

have to look more closely at questions of communication by *whom*, to *what audience*, to *what purpose*, and with *what results*. The first distinction to make here is the difference between the *intended* meaning of the built environment (on the part of designers and their clients) and its *perceived* meaning as interpreted by others. Often, of course, both intended and perceived meanings coincide. Lasswell's "signatures of power," for example, often serve to reassure the rich, strong, and self-confident while reinforcing feelings of deference among the poor and the weak. Nevertheless, some of the poor and the weak may be provoked and radicalized by such symbolism. The point is that much of the social meaning of the built environment depends on the audience. Meanwhile, of course, designers' and developers' preconceptions of the audience(s) help to determine the kinds of messages that are sent in the first place. It is therefore very important to look more closely at the roles and objectives of the various actors involved in the design and production of the built environment.

## The design and production of the built environment

While architecture and urban design are important in contributing to the character of the built environment, much of the decision making about *what kind* of structure gets built, *when* and *where*, is in the hands not just of architects and urban designers but of others, such as developers and politicians. It is useful to think of the design and production of the built environment as a process that involves a variety of "actors" or decision-makers, each with rather different goals and motivations. As they interact with one another over specific development issues, they constitute an organizational framework for the evolution of the built environment.

One of the attributes of the built environment that makes it especially interesting is that it reflects, through its very creation, the decisions of form-givers such as landowners, financiers, developers, builders, politicians, and bureaucratic officials, as well as members of the design professions. The built environment must be seen as the culmination of land development processes that involve all of these key actors. Understanding the built environment requires us to identify the key actors, their motivations and objectives, their interpretations of market demand, and their relationships with one another.

In any given case, the creation of the built environment is the result of a variety of agents, all with their

own objectives, motivations, resources, and constraints, and all connected with one another in several different ways. In a city of any size, there will be hundreds of major landowners, dozens of developers, and scores of builders. Some agents will act for themselves within the web of the development process; others will be representing groups of people, large corporations, or public agencies. Some agents may play more than one role at a time. Landowners may be actively involved in subdividing and building, for example; while city governments may act as both regulators and entrepreneurs. As long as we bear these caveats in mind, it is possible to sketch the agents that are typically involved in the creation of the built environment (see, for example, Baerwald, 1981).

### Landowners

Landowners stand at the beginning of the chain of events involved in the design and production of the built environment. While different types of landowners behave in rather different ways, all of them influence the outcome of the city building process in two broad ways: (1) through the size and spatial pattern of parcels of land that are delivered to speculators and developers and (2) through conditions that they may impose on the subsequent nature of development. In terms of the size and spatial pattern of land parcels, much, of course, depends on the initial pattern of land holdings. The large *ranchos* and mission lands around Los Angeles, for example, have formed the basis of extensive tracts of uniform suburban development, while in cities along the Atlantic seaboard of the United States, where the early pattern of land holdings was fragmented, development has been more piecemeal.

Because many landowners often sell only part of their holdings at a time, they have a strong interest in what happens to the land they sell. In the past, it was very common for landowners to sell off parcels of land with contractual provisos—*restrictive covenants*—that limited the nature of subsequent development. Such covenants usually discriminated against low-status groups and socially undesirable land uses, sometimes in a very explicit way. With changed social attitudes and tougher laws against discrimination, restrictive covenants are now somewhat less common, but they have by no means disappeared. Rather, the practice has been to frame them obliquely, stipulating minimum plot sizes or residential densities, for example, and so ensure development for more affluent users.