

interest. It has regular meetings, organizes lectures and has its own journal. There is an Institute for Urban Design in the United States based and functioning mainly in New York, and similar loose groups of like-minded professionals around the world. The Congress for the New Urbanism is a powerful professional and lobbying group in the United States but with a worldwide membership and following. It has a manifesto, holds conferences and advocates ‘smart growth’. It promotes its aspirations and values to professionals, public officials and lay-people. No legal bodies comparable to boards of architecture, however, control admission to a ‘profession’ of urban design.

‘Urban designer’ is not a protected title in the way ‘architect’ is (although in many places this legal protection is under review as other groups claim expertise in designing buildings). Most professional design societies have sections devoted to urban design, in much the same way that psychological societies have a section devoted to the study of environmental psychology. Urban design is professional work. It will be individual professionals and the educational institutions that guide the development of the field and, perhaps, the discipline of urban design.

Almost all, if not all, substantial urban design education is offered beyond undergraduate level. Until recently most such urban design programs required training in architecture for admission. This demand has changed as the skills required of urban designers have become more clearly defined. The prevailing belief amongst designers is still, however, that no special training or knowledge beyond that offered within the traditional design fields is necessary to be able to create good urban designs. The position is that if one is a well-trained city planner, a landscape architect or architect one can carry out urban design activities without any additional knowledge – that if one can design a building well, one can design a spoon or a city well (Vignelli Associates, 1990). It is a dubious claim.

Many observers (e.g. Schurch, 1999) see urban design as lying at the intersect of the interests of the three main professions concerned with the layout of the environment – architecture, landscape architecture and city planning, to which I have added civil engineering as shown in Figure 12.1a. This position reinforces that taken here. From the observations I have made above, however, my inference is that urban design while overlapping these fields has developed its own area of expertise. Its relationship to the traditional design fields now looks more like in Figure 12.1b. It has become what it should never have become – a discipline in its own right. In doing so, however, it allows the other three fields to pursue their own interests without worrying about the complex issues of urban development and urban quality beyond their traditional concerns.

Rightly or wrongly, urban design is increasingly taking on the form of a discipline. Like many other disciplines, such as those under the umbrellas of medicine or the social sciences, it is occurring where its interests intersect those of traditional fields. It draws on and helps to create urban geography, engineering, environmental psychology, climatology and the management sciences. No single person can encompass all this knowledge and bring it to bear on decision-making