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VIEWPOINTS

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VIEWPOINTS

In addition to full-length research papers, an important feature of this new journal will be what we are calling “viewpoints”. Included here is the first installment – ten viewpoint pieces submitted by scholars and writers from a wide variety of backgrounds and locations offering insights on the future direction of scholarship on urbanism.

Specifically, we asked contributors to respond to the following.

We would like you to challenge the scholarly community by identifying two or three research topics that you believe are critical for advancing the knowledge and practice of creating and sustaining livable urban places. Your viewpoint piece will help identify a research agenda for scholars of urbanism, highlighting the challenges and deficiencies in our knowledge, as well as topics most deserving of deeper investigation.

For future issues, we invite readers to send their viewpoints to the *Journal of Urbanism* (email: journalofurbanism@asu.edu). We welcome all views on any topic germane to the study of urbanism.

Valuing urbanism

Matthew Carmona

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In 1976, Ian Bentley described urban design as being in a “prehistoric age”:

emerging as part of a critique of the contemporary urban situation: a critique of the urban environmental product, a critique of the process of development by which it is brought about, and a critique of the professional role involved in controlling it. (Bentley 1976)

Continuing his historical analogy, the 1980s and 1990s could be characterized as the Dark Ages that preceded the Renaissance in which we find ourselves today. Thus, critiques of urbanism have rapidly gained legitimacy and a new discipline (if not profession) – urban design – has emerged to deliver something new.

Yet, in common with the classical Renaissance, the rules of good urbanism – like those of classical architecture back then – are poorly understood and remain largely the concern of the few. The default option too often is still a very poor urban environmental product, and professions that are largely unaware and unconcerned about their part in its delivery.

To my mind, this state of affairs reveals a continuing problem that Bentley alluded to over 30 years ago; namely, that the process of development and the professionals responsible for managing it still seem congenitally unsuited to delivering good urbanism. Two factors are key. First, a critique that many have voiced is that pretty universally we start the built environment education process by indoctrinating students in the narrow preoccupations and biases of their future specialized professions – architecture, planning, engineering, property, and so forth. Other professions do it differently; lawyers are trained to understand the basis of tort and common law before specializing in, for example, criminal or matrimonial law. For their part, doctors need to understand the basics of physiology and biochemistry before embarking on a career in brain surgery. So for built environment professionals, why is the

bit that unites us all – the urbanism – so often taught as an afterthought, as a postgraduate specialism, or not at all?

Such an approach shuts the door once the horse has bolted. If we are to understand how we all contribute to a greater whole, we need to rethink radically and reverse our educational process. In the absence of this, we at least need to understand how our educational and professional structures impact on the resulting values that stakeholders bring to the development process, and how these can be influenced by those interested in the greater whole.

Second, with education and our professional structures delivering such a blinkered approach, we typically focus on the separate elements of the built environment and rarely on the connective tissue between. These, to many in the development process, represent only costs on that process and not opportunities to generate value. The impact is felt in those parts of the city where we all have a stake, but no one is responsible – the public realm. Consequently, it is here where, for me, the research challenge lies, in understanding how value accrues and to whom, and how it can be captured for the greater good of the everyday users of space and for society at large.

Tentative research in the UK and elsewhere indicates that good urbanism does add value and adds value in hard economic terms as well as in broader social and environmental ones. But these relationships are rarely direct or straightforward, and require both new ways of understanding value and of valuing place. They go hand in hand with understanding the values that the different professions place on the various outcomes from the development process, and on what this means for quality. This is the holy grail of the urban design research agenda; we have a long way to go.

Reference

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Green urbanism

Frederick Steiner

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This first urban century poses many challenges for our species and the future of our planet. With more than half the world's population now living in urban regions and with the number of people increasing, one challenge is how to make cities more livable. This will involve, first, protecting the most environmentally sensitive places in regions and, second, greening existing built-up metropolitan areas.

We are flooded with data about our planet. Through geographic information systems (GIS), the World Wide Web (WWW), and remote sensed data, we are more connected than at any time in our history. We can track hurricanes in real time as they cross the Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico. We can use Google to locate a map or aerial photograph almost anywhere in the world.

“We have created the equivalent of a central nervous system for the planet,” ESRI founder and GIS pioneer Jack Dangermond has observed, adding, “but it is a system without a brain.”

The ability to go beyond collecting data to analysis and action presents an important research opportunity. Arizona State University's Decision Theater provides an example of the research opportunities generated through information synthesis. We conceived the Decision Theater to enable citizens and policy-makers to visualize the findings of research. The theater consists of an interactive, three-dimensional immersive environment where

researchers and citizens can explore “what if?” analyses of wide-ranging scenarios. Initial funding for the theater came from a US\$3 million private gift that was matched by Arizona State. Since opening in 2005, the facility has attracted considerable research funding, including a US\$6.9 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

In the past century, we have created a built environment largely divorced from nature. Buildings produce around half the greenhouse gases and consume half the energy in our nation. Transportation systems contribute another 25% of both carbon dioxide production and energy consumption. As a result, the built environment accounts for around 75% of our energy and greenhouse gas challenges. Meanwhile, we will need to double our building and transportation systems by 2030. With existing systems unhealthy and unsustainable, we simply cannot continue business as usual.

