

11

Learning from the case studies: current and future issues in urban design

The urban designs, landscapes and buildings described in the case studies presented in this book have, with a few exceptions, been remarkably successful. The people who visit, use or live in them generally enjoy the results. They have been thoughtful responses to the concerns they address as their clients, property developers and designers have perceived the issues to be. None are whimsical, highly egotistical statements, although many have strongly opinionated designers behind them. A couple of them were misguided; in retrospect many have incurred opportunity costs – they could have been done better. They have all been carefully conceived and executed within the limitations of the resources, intellectual and financial, available at the time of their creation. Yet all have aspects that might be regarded, to put it gently, as poorly considered. Much can be learnt from them all.

The first lesson is that there is no single ‘best practice’ in urban design. All urban designs deal with a number of issues that are generic, or universal, in nature, but also concerns that are highly specific. Sorting out the complexities of a case and what is important and what is less so for whom is always difficult and arduous. The easiest way to deal with them is to assume that they do not exist – to ignore them and plough ahead. All the case studies presented here address some issues more thoroughly than others.

How well does the marketplace, as represented by property developers and their architects, respond to changes taking place in the world? It has certainly been slow in responding to changes in household types. Where it has responded it has been to the top end of the economic scale (e.g. the Canadian company Bosa Development Corporation in designing for the young affluent singles market in its developments in San Diego in the late 1990s and early 2000s; see Figure 11.1). By all reports, it has succeeded in meeting the needs of that highly mobile segment of the population very well. There are, however, many people whose needs are not being met by the marketplace and many issues that the marketplace is reluctant to address. Only two of the case studies included here – Pruitt-Igoe (see Chapter 7) and Aranya township (see Chapter 10), address the problems of the poor. The former is generally regarded as a failure in both public policy and architectural design terms while the latter is deemed to be successful. Both relied