

# 12

## **Afterthoughts: Urban design - field or discipline and profession?**

Although it is difficult to reconstruct with precision the urban design history of the past 50 years, those who first used the term ‘urban design’ were concerned with large-scale multi-building architectural projects. These projects were necessitated in Europe by the devastation of World War II and in the United States by the changes taking place in cities as a result of new technologies, increased wealth, and changing ways of life and social values. Decolonization in Asia and much of Africa sparked new town and housing projects. Urban design was thought of as architecture particularly in Europe. Little distinction was made between city planning and architecture. The problem was that many politicians and architects alike saw the nature of cities and city life within an intellectual framework far removed from everyday life. Well-intentioned though much architectural thinking may have been, many of the projects simply did not work out well when built and inhabited and so were heavily criticized. In response the fields of architecture and city planning went in different directions.

The mainstream of architectural thought sought solace from the criticism of scholars, practitioners and critics such as Jane Jacobs (1961), Marshall Kaplan (1973), Peter Blake (1977) and Brent Brolin (1976) in the development of post-modern theories of aesthetics. City planners, particularly those in academia, turned their attention to the social and economic problems of cities that they considered more important. Luckily, a cadre of architects and planners and, on any extensive scale only much more recently, landscape architects, retained an interest in the qualities of the physical environment of cities. They focused their attention on how design can enhance or diminish the opportunities for people to achieve the positive aspects of what they are motivated to achieve.

This book has been about the efforts of these design professionals and many lay-people to improve the quality of cities in more than a piecemeal manner. True, some such efforts for and with people, young and old, rich and poor, and of different cultural backgrounds have achieved very little in providing the affordances that would help them fulfil their aspirations. At the same time, other such efforts have been highly successful particularly when they have dealt with life as lived. Many social policy and planning efforts have also been highly successful but others have been abject failures. Throughout these ups and downs, well-executed