

*Los Angeles versus Alameda Book*, 2002) it was stated that a municipality ‘cannot get away with shoddy data or reasoning.’ These legal decisions are not universally applicable but the implied suggestion is that designers should seek evidence before claiming what the outcomes of design decisions will be. Knowing the outcomes of previous urban design efforts is one source of supportive evidence.

### ***The Quasi-public Role of Property Developers***

The entrepreneurs creating large-scale property developments often play a quasi-public role in the development of cities. This observation is particularly true of the 1980s and even more so of the 1990s. Public institutions now rely heavily on private sector investments in developing the public realm. Simultaneously there is demand for regulation on what these private sectors entrepreneurs seek to achieve and how they seek to achieve it.

It is the private sector that sees opportunities for investing profitably in new buildings or building complexes. They, like the banks who sponsor their works, want what they do to be a financial success. To be a financial success there must be some public demand for the products they are creating. At the same time, developers often have to be cajoled into building items that are perceived to be in the public interest but are not as profitable as other types of development. It requires public sector incentives to make the private sector take on such less-profitable ventures (see Chapter 9).

Property developers generally look at the city in terms of the opportunities for creating what they are used to building. For instance, a developer of office buildings will look for opportunities for building office buildings; one interested in parking garages will look for opportunities for building parking garages. Few ask the question ‘What is the best use of this site?’ or ‘How will the way I do this building improve the cityscape and the amenity for pedestrians?’ The conservative political view is that this process of individuals ‘doing their own thing’ benefits us all and should only be interfered with on health and safety grounds.

Developers’ attitudes vary considerably and they do not represent a common block of thought. Some are vitally interested in the common good; others are not. They do, however, have one thing in common. They have to make a profit on their investments. They are not necessarily opposed to governmental controls over their work provided the controls make sense and do not inhibit their work arbitrarily. Developers have a history of supporting design guidelines if the improvements the guidelines lead to ensure that their own investments are successful. Most developers, nevertheless, like architects, have powerful egos – they want to do things their own way.

A major debate nowadays in thinking about urban design is over how comprehensive a set of concerns it should encompass. What should be subject to public control and what should be left to the prerogative of the individual? The case studies included in this book vary considerably in their answers to this question. Much depends on the context of a project and the goals that it is supposed to fulfil.