

revision, whereas at the time of decision making, it would have been thoroughly rational. Other examples include changes in administrative organisations, a change in interest rate or a crisis of over-production can all render what looked rational into irrational.

Urban design as a social process

We can also look at the urban design process as a social process due to the involvement of a large number of actors with various roles and interests who interact in different stages of the process. Design is often prepared by a group of designers interacting with other professionals: the agencies who control resources and rules such as landowners, financiers, planning authorities and politicians. The interaction continues with the parties involved in the implementation phase, with the users of the space, and with those who would be affected by it.

According to instrumental rationality, the process would only be rational if it ends in the purpose that was expected from it. As distinct from that, the form of rationality used here is one which aims at consensus between the players involved, and is in general making reference to norms and values shared by them as a point of departure. However, the patterns of rationality in the process and its outcome are open to distortion due to the power relations involved. Any disruption in this dialogue would either end in the break up of the process or to a new level of practical discourse where consensus is sought. If, however, all levels of interaction are not open to rational discourse, then the distortions might put any potential consensus at risk.

An example of the absence of consensus between the players which has led to disastrous results is the postwar planning policy and implementation of slum clearance without consulting the communities. The modernist rejection of context can be seen as the manifestation of instrumental action, which has been a major feature of the scientific and technological age. On the other hand, its opponent, contextualism, can be seen as focusing on the social interaction, which employs norm-based rationality.

It can be argued that arriving at a consensus would not necessarily guarantee the rationality of the action. It seems that consensus in technical-rational action is more readily available since the point of departure in any discourse will be existing technology and scientific knowledge, even though scientific knowledge might be contestable or alternative technologies, at comparable costs, be available for any specific task.

Since the product of urban design is the manifestation of a set of policies or interests as solidified in physical space or its management, it becomes evident how the role of urban designers can be important. They would act as intermediary players in a complex interactive process. Their ability to convince others through all forms of presentation will have strong impacts on the process as a whole.

Urban design as an aesthetic-expressive process

There is also a third angle: to look at urban design as an aesthetic-expressive process, what Lynch (1981; 1984) called a playful and imaginative creation of possible form. In this process, designers are interacting with their own subjective world and, by employing their aesthetic understanding and graphic skills, express their spatial concepts in the form of an appropriate scheme.

Here, among the identifiable structures, with which the agency interacts, are the subjectivity of the designer and the medium of expression. The subjectivity of the designer has been developed through contacts with the outside world. It includes a 'library' of images and arrangements in the real world, which the designer sees as appropriate and beautiful. Designers often work by making frequent references to this library in the design process. Through a process of adaptation and adjustment, trial and error, designers set the stored images, or new combinations of them, against a concrete context and arrive at the required form.

Interacting with the medium of expression can have different layers. On the one hand, according to the requirements of the task at hand, appropriate forms of expression and presentation are chosen. Graphic and verbal techniques of communication are employed to convince the other agencies, and first of all the client, of the worth of the design. On the other hand, traditions in a design profession have their own normative powers as to what is acceptable. At this level, there is always an ongoing discourse between the members of a design profession, which not only involves the present members of the profession, but also embraces historical periods and their representatives. Through these interactions, conventions are developed, which become a source of influence on, and if needed suppression of, lay judgements.

Through a Habermasian viewpoint, the form of rationality here is the authenticity with which the ideas are being expressed. In the subjective realm, the authenticity of expression might produce a moment