

The labels given fields of human endeavour change as the issues perceived by society to be important change. Urban design is a label coined at a time, in the English-speaking world at least, when architecture and city planning were developing distinct and clearly separate identities. Whether or not the term ‘urban design’ will endure or soon be replaced by a more precise term or terms remains to be seen. The term will probably continue to be used loosely as it is now. Maybe it will be abandoned for the same reason – because it is imprecise. Parts 2 and 3 of this book have discussed the realm of urban design as perceived over the past 50 years through the description of 50-odd case studies. The range of concerns that these case studies display will remain and may well increase in breadth and depth in the future.

All the traditional design fields are undergoing change. City planning has broadened in its scope of concern in an attempt to be comprehensive in its outlook; landscape architecture has considerably extended its domain of interest from a horticulture base to include urban environments, while architecture has many practitioners who focus on different aspects of the built environment. If anything, architecture has contracted its scope of concern spinning off sub-fields as new environmental problems have arisen. Architecture and urban design were once seen as one endeavour everywhere. In some European countries they still are but as architects are being asked to address urban issues with greater thought, urban design may spin away to become an independent (although not exclusive) professional field.

There has been a shift in the intellectual processes involved in urban designing over the past 50 years. It is implicit in the case studies. Urban design began in an era when Modernist architectural ideas about the design of cities and their precincts held sway. Rationalist and Empiricist design paradigms vied for hegemony. Urban Design emerged as an identifiable professional field in response to the limitations of, particularly, architectural ideas about the nature of the future city as presented in the Athens Charter of Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) (see Sert and CIAM, 1944). The utility of Empiricist ideas, particularly as represented by the Garden City paradigm, was also strongly questioned (see J. Jacobs, 1961).