

# Total urban design



Total urban design occurs when an entire project is carried out under one auspice and under the direction of an individual designer or a group acting as an individual. It is completed as one piece of work from property development to design to implementation. The concern is from the broadest policy issues, to the architecture, to the landscaping and to the details of street furniture. Total urban designs include a wide variety of product types: new towns, urban precincts of various descriptions (either as cleared site projects or as partial redevelopments), new suburbs, housing developments, campuses and historical revitalizations. Some projects are mixed types.

The strengths of total urban designs lie in their unity of appearance and, often, boldness of form. To critics this unity is their weakness. There is certainly the danger of them being dull, boring, if sanitary places but that is not necessarily because they are total urban designs. Many have indeed proven to be disappointing once they have been experienced for a short while but it is because of the paradigm followed. Attitudes towards specific total urban designs vary from observer to observer and they change over time. Designs (e.g. the Barbican, London) that were originally praised for the strength of their ideas were then seen to be lacking the diversity, individualism and the complexity that the traditional city offers. The Barbican, amongst other schemes, is now seen as a fine design.

The total urban design schemes, particularly housing projects from the 1950s and 1960s, based on the Modernist ideology that sunlight and air are the crucial variables in urban design are no longer seen as worthy substitutes for the personal identity and the variety of behaviour settings that many seemingly run-down areas of cities possess. Sunlight and air are indeed fundamental human requirements but whether they should override so completely other design considerations (as they still do in many large-scale housing projects in Asia today; see Figure 7.1) has been questioned (Miao, 2003).

It is extremely difficult, for one hand to design for variety. Urban designs schemes carried out all-of-a-piece following New Urbanist ideas have thus become the accepted paradigm of many architects at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the United States and there is considerable sympathy for the ideology elsewhere. Many Modernist design ideas are, however, still alive,