

of truthfulness, but it would hardly account for the plurality of such moments as produced by plurality of personalities and interests. It can be seen how expressive rationality can have an adverse effect on rational consensus. Any attempt to reach a consensus in expression might be threatened by attempting to standardise the richness of expression and experience that a combination and variety of individuals and periods can offer. Of course, this point can not be overstressed since there is an optimum level of variety that people can accept, beyond which there is a tendency to simplicity and homogeneity rather than plurality.

Many have tended to look at urban design from only one of these three angles that we analysed. Some tend to see it as only a technical process and therefore equated with 'big' architecture or 'big' engineering. Some see it as only a social interaction to reach new institutional arrangements, and so tend to focus on its management capacities rather than on production of space. Yet others tend to see it as an artistic activity which should be taken up only by talented designers. Such uni-dimensional foci would naturally lead to narrow definitions and viewpoints at the cost of undermining the reality of the process and its plurality of aspects.

It is quite obvious from this analysis that each segment in the urban design process can have at the same time an involvement of three forms of action and rationality, each having a direct impact on the other forms. Despite the limitations of such an attempt towards making a multi-directional approach to the analysis of the urban design process, it can provide a powerful analytical and normative tool in complex situations. It can contribute to gaining an insight into the urban design process and its component parts (Madanipour, 1996b). It can also be useful in the practical design processes by urging the designers to be constantly aware of the multiplicity of the dimensions of the process in which they play a significant part.

## Conclusion

Urban design, as we have seen, still suffers from a lack of clarity in its definition, partly due to its coverage of a wide range of activities. We have also seen that a broad definition is what we need to deal with these ambiguities. Rather than being confined in the differences and minutiae of these activities, it is still possible to see it as a process through which we consciously shape and manage our built environment.

Urban designers are interested and engaged in this process and its product. By using this broad definition, we can avoid seeing urban design as merely engaged in the visual qualities of small urban places, or, on the other side of the spectrum, in the transformation of an abstract urban space. It is only through broad definitions that we can encompass the range of interests and involvements of urban design, in all its macro- and micro-scale, process and product, and visual and spatial aspects.

Urban design therefore can be defined as the multi-disciplinary activity of shaping and managing urban environments, interested in both the process of this shaping and the spaces it helps shape. Combining technical, social, and expressive concerns, urban designers use both visual and verbal means of communication, and engage in all scales of the urban socio-spatial continuum.

We have seen an emergence of interest in urban design. Its concern for making places and improving the quality of the urban environment has attracted support from unexpected quarters (Cuthbert, 1996). In a social world in which 'expert-systems' have found crucial importance (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994), urban design has emerged as a critique of those expert-systems involved in shaping urban environments. Even if this does not lead to the rise of a new discipline, a clearer understanding of urban design will help the development of the established disciplines of town planning and architecture, by singling out the directions to which they have not paid enough attention. As such its impact on these expert-systems will be 'reflexivity', offering a new dynamism and the possibility for change and improvement. In this context, helping to clarify the nature and scope of urban design becomes a pressing need. For those who are engaged in urban design, a clearer understanding will be beneficial in showing the directions in which both research and practice could develop. Self-awareness and confidence by those who are involved in shaping places will inevitably improve their capacity to make better places.

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