

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has demonstrated some of the current confusion and inconsistency regarding the specification of desirable street types, patterns and hierarchies that influence the form and structure of urban layout. This effectively expresses the design debate as a research agenda for the remainder of the book (Box 2).

BOX 2. KEY ISSUES FOR RESOLUTION

1. The basis for street type.
2. The connection between street type and hierarchy.
3. The identification and justification of 'good' and 'bad' hierarchy.
4. The distinction between hierarchy and pattern.
5. The identification of 'preferred' and 'discouraged' patterns.
6. The relationship between pattern and process of generation.

The first key issue is that of street type: there is no place in conventional road hierarchy for the traditional urban street. Then, there is no clear or consistent basis for reconciling the street of the current urban design agenda with the 'link' in conventional transport analysis, or road type in conventional hierarchy. The basis for conventional hierarchy itself seems somewhat unclear – whether regarded as 'good' or 'bad' hierarchy by engineers or urban designers.

We have also seen that there is a lack of clear and consistent guidance on the overall form that a street pattern should take. On the one hand, highway engineering approaches are criticised for being too rigid, and yet these do not seem to prescribe any particular pattern; on the other hand, there is a rather diverse range of urban design and planning aspirations, which are either expressed too unclearly – for the purposes of description – or perhaps too specifically, for the purposes of prescription. For those approaches departing from conventional engineering principles, it is sometimes difficult to grasp what kind of theory might be underlying the rhetoric. Where a certain kind of desired pattern *is* clearly graspable – the simple rectangular grid, for example – its theoretical justification is not at all clear or consistent.

In general, design guidance has to maintain a careful balance between being too nebulous and being over-prescriptive. Bill Hillier points out that the drawback of many normative theories of design is that they are over-