

# THE CORE OF URBAN DESIGN WORK: PROCEDURES AND PRODUCTS

# PART 3

Specifying what falls within and without the core of urban design work will raise the ire of a number of city planners, landscape architects and architects. Each profession has a broader view of its own work than the view of its work held by people outside it. In order to understand what urban design is in comparison to those activities and products described in Part 2 it is necessary to identify a particular set of processes and products as being the heart of urban design. The position taken here is that those people, architects mainly, whose work in the 1960s and 1970s defined the field ‘almost got it right’.

The core of urban design work is defined here primarily in terms of common processes of design and administration. There is a significant intellectual similarity between varieties of products generated by the same generic method within a specific design paradigm. True, it is possible to cut the cake in another direction. An organization based on product types would allow the impacts of differences in methodological approaches to be explicated. It would not, however, show the thought processes, similar though they may be, that differentiate urban design from the traditional practices and views of city planning, landscape architecture and architecture.

Urban design, as stated in Chapter 1, is fundamentally concerned with the design of the three-dimensional qualities of the public realm of human settlements, taking into consideration the fourth dimension – time. Time is a consideration in urban design in many ways. It is both a factor in the way an urban design is experienced and in its relationship to its cultural context at different moments in its history. Some of the projects described in this part of the book have been hailed a great success at one moment and as a failure at another only to be regarded as a success at a third time.

Time is also a factor in the evolution of an urban design project. Many of the schemes included here evolved as perceptions of the nature of the problem being addressed changed in response to shifts in their political and economic contexts. There were five clearly different proposals for the Barbican site (see Chapter 7) and at least six distinct designs were produced for Battery Park City during its 30-year evolution, each based on a contemporary urban design paradigm (see Chapter 8).