
Editorial

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It seems that we are living in an era when erstwhile urban design concepts including masterplanning, figure-ground relationships, or imageability are merging into if not entirely becoming subservient to somewhat vaguer, more all-encompassing processes or ideas such as complexity, adaptation, resiliency, etc. Reactions to these long-lasting and often highly contentious concepts make us think deeper into the paraphernalia of strategies and modes of comprehensive design, thinking that characterizes the urban design training and pedagogy today.

Students of urban design and planning still familiarize themselves with Lynch's elements of urban form, the strengths and limitations of masterplanning, and/or the role of green and open space in maintaining a balanced figure-ground relationship as visually drawn and skillfully observed and used in Nolli's map of Rome circa 1748.

These fairly long-held and well-regarded studies, while ingrained within our trainings and thought processes as urban designers, have not remained unscathed from criticism. For example, many scholars (Friedmann, 1971; Lindblom, 1959; Holston, 1989; Wildavsky, 1973; Lang, 2005) have questioned the shortcomings of grand masterplanning or comprehensive planning. These questions concern not only its rigor and substance, but also the process leading to results, policy decisions, and outcomes, and the stakeholders involved in it.

The present volume of *URBAN DESIGN International* is a compilation of articles that more or less belong to this genre of thinking that start off from masterplanning and focus on its catalytic roles as a means toward placemaking as well as the procedural matters associated with crafting and interpreting it. Masterplanning can be achieved for the purpose of the adaptive re-use of old buildings through "reconceptualizing" the Lynchian elements of urban form, or even using multiple narratives and storytelling strategies for exploring the complex and multi-layered nature of planning decisions. Furthermore, the mass and void or figure-ground relationship that highlights the balance between the built and unbuilt

environment also determines the ways in which green and open spaces shape and define the physical setting, and the social characteristics associated with it.

Based on the data on diverse types of green open space in dense cities of Hong Kong and Singapore, Zhonghua Gou reports in the first article of this volume how two design approaches have produced two different types of social behaviors. The first model in which green open spaces are segregated from buildings (the "concrete jungle" model), encourages active visits with high intentions. However, the second model wherein green open spaces are integrated in buildings (the "garden city" model) is conducive to passive visits with low intentions and sensations.

The second contribution explores New Urbanism through a new way of using Lynch's elements of urban form where they become the components of a complex adaptive system rather than their formerly known "functional dynamics." Looking at the city through a new lens, Sharon Wohl proposes a new framework where Lynch's more utilitarian aspects of the built form (edges, districts, paths, landmarks, nodes) become aspects of analyzing the city's complex dynamics (including more temporary but unfolding changes such as tactical or pop-up urbanism).

In addition to these aspects of complexity in discerning how planning schemes unfold, Lieven Ameel explores the role of storytelling as a building block for redevelopment. He particularly focuses on narratives *for*, *in*, and *of* planning. Defined as "recounting real or fictitious events," narratives set out to tell stories about urban phenomena three of which are conceivable in this article: narratives that draw from planners' practice (*i.e.*, narratives *for* planning), narratives that tell stories of the planning process rather than practice (narratives *in* planning), and those that follow as a result of planning practice (narratives *of* planning). These tripartite narratives underline the multi-layered and contentious nature of planning decisions and their larger social and participatory impacts.



Another aspect of this discourse has to do with the multi-layered assessment of the post-war masterplanning era where the users' experience and heritage challenge facing those decisions question the planners' aims and assumptions. In her analysis of London's Southbank Center Masterplan, Patricia Aelbrecht underlines the value of a multi-layered analysis of a wide array of transformations from repair and improvement to adaptation and re-use of post-war modernist buildings. These types of masterplans that are often costly for their clients, face formidable challenges, and fail to accomplish their set goals. Coupled with structural and functional problems as well as obsolete uses, a multi-tiered, balanced perspective that involves insights from users and designers help successfully repurpose the rapidly deteriorating modernist buildings according to Aelbrecht. This approach critiques the designers' sole input as prior attempts in Southbank London have failed in reaching a balance between conservation and change in a post-masterplanning era.

Thinking about a balanced analysis and critique of masterplanning brings to light another relevant aspect, namely pattern recognition. Yunmi Park and Galen Newman address this question by revisiting Christopher Alexander's 235 design patterns with broad applicability in current design strategies such as new Urbansim, Transit-Oriented-Development (TOD), Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), and Smart Growth. Park and Newman's research shows that of the 235 patterns, those that stress natural lighting in arranging or reconfiguring a group of buildings, covered walkways around them, using smaller grains of fabric rather than buildings with large footprints, increasing pedestrian movement and walkability and considering paths and visual destination play important roles in long-term sustainable success in designing the building environment.

Finally, Amir Hajirasouliha examines masterplanning not in general terms, but more specifically, within a more narrowly-defined scope of

university campuses, which incidentally, represents a topic pertinent to Christopher Alexander's (1975) *The Oregon Experiment* as yet another significant contribution to the field of urban design. Hajirasouliha's study brings to light four design strategies that represent popular planning approaches to campus design. These strategies highlight four sets of tensions that justify their redevelopment including transitioning from: deficiency to convenience; isolation to contextual; segregation to cohesion, and brownfields to ecologically friendly environments.

These six articles, *in toto*, shed light on masterplanning in general, and its various aspects or genres in particular. The critiques deem necessary, especially in a time when as a discipline, urban design is on the forefront of much theoretical, professional, and ethically heated debates.

References

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