

## URBAN DESIGN FUTURES

### BOOK REVIEW

#### INTRODUCTION

Urban Design Futures, a collection of provocative 'think pieces' about the scenarios in which urban design could evolve, is edited by two practicing urbanists **Malcolm Moor and John Rowland**. The book was first published in **2006** in UK and then was reprinted in **2008** by **Routledge** (Taylor & Francis group) simultaneously in the USA and Canada. The editors have compiled **22 essays** by individual authors mostly from the western global sphere.

The editors of the book are both British practicing urban planners who specialize in providing urban design expertise to both public and private sector. They believe that the future proofing is central in terms of designing sustainable neighborhoods and the book could be considered as a step towards this futuristic vision in urban design.

#### CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The book celebrates the plurality of thinking and approaches in urban design and recognizes the emerging ideas on how to arrive at what we all agree is the destination; more attractive livable cities. It consists of emerging concepts in urban planning and directs towards the twenty-first century urban design paradigms.

The book is structured around **four themes (4 parts)** with introductory and concluding contributions from the editors Malcolm Moor and John Rowland respectively.

Four parts of the book are further divided into 22 chapters by individual contributors. The book commences with a prologue by the poet Bernard O'Donoghue, who has written beautiful verses about the layers of human occupation in city planning. Following the prologue, a fervent preface is written by Sir Terry Farrell. Then comes the extensive introduction by the editor

Malcolm Moor himself, who conveys the story about the present situation of urban design and its evolution process. He also signposts the four themes along which each contribution is organized.

Part one is preparatory which discusses the key objectives that urban design addresses on the larger scale and the role and territories of the urban designers. Part two is all about the soul of the urban design, the public realm and about the people whom it is designed for. Part three discourses about the evident importance of sustainability in urban fabric and the how the integration of technology could be a key factor to achieve it through new building typologies.

The last but not the least, fourth part of the book emphasizes on the new forms of urbanism that are being created from the juxtaposition of urban design with contemporary influences such as branding, networking, rapid change, commercialization and uncertainty.

## **CRITICAL REVIEW**

Urban Design Futures is an effort to assemble a collection of essays by various internationally renowned spread of authors in order to assess the progress in urban design and to explore contemporary emerging ideas, mainly around western global sphere.

The book is very helpful for the deeper understanding of urban morphology, and the determinants leading towards the design of cities. It is addressed towards urban design students, scholars, practitioners and general public for the understanding of their built environment.

The format of the book is very appealing for reader. Glazed pages with lots of colorful illustrations and graphics make it eye-catching and interesting for its key readers, rather they be students, professionals or general public. Division of chapters according to their relative theme and style, each chapter acting as an entity and in the meantime making the whole gives the book a great clarity. The variety in the book's themes and ideas is another factor contributing in its success.

**Part 1, "Urban Design Comes of Age: The Bigger Picture"**, being the introductory is the most lengthy part of the book giving descriptive account of origin and territories of urban design and those practicing this profession. All the contributors in this part emphasize the training of urban designers and focus on major urban design scope of works and theories guiding this profession and professionals. Urban design is at the forefront of the drive to improve our urban areas and achieve an urban renaissance. In part one total six contributors presented their impressions of urban design development patterns.

In Chapter 1 **Alex Krieger**, chairman of the department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University thoroughly describes the urban design as a mindset rather than a technical discipline. Alex gives a number of definitions of urban design, its origin and role in making better living environment in his starting chapter "**Territories of Urban Design**". He also presents ten spheres of urbanist actions starting with the basic position of the bridge between planning and architecture. The objectives of 'mainstream urban design' are becoming well recognized in developed world but there feasibility in third world cities is being challenged.



**Tony Lloyd-Jones** in his chapter “**Globalizing Urban Design**” then put questions about the implementation of universal urban design principles in developing countries and outside the American-European framework. In countries these principles are recognized as objectives of “**mainstream urban design**” (pp. 30).

Despite of the question raised by the author the book lacks any views of urbanists from developing countries and any issues faced by them.

