-owned, access was not possible; therefore online and postal surveys were used. The response rate for this method dropped to 4 per cent of 172 people surveyed. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a further 40 residents, and site visits conducted with building managers to explore emerging topics in more depth.

To understand the impact of high density development on existing communities, a neighbourhood survey was also conducted: this meant speaking to residents on their doorstep or stopping those working in the area in the streets within a 400m radius of each of the nine case studies. A total of 562 people were surveyed this way.

Additionally, workshops were held with various council services, housing associations, developers and architects to appreciate perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders.

Finally, to develop a holistic understanding of the experience of high density living, it was important to include environmental and well-being criteria such as daylight, sunlight, overheating, building energy consumption, outlook, privacy and their interdependencies. On identifying a gap in the skills available within the Council, environmental consultants were employed to develop a framework for defining metrics, targets and appraisal methods for the different criteria, and model case studies to test the framework.

OUTCOME

The breadth of the approach and high response rates make this study one of the most comprehensive into the experiences of residents in high density residential environments. These findings were used to inform and provide evidence for a design guide in the form of a supplementary planning document to assist in the application of policies in the recently adopted local plan. Analysis of the research findings and a literature review resulted in the emergence of five themes. These themes structure the application of the evidence, whilst also functioning as a discussion tool to identify the features that support a good quality of life and how it can be achieved through design:

- **Children and young people:** this seeks to ensure that new development provides sufficient and varied space for children and young people to play and socialise, whilst making it easy for children to move around the building and use play spaces in the immediate surroundings independently.
- **Mixed and balanced communities:** this aims to foster integration, both within the building and the wider community.
- **Buildings as systems:** this addresses climate change and the transition to the circular economy through the consideration of waste, energy, water and recycling. In addition, it aims to improve efficiency and the quality of life for building managers and caretakers working in the schemes.
- **Everyday life guidance:** this promotes flexible home design that considers everyday activities and their implications on the design of the home and meets the different needs of residents as they change over time, including ageing and home-working.
- **Healthy neighbourhoods:** this seeks to ensure that new development creates spaces that are comfortable, attractive and enjoyable. It also sets out a holistic framework for assessing the environmental impacts of new development.

As a project by the Place Shaping team, the research and resulting document champion the vital importance of design. They make the case for a comprehensive

2 The nine Tower Hamlets representative case studies

and holistic approach to design in the planning of high density residential schemes, in a local authority environment that can undervalue and under-resource design teams. There is limited appreciation of the correlation between design and quality of life, as this has not been explored in much depth in existing research on high density homes.

Research-informed design guidelines assisted in teasing out the complexities of high density living environments, in particular how density could be accommodated in different ways through building typologies. The research process and resulting design guidelines sought to understand the challenges and merits of different high density typologies and to prioritise approaches that create the best living environments for both residents of the buildings and the neighbourhood. Beyond typologies, it identified spaces and design solutions for features that could be a challenge to achieve in high density environments, and those that would significantly improve life quality.

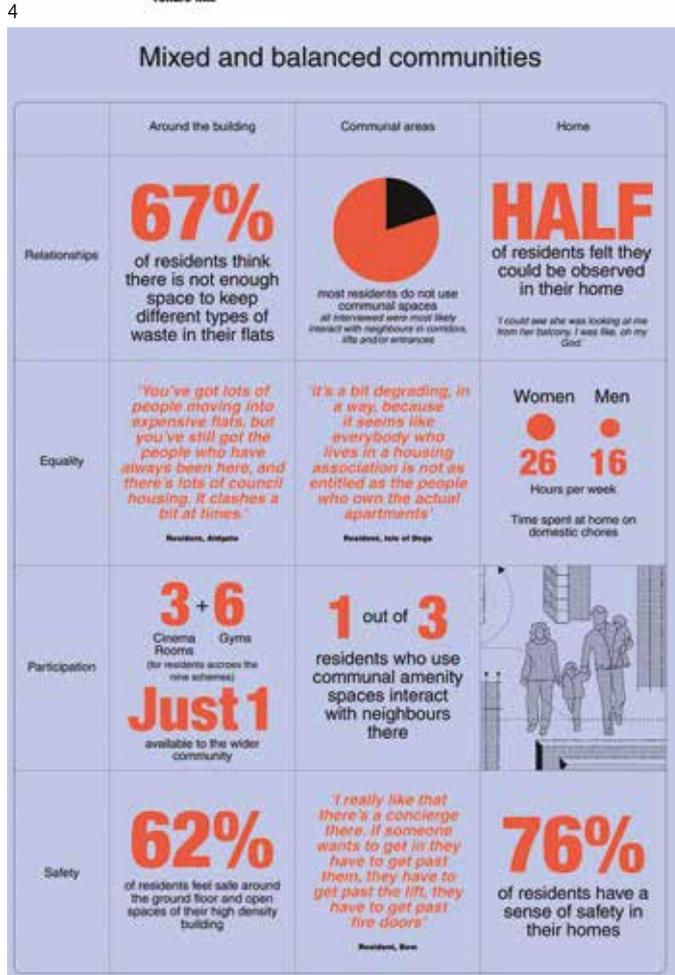
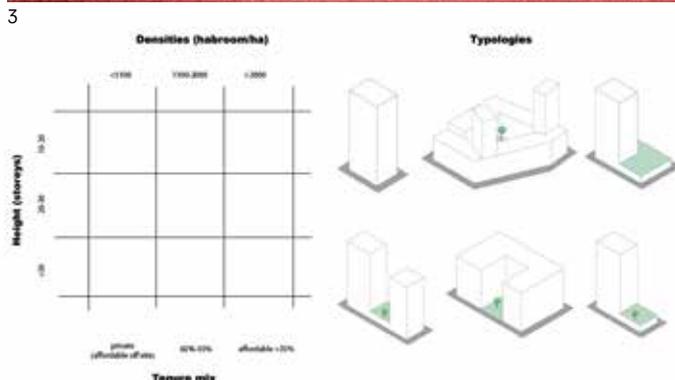
THE CASE FOR IN-HOUSE RESEARCH

