Editorial

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As the twenty-first century unfolds, newer concerns of shared interest loom large. The contributions to this volume spell out and examine areas of broad future relevance of urban design as a field of endeavor. These shared areas of concern and interest emanate from challenges such as ageing population, suburban development and ubiquitous unsafe environments. To address these challenges, it behooves urban designers to have a clearer understanding of each of these broad, globally shared phenomena rather than treating them as localized, isolated incidents.

The first contribution by El Sawahli *et al* contends that the ageing population has already become a global concern. Studies on a neighborhood in Kuala Lumpur shows that adhering to New Urbanism design principles (that is, walkability, mixed-use, connectivity, open space and pedestrian amenities), promotes social interaction and active urban lifestyles among ‘the young elderly’ (the 60–75 age group). Drawn from Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City movement idea, Kuala Lumpur’s design characterizes a city blessed with environmental and natural assets including green belts and gardens, promoting walkability in harmonious ways. The article further explores the virtues of a well-connected, walkable city, and that how, in turn, it not only promotes healthy living, but also enhances a sense of safety by maintaining eyes on the street, discouraging criminal activity and encouraging social interaction.

Ann Forsyth’s contribution focuses not so much on the increase of elderly population *per se* as a global concern, but on their over-concentration in suburbs. As prevalent contemporary enclaves with great physical, social, environmental and demographic diversity, suburbs present immense potentials for physical retrofit and adaptability. Defined as ‘bands of development beyond the urban or metropolitan areas’, Forsyth seeks to explore the commonalities of suburbs across international boundaries. In doing so, she addresses three conceivable theoretical hurdles surrounding what she calls ‘the global suburban future’, and why it matters head on: that adopting global views toward suburbs is exaggerated (or rendered irrelevant); examining the questions of suburbanization

or suburban character; and finally, discussing how, over time, urban design scholars have addressed some of these fundamental cross-cultural, social, environmental and physical) challenges.

The third contribution, which addresses another subject of shared global concern among urban designers deals not so much with unfolding phenomena such as ageing or suburban development, but in the ways in which urban designers use their shared body of knowledge to communicate with each other. Representations of qualitative and quantitative data, analytical methods, typologies and taxonomies characterize these shared concerns. Examining a fairly large database of master-plans and diverse planning practices, Adam and Jamieson identify a broad framework that lends itself useful to urban designers and planners across time, geography and ideology. This framework draws heavily from attributes that depend on variables including the plan type, permeability, density, network, block and building articulations, use and context.

Kim and Lee focus on another important area of urban design practice, namely, sustainable neighborhood design (SND). Bemoaning the planning paradigm of most new developments characterized by excessive vehicular use instead of promoting pedestrian-friendly places, they emphasize the necessity of concerted efforts on SND. Grounded in four comparative case studies from Korea, Japan, Canada and the United Kingdom, they found cross-cultural lessons that inform the future development of sustainable development. These broader shared lessons include closer proximity of SNDs to existing towns and services rather than isolated self-sustained enclaves, in addition to better utilization of practicing shared governance, community visioning, public charrettes and community participation.

Ozhanci *et al* explore a closely related question on the role of plant types in designing safer neighborhoods. This broader public need for designing safescapes stems from yet another important urban design concern surrounding the emergence of ‘unsafe’ or unsavory environments. While overpopulation and cultural differences are driving the increase of these neighborhoods,

greenery and green spaces spruce up the imageability of urban places and discourage criminal activity.

Lastly and interestingly enough, Kytta *et al* discuss the social benefits of retrofitting distressed neighborhoods. Questioning the often-times 'deterministic' and 'simplistic' notions surrounding planning safe neighborhoods, the authors place a large emphasis on key urban design methods such as increasing permeability and integration of neighborhood into the urban contexts facing rapid

decline. These measures, among others, would increase the likelihood of success in minimizing physical and social isolation, and hence, concerted efforts to retrofit.

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