

designing to mitigate the impacts, particularly of vehicles loaded with explosives being driven into buildings, is regarded as a fundamental aspect of public space design in the early twenty-first century. The consequence is that barriers, either overtly or as elements such as concrete flower boxes, are increasingly shaping significant public spaces. The objective is to prevent access by vehicles to the front doors and ground floor windows of buildings.

It would be a pity if buildings become designed as fortresses with blank façades on the ground floor. The result would be that the environment for pedestrians would be dull and would discourage people from walking along the streets. One can add murals and reliefs to make blank façades less boring as required in Bellevue, Washington, but such devices are hardly a substitute for the perception of activities. People enjoy vicarious participation in the lives of other people in the city. We need to free up the public realm for everybody to enjoy. Fears of crime and terrorism discourage us from doing so.

Procedural Issues

The urban designing process is complex. The way it should be carried out is open to debate. There are different ways of getting involved, of deciding on/designing the issues to address, different ways of designing solutions and different ways of evaluating, choosing and implementing them. There have been and are two major intellectual traditions in designing: the Empiricist and the Rationalist. The former involves learning from experience – from precedents – and the latter is based on logical design based on a set of idealistic propositions. Despite this generalization, many Empiricist urban designs have been highly idealistic and Rationalist ones have drawn from precedents as well, although that is often not admitted. Many designs are, however, products of a purely pragmatic design process.

The Nature of the Design Process

Models of design were introduced in Chapter 2. The process is full of ups and downs, backtracking and leaping ahead as, particularly, the all-of-a-piece urban designs included here show. Urban design process deals with ‘wicked’ issues – those that cannot be grasped with total comprehensive understanding. Problems and opportunities can never be perceived with total clarity; we can never identify all the issues of importance in a particular situation let alone deal with them. What the future holds for us is unknown although we can make sensible predictions about the future if we have sound empirical knowledge. This knowledge is, however, based on the present. The role of the urban designer is to provide ideas, bring attention to pitfalls and provide advice about the future.

The major initial decision from the designer’s viewpoint in any design process is whether to get involved or not. Many decisions will already have been made before a designer is sought; a preliminary brief will, for instance, have been