With a local authority leading the research and enabled through Public Practice as opposed to outsourcing work to external consultants, the process could be better embedded into existing teams. The project could be truly multi-disciplinary with links to various teams across the Council, both within the planning department and beyond to such services dealing with waste, children and youth. As local authority-led research, it also meant that the project was agile, and responded to gaps in existing information across the Council that emerged following discussions and workshops with various teams. However, this agility also meant identifying gaps in expertise or time constraints, which external consultants could infill more efficiently. For example, external consultants were used to conduct the modelling of environmental parameters and an external agency was used to carry out the data collection.

Conducting the research in-house also meant that the research and resulting supplementary planning document were developed with a better appreciation for existing development management processes. Discussions with officers prior to conducting the research identified gaps in their understanding of what high density residential developments are like to live in, helped to agree desired outcomes, and identified weaknesses in existing policy and guidance. An appreciation of the process meant that the research could be structured in a way that made it easy to use as evidence in negotiations, and provided a framework for discussions at both the pre-application and planning application stage.

Finally, in-house research works symbiotically, feeding back into other Council teams, in planning and beyond. The resulting data can more effectively be shared with various teams, evidencing other projects or processes, and the capacity of Council teams improves through the sharing of skills and experience. Overall, the project seeks to deliver development that better provides for the needs of Tower Hamlets’ diverse residents and raises the profile of design as an essential mechanism to achieve this. ●

Lucia Cerrada Morato, high density development project manager at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets
 Becky Mumford, planning officer at the London Borough of Tower Hamlet



3 From the Tower Hamlets Design Guide: policy on play space on roofs
 4 Types summary
 5 A panel from an exhibition related to the design guide

The Value Gradient Map

Louie Sieh, Alain Chiaradia, Stephen Jones and Fiona Waters describe their practice, teaching, research and design collaboration



Professional urban design education in universities usually involves teaching students techniques in how to do research but less often, what the role of research is in design, whether in their student or future professional work. This is not for a lack of theorising about the relationships between research and design. For example, a well-known framework was proposed by Frayling (1993): ‘research into, through, and for art and design’.

A practice-teaching collaboration between the Master of Urban Design (MUD) programme at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and the design practice Woods Bagot aimed to address these gaps through a deceptively simple yet effective platform called a Value Gradient Map (VGM). It was conceived by Stephen Jones and Alain Chiaradia, and tested in practice with clients and in the professional studio, then refined further in teaching.

The VGM operationalises ‘value’ in urban design. Value, a much used but much misunderstood concept, is the basis of decision-making in urban design processes. By value we do not mean a precisely optimised nor objectively measured price, but a heuristic that articulates how designers assess the worth that their client, or the eventual user, may place on the proposed design.

ARTICULATING VALUES IN URBAN DESIGN

The Value Gradient Map’s development was motivated by the search for a simple interactive method to visualise the relative magnitudes and multi-scale impacts on values of strategic urban design alternatives in a project. The assessment is centred on coloured diagrams – essentially a pixelated VGM. The VGM has been used to simulate, visualise, analyse and communicate urban design values collaboratively, in teaching, in Value Assessment Reviews, in the professional design studio at Woods Bagot, and to explore design ideas in a Value Creation Workshop service provided to clients and project stakeholders. Always delivered

in an interactive workshop format, whether face-to-face or remotely, VGM’s relevance to research, teaching and professional practice has been essential to its development.

The VGM’s graphic interface allows teams to enter value scores progressively to a scaled gridded plan image, resulting in a value map of a region, district or single site. To analyse a land area, consideration of the criteria and input into the VGM takes only 10 to 15 minutes, and the output is immediate. Each cell in the grid allows for the insertion of a numeric -10 to +10 that is linked graphically to the colour gradient. As each cell value is entered, a value gradient pattern emerges, giving a visualisation of the relative value assessment of each cell, and combines to create an overall value gradient map. Typical scales are regional level, sub regional, city, district and site.

