



Piece-by-piece urban design

The overlap between city planning and urban design occurs when the mutual concern is with the three-dimensional physical design of the environment, the detailed activities it should house, and with the nature of the milieu as a public display. In the case of master planning, city planning and urban design may sometimes coincide (as in the case of Runcorn). Thorough comprehensive plans have a set of clear urban design schemes within them – the whole system being held together by the armature of the plan's infrastructure. When planning gets down to the precinct level with clear specifications for the activities that should characterize an area and the building and/or infrastructure types required to afford them, it becomes concerned with urban design.

Piece-by-piece urban design is one method for improving the quality of precincts of existing cities. It does not, like all-of-a-piece urban design begin with a specific concept plan showing the desired physical end state of a precinct. Rather it begins with a generalized mental image of how an area should perform and what it should contain to get that performance. It is an alternative view of what urban design is.

Planning Districts and Urban Design

Kevin Lynch identified districts as one key factor in the cognitive map people have of cities (Lynch, 1960). A district, well bounded or not, is a precinct that is characterized by a similar texture of buildings in terms of their massing. It is frequently an area that houses a particular set of activities. Most cities have a clear central business district; many have clear shopping and entertainment districts. Some have areas dominated by ethnic minorities. Consider all the cities around the world that have Chinatowns. On a smaller scale many have, for instance, a jeweller's row. The mix of these elements gives a particular city its peculiar identity. In many places these districts are under threat due to changing land values as the result of technological or social change. Piece-by-piece urban design addressing the particular problems of a district is one way of shaping a district's nature in a particular direction.

Piece-by-piece urban design differs from city planning in its use of zoning. Whereas zoning controls are generally used to protect citizens from the negative