Editorial

There are few urban designers who would deny that wherever possible, user participation should form part of the process of arriving at proposals for design. The meaning and implications of the term participation are, however, equally unclear to many professionals.

Quite often, the convenient model is better characterised by the term consultation. All too frequently, unrepresentative 'focus groups' are used to bolster the preconceptions of designers, or the places and times for participation/consultation inevitably condition the sections of the public that will take part. As the quality and character of localities become ever more important in the global context, issues of genuine local identity need to be tested by the widest participation of interests in a city, town or district. We must guard against the belief that such participation can be achieved either quickly or smoothly. Successful user participation underlines the need to avoid the 'hit and run' approach to urban design, and reinforces the need to focus on the subject as a continuum of the process of urban change and regeneration.

Holmgren and Svensson address these issues directly in their paper on the dialogues between professionals and residents in those ordinary, but nevertheless complex, places that comprise the inner suburbs of our cities. They discuss the issues of definitions of problems and qualities in relation to physical form within these areas in the context of user participation in urban regeneration. In doing so they review the differences between the perceptions and value systems of professionals and residents based on case studies carried out in Denmark and look to more effective dialogue as the basis for achieving better planning and design. The paper offers a stimulating review

of methodological approaches that may facilitate such work.

In their paper Xue, Manuel and Chung also explore the value that users put on the built environment, in this case, the public space in the derelict city area of Mong Kok in Hong Kong. They analyse and categorise the existing public spaces in Mong Kok, reviewing quality, image, distribution and the use and abuse of spaces. The problems identified, the authors put forward a series of strategies and suggestions for improvement in terms of policy, development, management and design. They conclude that it is particularly important in crowded environments such as Hong Kong that more priority be given to public rights, participation and civic life and that processes of urban regeneration should ensure better quality provision of public space for the future.

In his paper, Nelissen focuses on the cultural and historical value of buildings of local significance, now unoccupied. Based on the Dutch experience, he proposes a process management model for the reallocation of appropriate uses for such buildings. The model is designed to aid local government in the management of the process of reallocation and the avoidance of deterioration of significant buildings in the locality.

In the concluding paper Al-Hathloul and Aslam Mughal discuss the planning and urban design issues arising from the importance of Makkah as the pilgrimage center for more than one billion Muslims spread around the globe. They discuss the resolution of the conflicts between vehicular traffic and the massive pedestrian movements to and from the Grand Mosque. An evaluation of a scheme by the public and private sectors to improve the situation as part of a mixed use redevelopment project concludes the paper.

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