In any given instance of its use, the specificities of the VGM process depend on the roles of the players involved: student, professional designers, clients or other stakeholders. By means of explicit visualisation, the goal is always to align, negotiate and mitigate conflicting values of a place through urban design. Participants discuss and agree the values in each cell of a given site or design project alternative against value criteria, producing the visual representation. The VGM is usually developed into a series of graphic overlays to enable a visualised value comparison within the collaborative workshop. Participants discuss existing values, the impacts of design on value creation, value erosion, value taking or realisation, value making, and the redistribution of value that happens when an intervention is made in an urban context. It also enables value comparison with one or more design alternatives. Finally, it enables these comparisons across different spatial scales, so that implications of urban design action at a distance can be understood, and across different temporal scales, if necessary.

The tool’s value framework encompasses social and environmental, as well as financial values. The VGM enables participants to assess, articulate and better understand through comparison and dialogue the possibilities and implications of the baseline and of design decisions. For education, understanding value

1 Shenzhen, China: Hazens Longgang Longteng District Regeneration Concept Master Plan, by Woods Bagot

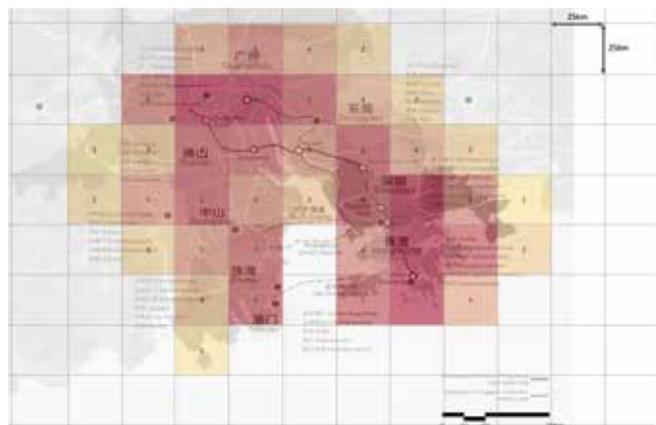
basics and learning how to assess value and deploy results for making design decisions is key. For the professional studio, it is the prototyping of design alternatives to deliver better value that matters. For client and stakeholder workshops, it is to make strategic design decisions in the face of multi-user preference, conflict and trade-off, in the context of city-wide and district planning policy, as well as the need for sufficient consensus to arrive at design optioning decisions within the session. In all cases, VGMs are filled in by participants, thereby remaining at the centre of discussions.

VALUE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Scale-sensitive assessment criteria have been established to help frame the use of the values that shape decision-making: the perception of private and public good, positive and negative externalities, and the assessment and value conversation in the workshop context. An example of blending typical and project-specific criteria is shown in Table 1.

IS THE VGM EFFECTIVE?

Most participants quickly grasp the urban values concepts sufficiently to begin to think and work with them, and to design. The VGM enables knowledge-sharing, allowing stakeholders to relate the concepts of urban values to spatial configurations, and quickly develop a working familiarity with value at macro, meso and micro spatial scales. Inevitably, a rich conversation about value emerges as participants debate the relative merits of a wide range of urban design issues including real estate values, private open space, transport, accessibility and heritage issues. This is an important outcome, as it allows everybody – designers and non-designers – to grapple directly with some of the complex spatial interactions in the project. Finally, VGM is a creative



2 Exchange Value Assessment, Regional Context, the XXL scale
 3 Exchange Value 'After' Assessment, Site Context, the M scale both from the Hazens Longgang Longteng District Regeneration Concept Master Plan by Woods Bagot

TABLE 1 SCALE

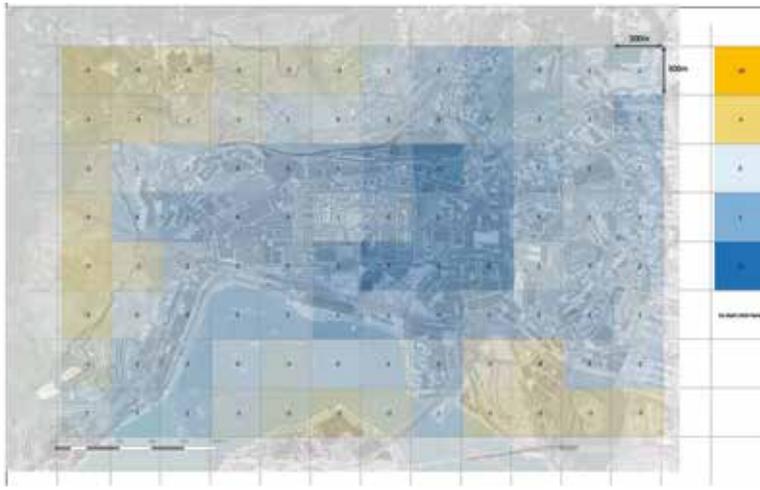
MACRO, MESO, MICRO	XCHANGE VALUE ASSESSMENT	USE VALUE ASSESSMENT	VALUES IN COMMON ASSESSMENT
10-200m evaluation grid within 500m-2km radius area Timeframe (now to 5-10-15 years ahead)	Developer point of view	User point of view	Urban Planning and/or Communities point of view
	Urban Design Private good – Club good		Urban Design Public good
	Selected appropriately according to spatial scale		
	Population Density Employment Density Future Development Plan (Centralities) Transport + Infrastructure Networks Density (FAR) Land Use/ Program Mix Layout: Urban Structure & Grain Block/ Lot Size Building Form (Massing, Scale, View, Daylight, Ventilation, Quality) Landscape Infrastructure & Landscape (Hardscape/ Softscape)		
	Corporate values Images values Prestige Vision Reputation Brand image	Resident/Worker/Visitor value Health & Well-Being Access to amenities and public facilities Views + Ventilation Daylight Green/blue within project area Collaboration Attraction Retention	Environmental values Protection of biodiversity, finite resources, climate change, resilience, whole life cycle Social values Enhancing positive social interaction, social identity, social inclusion, social health, prosperity, equity Economic values Livelihood, how this place makes a living? Images values prestige, vision and reputation, brand image Cultural values symbolism, inspiration, and aesthetics

