Editorial

URBAN DESIGN International (2016) **21**, 193–194. doi:10.1057/s41289-016-0014-8; published online 31 August 2016

The urban design education has traditionally involved acquiring expertise in multiple areas of volumetric design from spatial or visual connectivity and mobility to developing a knack for aesthetics and spatial legibility. Advancing the great legacies of the 19th century artist and designer, Camillo Sitte, whose critique of the urban space remains relevant even today, has revolutionized the urban design education. The five elements of imageability popularized by Kevin Lynch (1960), for example, attest to the intricate interrelationships of the important indicators of good urban form. Francis Tibbalds, Ernest Sternberg, and Jack Nasar, among others have also contributed to this litany of works.

Experienced and well-versed urban designers ought not only to understand the complexity and importance of each of these indicators, but should seek ways of integrating them. Tibbalds (1992), for example, describes what he calls “a Renaissance of the public realm” in order to examine people-friendly towns. Aside from his beautiful sketches from various scenic environments that convey deep visual meanings, he urges governments to prioritize the physical environment and the long-term future, asks people to seek and believe in good design, and as for local planning authorities, he asks that they plea for recognizing the importance of urban design.” Sternberg (2000), on the other hand, has explored this ambitious mission by pursuing what he calls “an integrative theory of urban design.” This theory consists of multiple principles of good form, legibility, vitality, and meaning, each of which adds their own intricacy and importance to the overall experience of reading the city. Nasar (1998), on the other hand, has used “likability” as a composite concept to determine the interface between the people and the city. Distinctiveness, visibility, and symbolic significance constitute the elements of this composite concept.

These two examples, among others, represent urban designers’ efforts to transcend an otherwise mechanistic approach to an extremely complex and fairly idiosyncratic sensation called experiencing or discovering the city. This volume of *URBAN DESIGN International* contains a number of articles

that move along the same grand tradition. Ahmadnia and Altar Atun, analyze 140 aesthetics-related studies in order to better understand the social construction of meaning within a broader urban context. In their study, they propose ways of enhancing the urban designers’ knowledge of the formal and symbolic meaning of spatial composition on aesthetic cognition of the city.

The second article in this volume by Paydar and Kamani-Fard examines the nexus between perceived legibility and pedestrians’ walking times from their workplaces to the metro stations in Kuala Lumpur’s CBD. The underlying premise in this article is that the pedestrians’ preferred path from work to metro station involves important variables such as choosing legible pathways. The findings of this study which was conducted in 9 zones in Kuala Lumpur indicate that while shorter walks are preferred, other important indicators such as the presence of certain building configurations and layouts and the visual access to destination constitute the elements of a composite legibility indicator.

But what if legibility involves more than commuting or going from work to a metro station? In other words, what if in a highly dense urban environment, people’s alternative pathways involves crossing bridges that are more than connectors between two points? Wang, Siu, and Choi Wong address these questions in their article. Under such circumstances, the research question changes significantly, and involves additional variables including alternative pathways that are more than simple connectors and can be construed as temporary places within the context of everyday urbanism. In this sense, it is important for people as ultimate users to use bridges as conduits that serve more than simple connections or as the elements of additional social activity and land use. In these places of everyday urbanism, people, regulators, and urban planners can collaborate to create better temporary places of high quality for everyone.

But aside from the questions of legibility, connectivity, and aesthetics in the built environment, and how they are perceived as composite concepts

that unfold deeper personal meanings and preferences facing urban designers everyday, other relevant and equally important questions emerge. Building density and urban form configuration is an important such question. Pedestrian walkability and community time and the question of legibility in a dense environment marked by tall buildings, as opposed to making decisions on using courtyard housing as opposed to high-rise apartment buildings, for example, would be a totally different experience.

The last article in this volume addresses these types of research questions. Agrawal et al., examine the postwar construction initiative by the Sri Lankan government. This bold development initiative involves megaprojects that range from highways and shipping ports to airports. Regardless of the type of development, however, tall buildings in the form of hotels and resident towers take up a good portion of these developments. Through a comprehensive case study method, the authors glean some lessons for designing better tall buildings. These recommendations include tips for their locations as well as their height constraints, proximity to other tall buildings and

public streets and spaces around them, and finally, a plea for integrating them into TODs (transit-oriented developments).

This volume also includes Katja Leyendecker's review of the book entitled *Mobility Patterns and Urban Structure*.

References

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