Editorial

The core knowledge, skills and working methods of urban design as a practice are now well established and increasingly being incorporated into public policy in many countries – or at least the rhetoric of public policy. This public recognition is undoubtedly positive but there are signs, now that everyone connected with the design and realisation of development is an urban designer, that too much of this practice is assumed, uncritical and encapsulated into the unreflective application of ‘good practice’. The challenge facing urban designers, in all their various guises, is to develop clear and useable evaluative frameworks for all stakeholders involved in design, planning and development. In this way, options and trades-off can be carefully appraised and the benefits package for various interest groups can be more clearly articulated. Each of the four papers in this issue offer a framework and method for evaluation, either of the physical environment itself and its performance in relation to enhancing sustainable, social and economic values or of the quality and clarity of the decision making process and the discourse of design.

The first paper in this issue explores the relationship between ‘good’ urban design and enhanced value – economic, social and environmental. The debate has a considerable history but much of the argument used has been anecdotal and contested by the different actors and agencies involved in the planning and development processes. Carmona, de Magalhaes and Edwards develop an evaluative framework for assessing what they term ‘sustainable value’. Based on their earlier research, they use six case studies in the UK to assess relative performance against seven urban design objectives and three sets of indicators of sustainable value – economic viability, social benefit and environmental support. Their framework allows both quantitative and qualitative evidence to be considered within the same frame of reference and provides an urban design appraisal tool to assess the contribution of urban design to enhanced value. They conclude that better urban design adds value by increasing economic viability, encouraging more environmentally supportive development and delivering enhanced social benefits.

Kumar and George’s paper explores a related and equally controversial issue – the process of design review of development applications. Despite its very widespread use in many development and aesthetic control systems, design review is often a contentious and unsatisfactory experience for the various stakeholders involved. While some attention has been paid in the literature to the instruments, procedures and processes of design review, this paper adds a new dimension to the debate by focusing on the discourse of design review. They propose that this discourse is all too frequently based on fallacious argumentation and it is these fallacies which are the source of dissatisfaction with the design review process. They address two key questions; firstly, ‘how can fallacious argument in design review discourse be identified?’ and then, ‘once identified, how will such fallacies be dealt with?’. The case studies are drawn from their research in a Canadian city named Historia to preserve the anonymity of participants. They conclude that most fallacious argumentation takes place in the process of adversarial modes of argument and recommend that clarification and consensus – building need to be encouraged as the most effective modes of argumentation in design review. A process and mode of discourse which is more sensitive to applicants’ needs, which explains and clarifies the purpose of design review and which presents cost-effective options for meeting design standards is the most likely way to remove some of the disenchantment and dissatisfaction currently associated with design review.

The third contribution to this issue also offers a method for improving decision-making in urban planning and design. Haggag and Ayad suggest that decision-making for sustainable urban development needs to be based upon reliable information about the relationship between socioeconomic and ecological performance of an urban area. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the authors combine the concepts of the ‘ecological footprint’ and the ‘urban structural unit’ with techniques of social area analysis. The main aim of the study is to assess the significance of the urban structural unit classification method in producing valuable urban indicators and a

framework for sustainable development. Haggag and Ayad offer case studies in Alexandria, Egypt to explore their method within the context of a developing country. Features of land cover, built-up areas, sealed surfaces, land use, building age, and density of urban and green areas were quantified for every structural unit. Although in its early stages of development, the method should help to produce a framework to evaluate the environmental status of urban areas and so to guide the future prospects for sustainable development.

Finally, Nobre's paper considers the cycle of change in an historic district of the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. The paper analyses

the area's morphology resulting from Portuguese colonial planning policies from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Nobre then describes the decay of the area as its progressive abandonment by economic activities and residents, partly as a result of modern urban planning. Having been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1985, the State and municipal authorities had the responsibility for formulating a strategy for renewal and economic regeneration through the promotion of tourism. The paper addresses generic issues in area regeneration as well as highlighting some of the specific issues of economic renewal faced by developing countries, most notably the issue of safety and security in tourism-led regeneration strategies.

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