co-design process which can facilitate consensus through dialogue around spatial design features, and with participants more aware of the implications of spatial configurations than probably ever before.

A TOOL FOR RESEARCH ABOUT URBAN DESIGN PERFORMANCE

The VGM enables a design dialogue, which makes it amenable to research operations by crystallising value within a particular design configuration. This visualisation of the relative magnitudes of value accruing to various stakeholders is a simulation of urban design values. It engages participants interactively and very immediately by bringing desired and actual values, and the roles of spatial configuration in delivering them, into the conceptual space. The tool's format both enables designers to evaluate performance as research and, if needed, researchers to grasp design, providing a critical linkage between visual and discursive languages, in a way that is sufficiently

Sources: adapted from (CABE, 2006; CABE Space, 2003; CABE, 2007; CABE, ODPM, Design for Homes, 2003; Chiaradia, et al., 2017; Laird & Venables, 2017; Chiaradia & Waters, 2020)



3

fast and sketchy to meet the needs of design decision-making.

In the educational version, seminars prepare students for dealing with design research at the very heart of urban designing itself, which encapsulates urban design performance in the idea of value. The VGM is instrumental in explaining the role of value in public design, and the relationship between urban design and research. The opportunities of using VGM in research, practice, design and learning promise to make design decision-making accessible to a much wider audience.

We conclude by explaining why the concept of value is the linchpin between research and design practice.

VALUE, VALUE AND VALUES

Graeber (2001) identified three major conceptualisations of value:

- value as net benefit, an economic conceptualisation that often implies accurate measurement
- value as meaningful difference, a linguistic conceptualisation, and
- values as moral or social principles, a sociological conceptualisation.

The design of the VGM is based on a transposition of these three – value in exchange, value in use and values in common. Chiaradia *et al.* (2017) argued that urban designers need to apply all three concepts at once, because not doing so risks a blinkered approach to urban design much as we have been suffering with urban design as traffic engineering or urban design as big buildings.

As it links research and design in the VGM, two properties of value seem important:

1 – THE HEURISTIC NATURE OF VALUE

The VGM relies more on ‘value as meaningful difference’ than ‘value as net benefit’. The latter requires precision, artificially created with the help of assumptions and a narrowly scoped object of analysis. This is not often helpful in something that is too complex to be optimised, and which requires a rough and ready approach and a holistic scope, such as the early stage design. Value as meaningful difference, however, lends itself to articulating how people think and act during a design process, which is heuristically. Indeed, this quality defines design thinking.

The VGM was conceived to exploit the heuristic nature of how people think during design. It is rapid to use, simple to modify, easy to understand and easily accessible to users, with fast inputs and outputs. This enables the rapid prototyping of design ideas, discussions, impact assessments against the baseline conditions at various scales, and participation in or curation of emergent value positions. The tool clearly shows participants the differences between design options. The visual description on the coloured map of the user’s assessment of the value makes the magnitude and contrasts between positive and negative

values graspable. The creation of an initial baseline analysis and the iterative return to it during the design process allow us to understand the change of value over time, and the dynamics of the value-creating and shaping processes. The VGM can be created at a range of scales, from region to site, as required by the project needs. Finally, discussion is enabled about the flows and transferences of value between stakeholders, and across spatial scales.

This heuristic approach contrasts with data-intensive and proprietary geodesign software which leverage large amounts of open and proprietary data. Finally, the VGM’s approach is also aligned with emerging approaches, such as design games that focus on an early design option generation stage with multiple stakeholders with no single optimal option.

2 – THE PUBLIC ARTICULATION OF WORTH AND MEANING ENABLES ACCOUNTABILITY

By enabling the communication of the worth and meaning of a design configuration, VGM makes design discussable, graspable, actionable and accountable to those in whose name those actions are being done. This is especially important for urban design, which is public design. Communicating the implications of design makes it possible for those affected to directly participate in its making. The designers of the VGM have insisted on collaborative workshops as the way to deploy the VGM, recognising that it is the facilitation of discussion around it that fully realises the benefits of VGM as a device that enables co-designing.

