Editorial

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Planning in general, and urban design in particular, is riddled with inherent layers of complexity, conflict, and contradiction, where multiple actors and stakeholders compete in maximizing their utilities and allocating finite resources. As “rational fools,” (Sen, 1977) who ought to balance their ‘self-seeking’ behavior with the ‘public good’ dimensions of any complex planning problem, actors and decision makers typically find themselves in difficult situations where looking for middle grounds may not be readily obvious or promising. The “bounded rationality” discourse (Simon, 1991), “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber, 1973) in planning, the prisoner’s dilemma, the logic of collective action, and the tragedy of the commons (Aram, 1989), represent these typically complex, multi-layered, nuanced, and at times abstract notions that have preoccupied planners, policy makers, and city administrators over time. The current issue of *Urban Design International* contains five articles that articulate the interface between planning as an expert-driven by-product of rational thinking and an outcome of a complex multi-layered practice of facilitation, mediation, or ad hoc bottom-up decisionmaking and collective design.

In the first article, Alizadeh focuses on the traditional urban quarter, which as a “materialized form of human thought, skills, and resources,” creates meaningful social spaces. This repertoire of existing urban fabric can help designers to reconcile possible tensions between modern and indigenous or pre-modern life styles. Highlighting their evolutionary patterns, the author recognizes the role governance or grassroots and bottom-up planning processes can play in shifting urban management decisions solely from experts who operate within a state-operated apparatus to localities (as was the case in the formation of the so-called “mound cities” in Kurdistan, Iran). Additional features of this type of planning and decisionmaking endeavor includes paying special attention to topography whereby terraced as opposed to courtyard housing could better leverage the local natural resources. Such design practices not only do not consider topography as

a hindrance, but also see them increasing the eyes-on-the-street element of the public realm. Reinforcing this type of design helps to also avoid constructing long, straight streets which minimize casual encounter in everyday urbanism.

In the second article, Cheshmehzangi discusses multiple levels of eco-friendly planning and design. Particular attention is paid to density, energy, and climatic performance as two key variables in designing in hot climates. Examining three residential blocks (an old traditional quarter that is on the verge of extinction; a low-rise more recent housing block built in the 1990s; and, a high-rise block of up to 30 floors), the article explores the quality of urban living in a mid-sized Chinese city. His findings show that while high-rise developments may be unavoidable in the future—especially, in China—pragmatic considerations for engaging authorities, designers, investors, and users in the planning and design process seems prudent if not imperative. This engagement while not easy in reality can facilitate different, and at times, conflicting perspectives of the four groups of stakeholders in development decisions.

In the third article, Ozkan explores a slightly different aspect of stakeholders’ engagement in the urban design and planning process. University campus design involves educators, students, administrators, and practitioners with sometimes divergent preferences, needs, and life styles. For example, universities prefer campus densification, while students prefer outdoorsy open spaces and park-like settings. A post-occupancy evaluation in Karadeniz Technical University in Turkey shows efforts underway to initiate collective or comprehensive planning alternatives that promote user-friendly designs meeting both the students’ as well as the university administration’s needs.

In the fourth article, Nejadriahi explores another decisionmaking method for addressing complex multi-tiered planning problems, especially, under circumstances that involve not just resource allocation, but also problems that involve multiple actors including those responsible for design to those engaged in development, maintenance, and management. Bazaars exemplify organic, multi-

tiered entities with intricate social, economic, cultural, and spatial structures that pose significant complexity while epitomizing cultural sustainability over time. With their overall utility outweighing modern markets, bazaars integrate economic vitality, social conviviality, and environmental sustainability. Applying the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) model to Tajrish Bazaar located in northern Tehran, the study ranks the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability in the order of importance. The analysis might also be applicable and relevant to other cases involving different stakeholders (i.e., planners, government officials, and/or users).

The last article on shared space represents another example of multiple stakeholders' involvement with different and possibly conflicting sets of preferences or priorities. The term "shared space" includes urban spaces where multiple modes of transportation negotiate for access and use. The question Ruiz-Apilanez addresses in this paper is whether shared space hinders or enhances public life and pedestrian safety. Examining six settings, the study findings suggest why perceived pedestrian safety and comfort exists in shared space. Future design decisions should aim to address more specific problems compared to what the extant literature typically reports. In other words, generic and boilerplate questions involving pedestrian-friendly streets or highway

safety, etc., may no longer be valid, and therefore, requiring more qualification in the lines of inquiry. To this end, traffic counts and how different modes of transportation negotiate the shared space matter, and are every bit as important as the types of social activity and occupation of space by building frontages at the ground floor level.

References

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