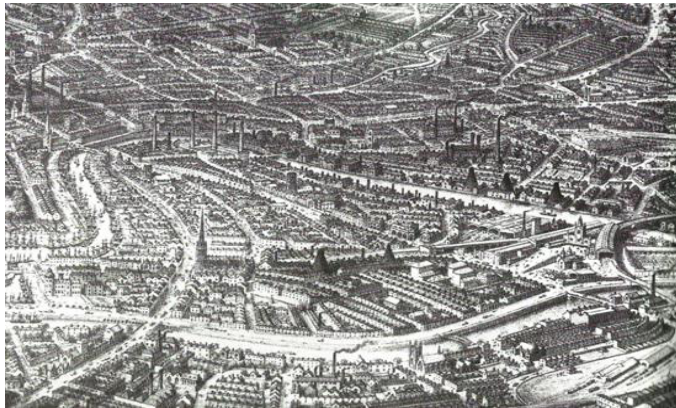
**Harriet Tregoning** in chapter 3 and **Paul Murrain** in chapter 4 debates about how Americans are schizophrenic about their built environment. According to Harriet Americans are schizophrenic about the built environment. They want to preserve green space but don't see how that relates to their own house built on former farmland and how to both raise standards and ensure that design effort is properly channeled into projects that get built? It can be suggested from his behalf that architects, policy makers and urban designers should study the problems in architectural and design education and should allow broader participation in educational and professional field.

In Chapter 5, “**The Planning System and the Delivery of Design Quality,**” author **John Punter** emphasizes on British responsive environment urban design principles and the way they are extended to wider sustainability and redefined them particularly to

**David Rudlin** in his chapter “**The City Building**” talks about basic that have been guiding his practice avoid making urban design boring and and how to revive ‘the slow art urban and make it exciting and memorable.

*Grahame Park, North London, Southern square. (This square contains retail and community squares emphasizing that this is a ‘public’ place)*

principles suburbia. **Art of principles URBED** to predictable design’



*Temple quay2, Bristol, historic view of site.*

**Part 2, “Connecting Social Spaces: Creating Public Realm”**, can be called as the heart of the book. It is the most interesting chapter of the book as it is related to the people and their social life. 8 Contributors cover all aspects of the design of public realm and how we can create cities which are more people friendly. It also consists of the only essay of the book of Asian urbanist.

“The major attraction of any city is its people, its life and vitality.” This is how **Jan Gehl** begins his chapter 7, “**Life, spaces, Buildings- and in said order, please.**” The title fittingly sums up his argument. . Human scale, high density, great diversity, environmental comfort and architectural and the visual qualities of public spaces and places is the mantra of Gehl.

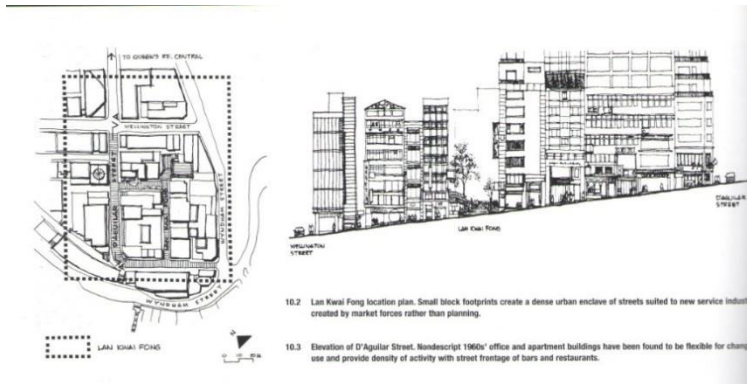


**Tim Stonor** uses his chapter 8 “**The Insecurity of Urbanism**” to show his concern that urban design methods are currently less secure than they should be. He emphasizes on the time and activity analysis of public spaces. Other notable topic of his discourse is the positive interaction between transport engineers, land use professionals and urban designers. Multidisciplinary models helps in creating more friendly platforms for professionals.

Chapter 9, by **Adriaan Geuze**, shows how our streets regulates our activities. The rapid growth of cities of Asia have embraced modern architecture as the epitome of economic progress but in the process have rejected much of their own built heritage and traditional street life; that their streets are being turned into logo cities with lots of bill boards and commercialization, unwelcoming the free spirit.

**Alex Lui** tells of a rare conservation success story in Hong Kong in Chapter 10. Lan Kwai Fong is a side street with vibrant city life character which was redeveloped and renovated when other old buildings in CBD were torn down to make room for taller commercial building. It is now acting as the entertainment and commercial hub of the city conserving taste of traditional streets of the city.