On this note, we can imagine that the VGM could become a useful and empowering instrument for collaborative design, and that it may be joined by other tools that are user-friendly for those wishing to take part in managing the design value construction process, or to research and understand urban design performance. ●

Louie Sieh, assistant professor, City University, Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

Alain Chiaradia, associate professor, The University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban Planning and Design

Stephen Jones, director – China, regional chair at Woods Bagot and adjunct associate professor, The University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban Planning and Design

Fiona Waters, director of Waters Economics, and adjunct associate professor, The University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban Planning

3 Student work:
Use Value after
Assessment

Towards Research-led Dialogues between Practice and Academia

Juliana Martins draws conclusions from current research and looks to the future

The collection of articles brought together in this issue shows that practice-led research is alive and well in urban design firms. It is being used to address complex current and future urban challenges such as multi-generation housing, suburbia, urban industry, identity, density and value. Not surprisingly, there is a diversity of approaches, from research that underpins the design process, to discrete pieces undertaken to develop a more robust and unique approach to a design problem or debate. Methods employed are also diverse and include established qualitative data collection (e.g. observation), and innovative methods such as practitioners' self-ethnographic accounts or exhibitions.

Four key points emerge from the contributions in this issue:

- Research in practice is distinct from academic research in many ways. For instance, it has commercial constraints and must bring clear benefits to the firm. On the other hand, it is free from quite specific (and perhaps narrow) academic standards in terms of research approaches and methods;
- Practice-led research is tailored to design, seeking useful outputs such as tools and prototypes, or directly employed in projects;
- The value of practice-led research is undeniable and reaches widely, with examples showing the impact on the design process, project outputs, planning debates and policy, design control and development, and teaching; and
- Collaborations with other public and private organisations are crucial in much of the work presented, and the need to further these collaborations is strongly emphasised.

Despite the wealth and quality of practice-led research, I would argue that engagement with academia is incipient. Cutting-edge academic studies find it difficult to make their way into practice discourse, with exceptions such as Matthew Carmona's work. Yet, a closer collaboration between academia and practice in research would be beneficial to both. As Carmona (2020, p.7) summarises, from a more conceptual perspective 'theoretical work will be most powerful if, perhaps over time, it also informs practice. Equally, practice-related research will be more rigorous and incisive if it draws from, and feeds back into wider academic debates'. Urban design firms could also benefit from additional knowledge, expertise and resources from academia to undertake research. For academia, engagement with practice would be an opportunity to deepen the understanding of 'designerly' ways of knowing (Cross, 2001), and construct a more robust understanding and a conceptual or methodological basis for 'research by design', which are still limited.

There are several challenges in furthering this dialogue. Academic research needs to engage with gaps in the literature which is sometimes narrow, and not always relevant to practice. The timeframe of academic and professional work is very different as well as the key constraints and objectives; the former is driven by publication in peer-review journals and research metrics, the latter by commercial aims and reputation. Academic outputs are often inaccessible despite recent efforts to increase open access.

Perhaps more importantly, practice tends to deal with design and wicked problems, and propose solutions, all aspects which are hardly addressed by conventional research approaches.

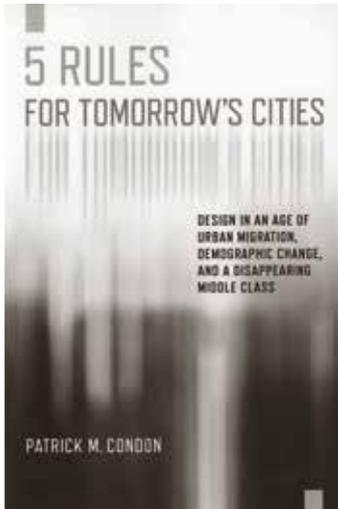
But academia could certainly do more. First, it should spearhead these collaborative efforts by creating spaces and forms of dialogue with practice, particularly on identifying common topics, developing concrete research projects, and sharing results. URBED+, a collaboration between Manchester School of Architecture and URBED, is an example of an attempt to develop such long-term collaborations. Second, it should strengthen the teaching of research skills in urban design education, particularly 'research by design'. Finally, it should use more accessible language and more diverse forms of research dissemination (e.g. practice-related publications, websites, etc.).

This issue explored some examples of practice-led research in urban design. But an immense body of work is being developed out there by many other practitioners operating across multiple geographies. This body of work is an invaluable resource to further knowledge in the field, both theoretically and practically, and should be properly scrutinised, disseminated and, above all, nurtured. ●

Juliana Martins

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5 Rules for Tomorrow's Cities

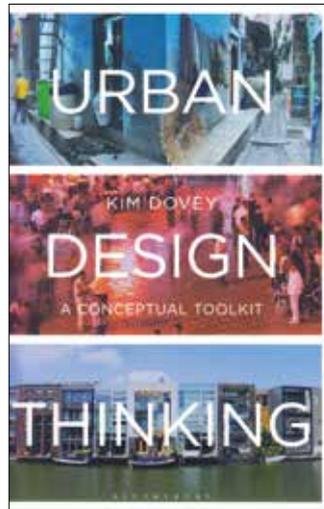
Patrick M. Condon, 2019, Island Press, £26.00, ISBN 978 1610919609

This book, written by an American landscape architect working in Vancouver, illustrates the extent to which comprehension depends on having a shared agreement on what words mean. This is made more difficult when the two sides of the Atlantic are divided by a common language. The words in question here are *urban design* and *the middle class*. I think I know what these terms mean, but throughout the book I was unsure whether the author and I had the same understanding.

