

3

An evolving typology of urban design projects

Urban designing involves the self-conscious intervention, great or small, into the marketplace for development and architectural services and the legal processes that shape the public realm of cities. The term public realm is understood here, as outlined in Chapter 1, in its broadest sense to include not only those elements of the built environment that are publicly owned and serve the public but also those elements, physical and social, that define public space and impinge on it visually and behaviourally. The question is: ‘Can the cumulative experience represented in a set of case studies be organized into a framework that aids professionals to deal with the situations they confront?’

Types and Typology

A type, as understood here, is a construct of a product or a process that serves as a generic model of a way of thinking. There are many books in architecture on building types: schools, hospitals and houses. Design professionals use them because they bring attention to the commonality of form requirements resulting from the purposes a building serves primarily in housing human activities, efficiently and in comfort. The concept of type has also, but less often, been applied to the aesthetic qualities of buildings.

Architects also design types to be emulated in solving categories of problems. Historically, the Unité d’Habitation was developed by Le Corbusier to be a type to be reproduced across the world (see Chapter 6). More recently, the pedestrian pocket has been promoted as a way to deal with problems of transportation and quality of life issues in residential area design (see Calthorpe, 1993). Contemporaneously the New Urbanist paradigm proposes an approach to design to be emulated (*Staff of New Urban News*, 2001). In all-of-a-piece design the buildings required to meet the specifications of a master plan are often identified by type (use, mass, aesthetic character). Here a type is concerned with the communality between cases, or examples, of urban designs. There are many ways of looking at types of urban design. The goal here is to make some sense of them by placing them in categories – by developing a typology of projects.