# URBAN DESIGN

Urban design concerns the physical form of urban space at the scales of a city or a precinct; it may be conceived as *the art of shaping cities and their public realm while producing livable urban space;* Deriving from this, urban design has to draw together many constituents of *place making* - such as architectural forms, urban landscaping, functions and uses of space, economic viability, social equity, environmental sensitivity and responsibility - into the creation of places of amenities, beauty and identity.

The evolution of urban forms over at least two millenniums exhibits a variety of schools of thought, approaches and methodologies of urban design. However, the end of the 20$^{th}$ century has marked a major turning point in the significance, complexity and task of urban design. This is associated to contemporary dramatic and universal changes and developments concerning economy, society and space: Economic globalization, new urban networks and new flexible hierarchies of cities, volatility of capital and intercity competition; the rise of post-industrial urban economies with cultural, leisure and consumption economies ranking top; new technologies, informational societies, high mobility of individuals and time-space compression; mass migrations and the generation of multi-ethnic urban societies; cultural diversity and individualization and the creation of multi-cultural postmodern societies; the deterioration of natural environment and the new environmental ethics and consciousness.

## The competitive milieu:
## The increasing power and the new task of urban design.

Examining the impacts of the above global changes and developments, it may be said that under the condition of economic globalization, traditional factors (e.g. geographical location, physical infrastructure) that once affected the location of new business to a specific place, appear to matter less than ever. Due to the capacity of capital to switch locations, all cities – perhaps with the exception of 'global cities'

having sufficient power to mastermind volatility of capital - have become interchangeable entities to be played off one against another forced to compete from positions of comparative weakness for the capital investment. In the new milieu of intercity competition, cities have more than ever to offer inducements to capital investments and businesses either by a refashioning of their economic attractiveness (e.g. tax abatements, property, transport facilities) or/and by amendments in their soft infrastructure. The later mainly involves (a) *the development of cultural and leisure amenities,* and (b) *the enhancement of the city's image and place identity through landscape transformations.*

These spatial amendments/prerequisites for bidding intercity competition first entail a shift in urban politics and governance: From the traditional managerial forms before the 1990s and the entrepreneurial forms in the 1990s, to contemporary radical new models focused on *amenity urban growth,* both economic and demographic. Because such a model of urban politics and governance appears to fit well into the profile of post-modern societies which are characterised by high mobility of an increasing middle class of young professionals and high-tech staff mainly courted by cities competing for them with cultural and leisure amenities and quality of urban space. Second, they give rise to a new paradigm concerning the relationship between urban design and urban economic growth. While for centuries the quality of urban space and urban design innovations have been the outcome of economic growth of cities (see for instance the Greek and Roman cities in Classical Antiquity, the Italian cities in the Renaissance period), in the era of globalisation and intercity competition they have become prerequisites for the economic development of cities; and urban design has undertaken an enhanced new task as a means of economic development.

This new 'use' of urban design is combined with the efforts of cities to encourage the clustering of flourishing post-industrial economic activities (technology intensive and knowledge rich enterprises, high-level intermediary financial services, creative, cultural and leisure activities). The phenomenon of cluster-led redevelopment or/and renewal of inner city areas, mingling built heritage and innovative design schemes, generates a new species of landscape-collage dominated by two extremities: a) that of built heritage and tradition with rather local spatial references and b) that of spatial innovation having more universal or global spatial references. In this respect, the

emerging new landscapes of the 21st century-city may be termed as *'glocalised'*. Such kind of urban landscapes mostly corresponding to clusters of post-industrial economies, represent the city's new epicentres of prestige, power and symbolism that 'hard-brand' the built environment and add to its competitive edge. As typical such epicentres, one may refer to:

*(1) 'Entrepreneurial epicentres'* constituted by clusters of advanced financial intermediary services and technology-intensive and knowledge-rich firms (e.g. Potzdamer Platz, Berlin; 'Citylife', Milan; One North, Singapore);

*(2) 'High-culture epicentres'* constituted by clusters of museums, galleries, theatres, operas, concert halls, and the like (e.g. the Museums Quarter in Vienna, Rotterdam and The Hague);

*(3) 'Popular leisure epicentres'* constituted by clusters of cafes, bars, restaurants, popular-music clubs, etc (e.g. Temple Bar, Dublin; Bagladcity, Brick Lane, London; Westergas-fabriek**,** Amsterdam; Witte de Withstraat Rotterdam);

*(4) 'Culture and leisure waterfront epicentres'* constituted by clusters of culture and leisure activities such as museums, convention halls, galleries, concert halls, theatres, theme parks and promenades (e.g. the South Bank, London; the Forum of the Cultures, Barcelona; Abandoibarra, Bilbao; Port Melbourne, Melbourne; West Kowloon, Hong Kong).