Condon declares on page 1 that his subject is urban design. But as I read on, I found little connection between what he was writing about and the urban design which I was taught, and which I teach and practise. I think the explanation is that his urban design is so comprehensive that it includes the whole of town planning and urban development. He advocates that urban designers should exercise the kind of influence and power that few, if any, urban designers are in a position to possess. The book contains only two urban design drawings.

His five rules are good ones, appropriate, relevant, and well argued. They are in tune with much current progressive thinking about ecological design, the emphasis on the local, and the removal of the tyranny of the motor vehicle. They are: See the city as a system; Recognise patterns in urban environments; Apply lighter, greener, smarter infrastructure; Strengthen social resilience through affordable housing design; and, Adapt to shifts in jobs, retail and wages. There is emphasis on learning lessons from Third World informal settlements, and on insights drawn from the observation of human behaviour by Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander.

Condon writes persuasively and in considerable detail about his very reasonable five rules. But he finds it necessary to



justify them by examining at length what he calls 'three cresting cultural waves which are already transforming the city': world-wide rural-to-urban migration; the collapse of global fertility rates; and, the disappearance of the middle class. Firstly, this lengthy justification, taking in fertility statistics, Thomas Piketty, spiralling housing costs, World Bank data, Marxian economics, and 24 pages of footnotes, is tiring and unnecessary. His recommendations stand up without this underpinning. Secondly, who are these middle classes who are disappearing? I am confused, and I suspect that part of the answer at least is that what Americans mean is different from what we in the UK understand. For their readers in the UK, Island Press need to take account of this semantic difference in order to ensure clarity. ●

Joe Holyoak, architect and urban designer

Urban Design Thinking, A Conceptual Toolkit

Kim Dovey, 2020, Bloomsbury, £29.00, ISBN 978 1350175457

Can a toolkit be conceptual? The question is answered in the introduction to this book: 'while it is conceived as a toolkit, these are tools for thinking and not recipes for practice'. It is a fair explanation of what follows and justified by another introductory comment: 'poor urban design is always based on poor urban thinking'. Thirty short chapters follow in which a number of concepts commonly used by urban designers and other built environment professionals and stakeholders are analysed, deconstructed and questioned. The objective is to make us rethink many of our assumptions, and not to give us ready-made answers.

Dovey's thinking is based on well-known theorists such as Jane Jacobs, Sennett, Alexander, Lynch and Gehl, and he quotes many others that readers might or might not recognise. On the other hand, this is not an

abstract book, as examples are consistently used to illustrate and clarify what is being debated. The images are in black and white, surprisingly these days, but they manage to put across the author's intentions.

In the first chapter, Urbanity, Dovey describes what he calls the urban DMA, the 'assemblage' (a recurrent word) of Density, Mix and Access, all necessary although not sufficient to create urban intensity. These three concepts are then each given a chapter and here the value of the book is evident.

Do you think you know what density means? Think again, and also think whether the qualities that we assign to density are always correct. This is just an illustration of how the book makes you reflect on its points. Further chapters deal with different kinds of issues, some more complex and abstract than others but all rooted in the city: Action, Type, Image, Place, Authority, Character, Shopping Malls, Tourism, Codes, Graffiti, Creative Clusters, etc. The text shows the interrelationships between these and there is a kind of progression towards complexity.

As the issues become more complex and contentious, the later chapters become more polemic. There is an underlining feeling that the author prefers the open, informal, spontaneous and temporary, to the top-down, closed, clearly ordered city, but he is careful to balance this by accepting that regulations and some order are needed. 'How to regulate for cities of difference is one of the big questions of urban design' is probably the main message of the book.

For the most part, the text is free of jargon and the concepts are easy to understand. Occasionally words appear that professionals may find clear, but lay people will struggle with (e.g. striated vs. smooth space). This is a minor criticism of a book that should be read by anyone interested in the urban environment. ●

