

The products of city planning and the nature of urban design



Urban design is often considered to simply be city planning. Is it? To many architects any scheme containing more than one building is city planning. Thus to them most of what is described as the core of urban design in Part 3 of this book is city planning. To other observers, city planning is land-use planning and to yet others it involves the formulation of economic and social policies. All city plans deal, explicitly or implicitly, with urban design in one form or another. This statement does not mean that city planning is focused on urban design, but that many planning policies that are not seen to have design implications do shape the architectural and urban landscape of cities and rural areas alike (Craighead, 1991).

City, or town, planning is seen differently in much of Europe, Latin America and Asia than in the English-speaking world. In addition, the concerns of the field have not been stable. In the United States, for instance, emphases have varied from city to city and have changed over time. For much of the period covered in this book, the focus of attention has been on social and economic planning. In continental Europe, planning and architecture are generally more closely allied in a single field that focuses heavily on the physical qualities of cities. As a result city planning is often urban designing.

A number of city-planning leaders such as Edmund Bacon, once head of the City Planning Commission in Philadelphia, were very much concerned with urban design in the 1960s and 1970s (see Bacon, 1974). The economic state of American cities in that era and the following decade was, however, so precarious that urban design concerns were often thrust aside. Planners began to regard the built environment as only marginally important in establishing the quality of life of people. The lesson of having done so has been learnt from those cities that strove for development at any cost as well as those that successfully maintained an interest in urban design. The latter have tended to do well.

The quality of the built city and its behaviour settings has proven to be economically important. From the early 1990s onwards many planning agencies have established sections on urban design and have been employing professionals knowledgeable either through education or practice about urban design. In many places this heightened awareness of the importance of the cityscape