

Greater multi-professional collaboration would, I am convinced, produce better, more coherent places, because no one profession has all the answers to the complex task of designing livable cities.

Public places within a town belong to the people of that town – they do not belong to developers or investors, the police or traffic wardens. Their nature will be influenced by their scale, shape and size; the ways in which they are related one to another; the uses and activities which they contain, and the way in which traffic of all kinds is handled. The proper civilized use of places – streets, squares, alleys, promenades and so on – can be achieved visually, functionally and psychologically, through sensitive and imaginative design. If, for example, motorists feel like guests in a predominantly pedestrian area, hopefully they will behave like guests. Is this not infinitely to be preferred to a plethora of street signs and prohibitions backed up by tedious byelaws and penalties?

The same is true of buildings. New buildings are also guests in the existing urban environment and need to show due deference to their host and their companions. This is not to invite false modesty; nor is it to say that there shouldn't be room for the occasional live wire or prima donna. What architects and clients need to accept, however, is that the greatest contribution that they can make to the built environment of the town or city is to construct good, backcloth buildings.

The challenge is clearly very great – finding ways of promoting the renaissance of the public realm in our towns and cities. But it is a potentially very rewarding and enjoyable one. It demands a new set of priorities in which, basically, *places* take precedence over buildings and traffic. This will be hard for the individual players to accept – be they architects, engineers or developers – if they maintain their professional separations. The more they learn to collaborate – to try to meet agreed, common objectives for the urban environment – the easier and more productive the process will become.

In the hope that it will be useful to readers, this chapter concludes with a short list of recommendations, related to the theme of the chapter, which can be used as a checklist by practitioners.

## Recommendations/action checklist

1. The first priority is to agree what sort of public realm is appropriate in any particular area and then to agree the buildings, development and circulation system which are appropriate to it. Usually this is done the other way round, with devastating results for the urban fabric.
2. Places need to offer variety to their users. They need to be unique and different from one another – each rooted in their own particular historical, geographical, physical or cultural context.
3. In most instances, individual buildings will be subservient to the needs and the character of the place as a whole. If every building screams for individual attention, the result is likely to be discordant chaos. A few buildings can, quite legitimately, be soloists, but the majority need simply to be sound, reliable members of the chorus.
4. Many town centres are small enough to be considered as single places. In the larger towns and the central areas of cities, over time, areas of different character are probably discernible. These should be defined and developed, providing they are for real, rather than artificial bits of make-believe or urban theatre that will, in the long run, devalue reality.
5. Try not to view the organization or reorganization of towns and cities purely from the rather exclusive points of view of the motorist or the developer. It is of greater importance to consider the needs and aspirations of people as a whole – with priority being given to pedestrians, children and old people. This simple change or widening of priorities could, by itself, transform our urban environment and lifestyle.

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