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Urban design processes and procedures

Around the world many urban design schemes have been brought from the glimmer of an idea in somebody's head to being a completed part of a city. Many proposals remain unimplemented. Some were simply explorations of possibilities. Many were, in contrast, concrete proposals for specific projects. Some were designed with implementation processes that proved to be unfeasible. Some were the victims of political vagaries. Others simply disregarded the rights of individual landowners and/or the implied sources of funding were unavailable. Many were not implemented because property developers could not be induced to participate in building the scheme's components.

Many developers, public and private, hold competitions for design projects. A noticeable proportion of the case studies presented in this book were initiated through competitions. In its short history the World Trade Center site has been the subject of a number. There are many more examples. The People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, for instance, held an international design competition in 2003 for the design of a new central business district for the city. The entries had to consider the phasing of development but not how it was to be financed. They presented the officials of the city with a lode of ideas to mine. In such competitions winning entries often have to undergo substantial changes to make it financially possible to implement them.

Many architects and landscape architects regard issues of the financial feasibility of the urban design schemes they propose to lie outside their concerns. This attitude is surprising because the budget available is a central factor in the design of buildings and landscapes. Often, however, the issue of financing and how to get property developers to build what is desired only becomes an issue when a design proposal has been prepared. A proposal gives stakeholders something that they can understand. In almost every case the design is likely to change due to fiscal limitations. An urban designer with any stamina soon becomes embroiled in the issues of financing and the design of carrots and sticks to shape designs in particular directions. In autocratic societies implementing grandiose schemes is easy provided one is working for the dictator!