

The lay-public often cannot comprehend the consequences of designing in one manner rather than another. Often any environmental change is seen as negative. In many suburban communities, for instance, the fear of high-rise buildings is so embedded in ways of thinking that sensible discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of taller buildings, residential or commercial, seems impossible. In the development of the Denver Technological Center, pressure from the residents of surrounding areas resulted in a major constraint on the height of buildings. The result is the buildings are all of the same height and flat-topped (see Figure 8.66). While a sense of unity is achieved, it is hardly a visually exciting precinct.

How does one get the public involved and, more importantly in specific projects, how does one get all the stakeholders to actively engage in discussions before crises occur? Much of the public furor over the building of Darling Harbour arose because Sydneysiders did not grasp what the scheme would be like when completed (see Chapter 8). The media – newspapers and television – have been important in bringing visions of what places can be like to popular attention. They were constantly involved in Curitiba and in the design of Battery Park City and now the proposals for the World Trade Center site in New York. They have also been important in moulding people's attitudes. What the lay-public sees as desirable in illustrations is what they seek and, in turn, the press feeds images back to them of what they want to see. Advertisers dictate much. It is difficult to break into this cycle but urban designers have a role as educators. A detailed knowledge of case studies can be used in this educational process.

The Nature of Creativity

The design professions bestow great esteem on what they perceive to be 'creative' designers. Such designers are those who produce works that are geometrically, structurally or spatially a departure from the norm in response to what they see as problems needing to be addressed. The question is: 'What freedom of action should individual designers have in creating the public realm of cities?' Those observers who regard urban design as a fine art would argue for little or no outside interference into what an individual designer/artist does. The population simply has to live with the consequences in the name of Art. The 'art defence' – that some object or environment is an expressive act of an individual and thus a work of art – has been used to justify many design decisions, from pieces of sculpture to squares to streets, that are detrimental to the enjoyment of the city. Sometimes this has been a purposeful design objective. Making people feel uncomfortable, physically or psychologically, is, however, difficult to justify. Purposefully making poorly functioning places even worse with buildings or public art seems antisocial.

This discussion comes back to that on the rights of individuals and definitions of what is in the public interest with which this book began. The architectural