Editorial

Streets and squares have always been important containers of public life. Jane Jacobs (1961) was one of the earliest urban design thinkers to focus our attention on the sidewalks and parks as a place for people to come together to build relationships, exchange words and goods, and to bring safety to neighbourhoods. However, these ideals are being undermined by the challenges of the modern city; high volumes of traffic; social segregation; economic decline; poor quality pedestrian environments. These challenges are discussed in this issue of *Urban Design International*. The authors take different perspectives and use different qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the spatial attributes of streets and squares that can promote walking and a better image of a place, protect historic cities from the destruction of its social and physical fabric, and to respond sensitively to different user perceptions and needs.

Rashid and Bindajam's paper examines the potential conflicts between traffic and historic environments. The premise of their paper is to interrogate the commonly held urban design principle that high levels of movement of people and cars on the streets of cities are good indicators for liveliness and vitality. Within the context of historic cities and heritage planning, high-density movements defy the traditional social logic of space and can easily damage the physical and social environment, forcing traditional dwellers to leave. In the Old City of Jeddah, the authors recognise that the historic city's low spatial integration in relation to the wider city has restricted through-movements, benefitting the preservation of socio-cultural and religious norms of camaraderie on local streets and the historic fabric. The authors advise heritage planners to restrict movement in historic cities by encouraging low spatial integration, as long as it is not an impediment to economic viability.

Mahmoudi and Ahmad examine the concept of liveability from different user's perceptions. The concept of liveability, first developed by Appleyard and Lintell (1972) to identify the detrimental effects of traffic on residents' quality of life, is commonly perceived as the same by all users. However, in their study, Mahmoudi and Ahmad find users place different emphasis on the variables of liveability in two multi-functional streets in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. They found that out of 12 common physical attributes that contribute to liveability, four in particular are most important to users in Kuala Lumpur: paving, parking spaces, traffic management, and maintenance and cleaning. On the other hand, irregular commercial street signage had less of an importance. Their findings suggest variances do exist in the measures of liveable streets and open spaces that should inform local government investment and guide urban design practitioners.

A further challenge to the design of public space is the importance of providing walkable environments to support greater use of public transport. In his article, Kim tests a new method of observing pedestrian behaviour to understand the relationship between the built environment and travel behaviour, and walking distance and choice, in two inner city commuter suburbs in San Francisco. Kim challenges the commonly used urban design principle that people walk a maximum of 400 m to a transit stop and in fact reveals that longer distances are walked if the walking environment is attractive and provides opportunities to engage in other activities such as shopping, window shopping, conversing with others and using street furniture. These activities are mostly found on main streets, highlighting the importance of locating transit stops along mixed use main streets at the centre of neighbourhoods to promote walkability.

Mixed use suburban streets are an important focal point for reversing the social and economic decline of suburbs. In their paper of Lisbon's Amadora suburb, Goncalves *et al* demonstrates how waves of urban regeneration funding have not been successful in stemming the tide of population shrinkage and an ageing population, social segregation in neighbourhoods, perceived insecurity at night, devaluation of residential and business property, derelict post-industrial areas and poor socio-economic image. The study examines a different approach. The medium-term strategy, the Amadora Viva Plan, focused primarily on the regeneration of the main neighbourhood mixed

use street based on a partnership between stake-holders. The strategy included the transformation of the facades of buildings according to an unifying design, improvements to shop frontages, signage and a canopy was added above the shops, as well as public space improvements. This article is a good example of the wider impact of local processes to attract new residents, new economic activities, and to change the image of a place.

The success of Amadora's change in image is attributed to the socially inclusive initiative of stakeholders, associations, residents, traders and the local authority. In Kuala Lumpur, Askari *et al* considers social inclusion of public space from the perspective of age. They examine the different needs of young and old people in a major public square. They find that different needs are based on three factors: facility-based opportunities, social opportunities and opportunities for leisure time. The study found that old people do not use the public square as frequently as young people because of the fears of the presence of young people and the lack of facilities such as quiet and separate sitting areas, and washrooms. In contrast, young people do frequent the square more often, however, they gather in separate ethnic groups. What both age groups have in common is the importance of their environmental needs such as good weather, elements that reduce stress, sense of belonging, and safety and security. The study confirms that there are different needs among young and old social groups, and that these need to be explored in integrated design approaches.

References

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Noha Nasser
University of Kingston, UK.

Mahyar Arefi
University of Cincinnati, USA.