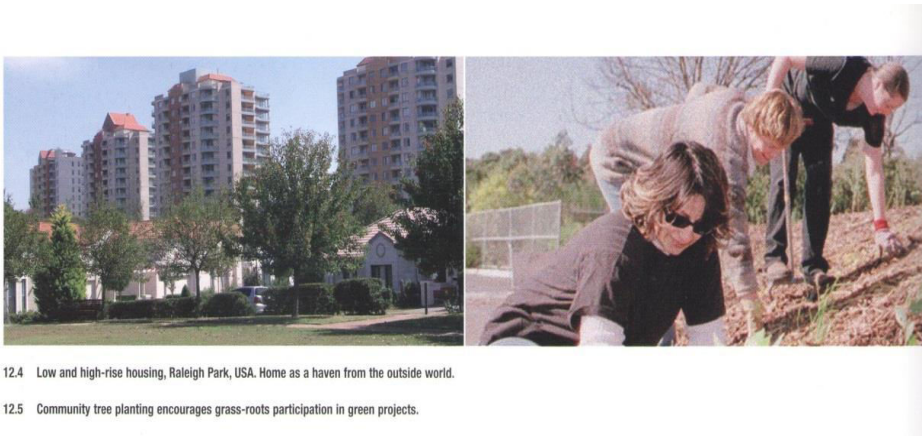


10.2 Lan Kwai Fong location plan. Small block footprints create a dense urban enclave of streets suited to new service industries created by market forces rather than planning.

10.3 Elevation of D'Agular Street. Nondescript 1960s office and apartment buildings have been found to be flexible for change of use and provide density of activity with street frontage of bars and restaurants.

In Chapter 11, **Ken Worpole** again reinforces the view that urban designers need to pay attention to the fine detail of human needs and aspirations to create places that enlarge people's capacity for self-confidence and sociability. Discussing some concepts introduced by Jan Gehl in part 2.

The male-oriented perceptions continue to dominate the conceptualization of space is the theme of **Mardie Townsend's** Chapter 12. According to her, women opinions and views are being ignored despite of women liberation and tacit knowledge of family and community needs. Women as carers of the society and must be included in the design process.

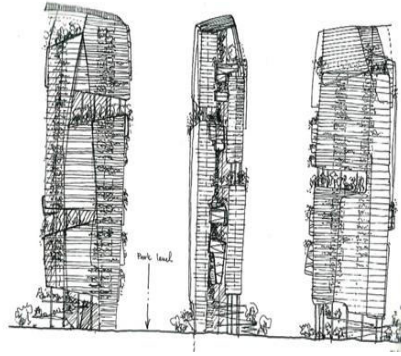


12.4 Low and high-rise housing, Raleigh Park, USA. Home as a haven from the outside world.

12.5 Community tree planting encourages grass-roots participation in green projects.

In Chapter 13, **Alain Cousseran** and in chapter 14, **Lucien Kroll** give an account of how the Modern movement rejected the idea of external space as something sculpted from the built volume and he criticizes this ignorance of what has constituted public space. They considered modern movement as "the rejection of idea of external space" as something carved from the built volume, that is to say "recessed" or "inscribed" space.

**Part 3** is all about the contemporary challenge of the sustainability agenda to shape the new urban future. Two contributors **Bill Dunster** and **Ken Yeang** in respective chapters 15 and 16 of **Part 3, "Sustainability through Technologies: Creating New Typologies"**, states that the challenge of the sustainable agenda is to rewrite the way we do things. Reducing environmental impacts can range from refining existing building forms to making them more energy efficient, to the creation of new building typologies like green skyscrapers and vertical living can totally change our perception of what constitutes the building blocks of urbanism.



*The application of urban design techniques has much to teach architects and developers in the design of such intensive buildings*

**Part 4, " Networks Expand Choice: New Frameworks for Urbanism"** the last part of the book emphasizes on future urban design frameworks and 4 contributors **Richard Rees, Andrew Cross, Jason Prior, John Worthington** supported their arguments by illustrative chapters on how powerful economic forces descend on cities, defy the street patterns and move the urban life blood, core retail and office space, into new shopping and commercial typologies. Urban design trends are changing progressively and with the merging of contemporary trends, new tendencies and forms of urban design are being shaped. Changes are occurring rapidly such as in networking branding and uncertainty contemporary trends are molding urban design to fluid and flexible designs.

In the penultimate chapter, **Thom Mayne** concisely describes his morphisms competition entry for the world trade center site and how they rethought the concept of the tower.

In the conclusion of the book written by editor, **Jon Rowland** explores the various approaches with some thoughts of new directions that have emerged from the polemical views of the contributors.

## **OVERALL CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell it is a book of beliefs and observations by some of the best practitioners and thinkers on urban design in the world. Its outcome is global, the views of the authors reflect the social concerns of 'place' and the more dynamic ideas on form that are emerging from Europe, the far east and the US. It is an approach towards the new theories to achieve better attractive livable cities.

The book is ideal and must read especially for urban design and architecture students throughout the world. Diversity and variety in the ideas of the book distinguish it from any other urban design book and striking graphics add spice to the experience.

Although the book touches almost every aspect of urban design, it lacks the issues faced by developing countries and views of urbanists from any other region and culture other than Europe.