The production of new epicentres and the 'use' of innovative urban design schemes as a 'tool' of urban economic development involves all classes and groups of cities - global cities, large cities, small cities, core cities and peripheral cities in large urban systems (e.g. the European urban system, the USA system). In global cities, they can support, maintain and enhance the city's metropolitan status (see for instance, London's Docklands, Berlin's Potzdamer Platz). In large cities, they can upgrade the city's rank in the hierarchies of the global urban systems as a new 'service pole' (see for instance, Barcelona, Milan, Seattle, Hong Kong,). In small peripheral cities without adequate indigenous resources to address intercity competition, they become critical controlling the city's future. They can handle problems of peripherality and decline through the restructuring of local economy and the transformation of urban morphology itself into a tourism resource. Bilbao in Spain has set a significant example. Bilbao's economy, mainly based on traditional industrial units, was in

decline during the 1980s. The redevelopment of the old industrial area along Nervion's riverside in the inner city and the creation of a high-culture and leisure waterfront epicentre with an indeed innovative design, was a redefining point for local economy – shifted towards urban tourism, cultural production and consumption. In particular, Frank O. Ghery's design scheme of the Guggenheim Museum and its surrounding open spaces does reinforce a new international paradigm gradually emerging in the last decade and concerning the relationship among urban design, urban morphology and urban tourism: Irrespective of the particular functions and activities accommodated in space, it is avant-garde design of both buildings and open spaces that can make urban morphology in itself and of itself a sightseeing, a tourist attraction.

## Informational, mobile, multicultural and environmentally sensitive societies: The new complexity of urban design.

In the last two decades or so, a series of new technological developments has strongly affected everyday life of individuals in developed regions of the global: First, new developments in ICT's, multimedia and telecommunications provide excessive information to individuals generating a growing flow of events in time, or a kind of 'acceleration of history', and giving rise to *information societies*. Second, the development and increasing use of mobile telecommunications (mobile cells, mobile internet connections), as combined with the development of high-speed transportation means and infrastructure, such as high-speed trains and closed high speed motorways in urban, suburban, and regional networks, offer individuals the potential to make use of almost all office facilities in terms of communication and work, while travelling. This has resulted in *high mobility* of individuals on all territorial scales - metropolitan, regional, continental, and the rise of the phenomenon of 'time-space compression' characterising the era of *new modernity*. Third, internet and its products, exhibit a rapid increase of users worldwide. This offers the potential of distance participation – or electronic access - of individuals in various social activities such as education, work, shopping, banking, recreation, leisure, tourism etc. These new modes of communication and social participation (e.g., tele-education, tele-working, tele-shopping, tele-banking, etc) tend to blur the limits among social activities which in the past were well distinguished in terms of both time and space. Nowadays, by

means of internet products and facilities like e-mail, on line access, teleconference, etc, social activities such as work, education, creativity and leisure may simultaneously occur in the same space. Such spaces are neither home, nor office; they have no clear functional identity; and therefore, they tend to represent 'non-places' (*'non-lieu'*) to use a term introduced by Mark Augé as early as 1992. In this respect, new technologies and their products appear to rearrange spaces, their form and function, at all levels of spatial organisation – from buildings to building complexes, to urban areas and cities – yet allowing cities to have a dispersed physical development. In this framework, urban design has to incorporate in its processes and outcome the new conditions of informational societies, acceleration of mobility, time and space compression.

Following economic globalisation, mass migrations from the developing regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are transforming the economically mature cities of Europe and North America into *heterogeneous, multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.* An important socio-spatial aspect of this transformation of cities is the spatial segregation of different cultures and social groups – voluntarily or involuntarily. Cultural pluralism is also reinforced by the ideas of 'diversity' and 'individualisation' characterising the spirit of post-modern urban societies. Old forms of social behaviour and classification (e.g. customs, ideological codes) do not function in contemporary societies as they used to do in the past. In many social activities, the 'diversity' and 'individualisation' of the individual's references and choices express the idea of *the 'world of otherness'* – i.e., the ways different and co-existing fields may define their own rights of being and reproducing themselves. In this context, urban design has to expand, to become richer, to produce spaces that simultaneously reflect all culturally divergent trends while integrating the city's different ethnic, cultural and social groups.

Finally, the gradual deterioration of the natural environment in many regions of the global has increased the environmental consciousness and sensitivity of societies and generated the necessity of assessing the environmental impacts of urban design projects. 'Sustainable' urban design has been established as a dominant school of thought in the 1990s. The "green" design schemes attempt to safeguard air, water, and earth by choosing *eco-friendly* building materials and construction practices. They

usually have many of the following virtues: green spaces for maximizing the natural cooling of buildings and the quality of air; passive solar energy; ventilation systems designed for efficient heating and cooling; alternate power sources such as solar power or wind power; energy-efficient lighting and appliances, water-saving plumbing fixtures; non-synthetic and non-toxic materials locally-obtained; responsibly-harvested woods; use of recycled architectural salvage.

*Dr. Aspa Gospodini,*
*Professor of Urban Planning and Design,*
*University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece*

## FURTHER READINGS

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