GENERATING ALTERNATIVES 5

INTRODUCTION

Central to the urban design process is the exploration of problems through an examination and testing of solutions. Many of the problems in urban design could be described as 'wicked', in the sense that they are difficult to define and they are without an obvious and generally agreed solution. The nature of the process, therefore, by which these problems are approached is dialectical, taking the form of a dialogue between problem and solution. Inevitably the designer expends considerable energy understanding the problems with which he or she is confronted. Clearly the designer, by engaging in this dialectic between problem and solution, clarifies the definition of the problem and the direction of the investigation necessary to seek the solution, as the process itself evolves. The nature of the problem only becomes clear as the iterative process develops. The solutions or ideas used in solving urban design problems for the purpose of this text will be termed concepts. Generating design ideas for solving problems of urban structure is fundamental to urban design. Design concepts are the basis of the creative process: without them the process of urban design degenerates into a sterile activity. Generating concepts is an act of the imagi-

nation. Concepts, or the ideas which inform alternative ways of perceiving the problem, can be generated using a number of techniques. Ideas can be gleaned from an analysis of the site, from a study of historical precedent, from theoretical propositions, by using synectical techniques or the art of analogy, by techniques of lateral thinking including brainstorming and by seeking ideas directly from the public. This chapter explores the use of analogy for the generation of ideas; being particularly concerned with concepts drawn from nature. Case studies from Surrey, Derby and Norway illustrate the use of some of these concepts in practice. The chapter also explores techniques used when working with the public on the process of concept formation. The process of public participation in design is illustrated with a case study from Newark in Nottinghamshire.

According to Lynch there are three main metaphors which attempt to explain city form.[1] The magical metaphor for the earliest ceremonial centres attempted to link the city to the cosmos and to the environment. The second metaphor uses the machine as an analogy for the city. The concept of the city as a machine is quite different from conceptualizing it as a microcosm of the universe, a perfect unity modelled on the universe and anchored by orienta-