Sebastian Loew



Age-Inclusive Public Space

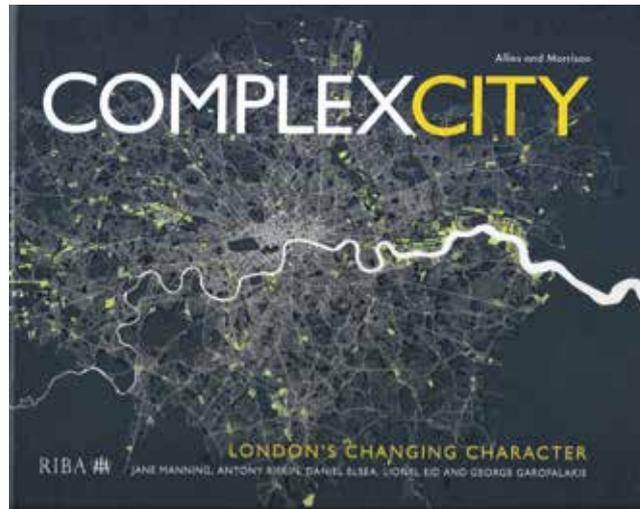
Dominique Hauderowicz and Kristian Ly Serena Ed., 2020, Hatje Cantz Verlag, £24.00, ISBN 978 3775745901

In a series of five sections with contributions from 19 individuals and guided by two editors, this constellation of material is presented in a lively, well ordered and illustrated manner. It is almost a conversation between experts.

Part one describes and defines what is meant by the Elderly and presents the concepts of both ageing and public space. In the second part, the notion of Elasticity and how the characteristics of spaces need to change to serve the needs of different groups, are discussed. The third and fourth parts look at the ideas of Agency, the ability of an individual to use a space, and Belonging, the experience of possessing a space. In the final part, the way in which agency and belonging can be brought together to create useful meaningful places is examined.

In order to bring order to the multiplicity of ideas and variety of contributors, each part is structured in a similar fashion. An introductory essay setting out the broad nature of the topic discussed is followed by an examination of the consequences of defining it this way. These first two parts are written by the editors and distinguished by being presented in a sans serif font. The more detailed sections that follow from individual contributors are presented in a classical serif font. This sounds complicated but works well in practice. Through each part, the margins are used to lead the reader to related sections elsewhere in the book. These function in a similar manner to footnotes but are more immediate and are marked by a simple 'See'. Throughout, a series of asides or quotations are presented using a classic font and attributed to their source.

This energetic text is supported by carefully sourced and sometimes poignant photographs. Perhaps less successful is the use of reversed plans and text, i.e. white line drawings and text on a black background.



Whilst this can make plans or drawings easy to read, studies have shown that reversed text can be more difficult to read.

The writing is generally clear, simple and readable. As is to be expected from such a widely drawn series of contributors – ten nationalities from seven disciplines – there are some linguistic oddities, but these are few and overall the book is more readable than other quasi-academic publications that grace urban design shelves.

There is a danger that by focusing on the needs of one age group, the book might appear to promote a fragmented approach to public spaces. The authors are aware of this and a section on Inclusive Boundaries follows one describing the sad decline of a multi-play street, into a fenced off football court – a warning to those who would destroy vitality for the sake of avoiding perceived hazards.

This is a well thought-out book, deliberately not a handbook or manifesto but a veritable cornucopia of ideas and explanations. Pity about the dull but distinctive cover. ●

Richard Cole, architect and planner, formerly Director of Planning and Architecture of the Commission for New Towns

Complexcity – London's Changing Character

Jane Manning, Antony Rifkin, Daniel Elsea, Lionel Eid and George Garofalkis, 2020, RIBA Publishing, £35.00, ISBN 978 1 85946 894 4

This stylishly presented book develops the body of knowledge gathered by Allies and Morrison when working for Historic England. The book has two unequal parts, an analysis of the way that London's character has evolved and a shorter part looking to the future.

Clearly written, the book has a structure that provides a rhythm, not a straitjacket. Its aim, to describe a city as large and

interlinked as London in less than 200 pages, is ambitious but by following an essentially chronological order and using a simple framework, this objective is achieved. If the book has a message, it is that the character of a place grows from the layers of its past.

There are ten sections in chronological order, which individually describe an aspect of London's character. Each starts with a general discussion of the particular aspect, often by asking a series of questions. These are followed by highly detailed maps and diagrams of London, exploring the issue in question. The maps are perhaps both the book's strength and its basic weakness. Their small size and subtle colouring make reading them difficult. This is a problem not exclusive to this book. Perhaps we could all benefit from the creative use of QR codes. The maps are followed by a collage illustrating each topic throughout London. Some sections include discussion of the flexibility and resilience of London's different *foci* in relation to the specific aspect.

At the end of later sections, a 'What if...' question is posed and answered by both text and a jolly and often tongue-in-cheek illustration. The authors seem to have enjoyed creating the book and even creating a pun in its title. The speculative insertions provide not only light relief, but also serve to show the underlying message that London's strength lies not in a rigid master plan, but in its organic response to both what has gone before and what is driving change.

