Editorial

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Contemporary urbanism is transient among other things. Short-lived life styles and places in flux bring to bear other realities and expectations that may seem unrealistic in times of rapid change. Concepts and themes such as “deterritorialization” (Appadurai 1990) or “reterritorialization” represent post-modern thought processes that, in an era of globalisation and social media frenzy, focus on the weakening or changing ties between place and culture. If these global volatilities are constantly changing our daily lives, then, how can urban design as a field or a profession intervene to create meaningful places? The urgency for short-, mid- and long-term planning forces urban designers to think more responsibly and beyond mainstream questions involving their professional turfs and interdisciplinary allegiances they have been debating for decades. For example, whether urban design is “architecture writ large” or not, or the extent to which it pertains to architecture and landscape architecture more than the social sciences exemplify such debates. In light of these emerging discourses, sustainable development and design, resilient neighbourhoods, climate change and public policy, on one hand, and the increasing rates of the ageing population, and neighbourhood character and identity on the other, are appearing more and more on urban designers’ radar screens.

This issue of UDI seeks to address some of these increasingly popularising urban design debates. While each of the five papers in this issue raises one or more of these questions, they reflect the overarching importance of the utility of urban design in addressing them, especially at the local level.

The first paper addresses two distinctly different emerging phenomena that transform conventional thinking towards

street vending in public space and gentrification. In the former, authors reveal unfolding new sentiments towards the decriminalisation of street vending activities in L.A.’s Latino neighbourhoods, i.e. Boyle Heights. Crisman and Kim report the current change of heart in decriminalising vending by those who abhorred it originally so vendors do not get deported. In the latter, community and city council public officials use what is known as “property outlaw” tactics to stop activities that may ultimately lead to gentrification and displacement. To sum up, this article highlights how aesthetic, power and race can have adverse impacts on the original residents’ welfare.

The second and the third articles in the current issue focus on another dimension of the linkage between the neighbourhood unit concept and urban design. The second paper starts by giving an overview of the growing population of older people worldwide, and the unpreparedness of cities in fulfilling their needs. With low mortality rates among the elderly and the percentage of older people living alone—particularly due to high divorce rates—cities ought to explore new ways of offering better sources for them to age in place; hence, the linkage to urban design. Forsyth, Molinsky and Ye Kan have explored some of the urban and regional challenges and their urban design implications. This article places more emphasis on the public realm and “clustering of services” as one area of urban design contribution along with more coordination among the public agencies in charge of “public works, transportation, parks and recreation” and of course, housing.

But graceful ageing, or ageing in place, transcends concerns for the elderly in the U.S. or Europe alone. Zang, Xue, Lu and Tu have explored the same concept in Hong Kong, where the elderly population is expected to increase at alarming rates by 2031 (one in every four people expected to be 65 or older). This research explores how Hong Kong’s dense and hilly topography and its public infrastructure fare with the ageing population. In a concerted effort, urban policies at the macro, meso and micro levels provide a comprehensive backdrop for practicing planners and urban designers. Integrated planning includes efforts that range from strengthening proximity to key facilities, locations and

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social connections to enhancing land-use mix and street connectivity, green and public spaces, and providing hand rails, wheel chair compliance and better way finding.

In addition to addressing the needs and concerns of the ageing population, urban designers and policy makers ought to examine the compliance and congruence between zoning ordinances and collective identity. Talen and Jeong address the degree to which zoning codes support main street identity in Chicago. Zoning codes that support rather than weaken main streets constitutes one way of achieving sustainable development in planning and urban design. Neighbourhood main streets reflect community-based ideals that, among other qualities, promote pedestrian friendliness, safety and social interaction. As planners acknowledge, the gradual shifts over the last several decades have deliberately

or inadvertently weakened and diminished some of these collective values and ideals. Talen and Jeong have explored the relevance of these qualities in Chicago neighbourhoods.

Reference

Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (2–3): 295–310.

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