The book demonstrates the extensive cumulative knowledge about London that the Allies and Morrison team have acquired, and that they have much to offer to those seeking to plan for London in the future. Whether the system proposed by the current government will allow for the use of the approach proposed remains to be seen. I fear the quest for certainty in planning may remove the spontaneity that complexity has generated. Overall, *Complexcity* deserves to be welcomed to the burgeoning canon of London books. ●

Richard Cole

Practice Index

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E madeddum@lsbu.ac.uk
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To view the course blog:
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W <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/programmes/postgraduate/msc-building-urban-design-development>

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E yue.tang@nottingham.ac.uk
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1

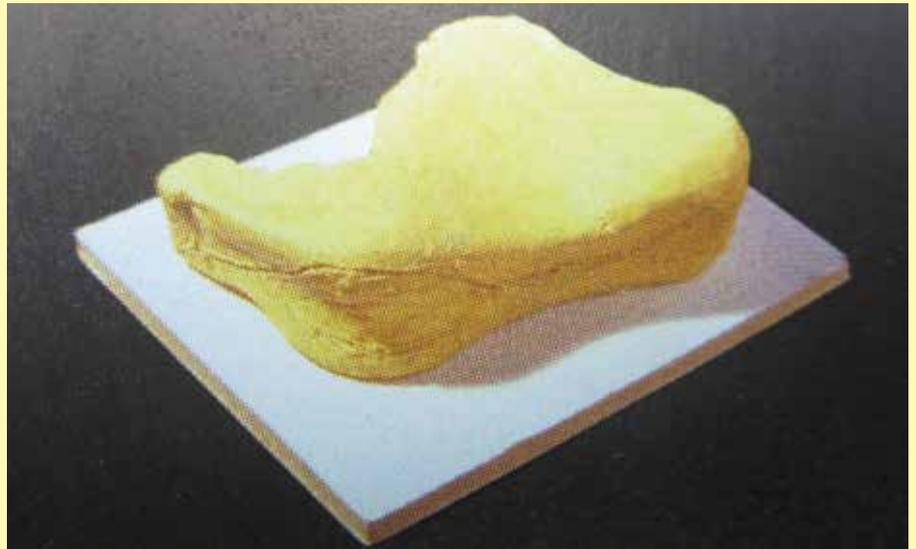


2

Art concealing life

Selfridges in Birmingham is much celebrated, but it is a problematic building. I suggest that it can be assessed against three criteria. Firstly, as a piece of corporate publicity. Here I would describe it as brilliant. The managing director of Selfridges, Vittorio Radice, instructed his architects Future Systems to design a building that was so distinctive that it did not need a sign saying Selfridges. This they did, and within days of its opening in 2003, images of it had gone around the world and it had achieved an emblematic status. Although, as the architect Jan Kaplicky pointed out, it cost no more per square metre than Benoy's banal and unmemorable Debenhams at the other end of the Bull Ring development. Hi-tech it wasn't.

Secondly, as architecture. Here it is less successful. Its shape is arbitrary, deriving from a small blob of yellow plasticine which Kaplicky squeezed in response to Radice's brief. The exterior form has no relationship to its interior spaces. Go inside and walk towards the external wall, and you will find the shop interior unable to engage with it. In A.W. Pugin's 1841 book *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, he called shapes like these Bulbous Form, and condemned them as having no tectonic justification: '...it is a form which does not result from any consistent mode of constructing a covering, and, on the contrary, requires by its shape to be constructed'. I watched the construction of Selfridges with this in mind as firstly vertical steel stanchions were built along the perimeter, then horizontal beams were attached to them, cantilevering varying distances outwards. Then steel mesh was attached to the ends of the beams, and sprayed with concrete to create the curving surface. At a seminar about the Bull Ring which I chaired shortly after the development opened in 2003, I asked the architect



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Amanda Leveté why Selfridges was that shape. She answered simply 'Because it's beautiful'. If a student presenting in a crit had given me that airy justification, they would have been in big trouble.

Thirdly, as urban design. Here it fails. The department store is admittedly a type which it is difficult to make transparent, as defined by Kevin Lynch in his 1976 book *Managing the Sense of a Region*: that is, enabling someone in the public realm to appreciate, through their senses, what is happening inside a building. But Selfridges glories in its opaqueness. It contravenes the city council's sensible policy of requiring city centre buildings to have active frontages at street level. Behind the street level façade there is a car park and, perhaps uniquely for a department store, there is no entrance to the store from the street. It is unsurprising that the big Beorma development on Park Street opposite Selfridges, which gained planning permission in 2015, has still not started construction. The hermetic nature of Selfridges, and its indifference to the street, has removed any life from Park Street, and discouraged any future growth there.

The exterior envelope of Selfridges is about to be upgraded. Its 15,000

aluminium discs will be removed, and the thermal insulation behind them expanded and repainted blue, before the discs are replaced. This might be interesting to watch, but we shan't be able to, as the scaffolding around the building will be completely wrapped in a temporary screen. This has been designed by the clothes designer Osman Yousefzada, whose clothes are sold in Selfridges, in a giant sort-of-dogtooth check, in pink, black and white. The project is being done in collaboration with the Ikon Gallery. It's always good to see big-scale public art on the street, even if temporary. But there is a certain grim appropriateness to the proposition for the surface of this building which communicates nothing about the activities inside, to be replaced by another surface which also conceals what is going on behind it. ●

Joe Holyoak

- 1 Selfridges designed by Future Systems, opened 2003.
- 2 The proposed temporary screen for building work designed by Osman Yousefzada
- 3 The plasticine model for Selfridges squeezed by Future Systems partner Jan Kaplicky



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