The need to create greener, more sustainable, urban environments presents another important research opportunity. The growing work in the emerging field of urban ecology can make a valuable contribution. The National Science Foundation supports Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) projects, traditionally located in remote places. In the 1990s, the National Science Foundation established LTERs in two contrasting cities: Baltimore, Maryland, and Phoenix, Arizona. These LTERs pursue research on topics such as land-use and land-cover change, climate–ecosystem interactions, water management, fluxes of materials and socio-ecosystem response, and human control of biodiversity.

The Baltimore and Phoenix LTERs have stimulated other urban ecology research, most notably in the Puget Sound (an arm of the Pacific by Seattle, Washington) lead by University of Washington Planning Professor Marina Alberti. Urban ecology research generates ideas for planners about how to manage the needs of people and other species. Such research demonstrates how vegetation can have a cooling effect in urban areas. It suggests how water and energy can be conserved and biodiversity increased.

To pursue the research opportunities of green urbanism, certainly a knowledge of social systems and urban design will be important. However, ecological literacy will be essential.

Not your daddy’s metropolis

Jim Kunstler

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My own view of the American urban future is perhaps radically opposed to many of the prevailing fantasies – especially those based on utopian mega-structures and continued growth. Overall, I believe that the energy and climate problems we face will produce epochal discontinuities in our habits and practices, and in the ideas we associate with “progress.” The following can be regarded as topics worthy of study.

First, I believe we will see a reversal of the 200-year-long demographic trend of people moving from rural areas and small towns to big cities. I do not regard the gigantic metropolises of our times as sustainable under any circumstances in the years ahead. Nor is our system of industrial agriculture – a necessary component of the current arrangement. Therefore, I think we will see our cities contract substantially. Some cities in geographically unfavorable locations, such as Phoenix, Arizona and Las Vegas, Nevada, may vanish altogether in one hundred years. Older cities in more favorable places will probably densify at their old centers and along their waterfronts – though it is hard to predict the issue of rising sea levels under the regime of climate change. In any

case, the process of contraction is liable to be disorderly and difficult, and may take many decades to resolve.

Urban designers in recent years have made a grievous error in ignoring the need to restore waterfronts for maritime trade. Instead, they have been lined with condominiums and parkland. This will certainly have to change. The infrastructure for shipping will have to be put back.

In my opinion, the urban areas more susceptible to carrying on will be the smaller cities and traditional towns – and they will have to be associated with productive agricultural hinterlands. Rural land is likely to be inhabited differently, too, since farming in the 21st century will require more human attention (and perhaps animal labor). The cities and towns that have a chance to thrive will have to be associated with navigable waterways and rail lines.

The destiny of the late 20th-century suburbs is a question apart. My own view is that they have three possible outcomes – not necessarily exclusive of each other generally: slums, salvage material, and ruins. I do not regard most of our suburban fabric as suitable for retrofit. Manufactured and modular building materials – including concrete blocks, bricks, and metal sashes – will likely be scarce later in this century. I think we will see a lot of disassembly of existing structures in the suburbs.

One issue getting next-to-zero attention is the future of skyscrapers. I maintain that we will have a lot of trouble running tall buildings due to increasingly unreliable electric and natural gas supplies, and that this will determine the usefulness of these buildings. I regard any vision of the future city based on towers to be a tragic one.

Children, network urbanism and biophilia

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I would like to identify three critical research topics on advancing the knowledge and practice of creating and sustaining livable urban places. We are seeing the convergence of several group efforts, up until now isolated from each other.

- (1) Several distinct groups are now designing cities for human use rather than purely for occupation by machines. Thoughtful investigators are moving away from the disastrous modernist planning that erased tightly knit urban fabric in order to replace it with images of an alien modernity. I would add my concern about designing cities for our children. The urban form should satisfy children's physical and psychological needs and encourage them to be eager participants in our built environment. There are very few isolated regions of our contemporary cities where a child feels "at home" outside. The organized small scale is missing. A child is assaulted by visual and other aggressions: the world has been designed to be a hostile environment, and it is perceived as such. Adults can put up with a great amount of such environmental unease, but children are far more sensitive. Children retreat inside their house and their parents' automobile because these offer protection from the built environment.
- (2) The network model of cities reverses the old obsession of buildings as volumes strictly aligned on a grid, and towards the urban networks that make a city work. Our model of a city must try to understand – instead of stubbornly ignoring – this connective complexity. New Urbanists have made impressive advances (sometimes

uneven, but remarkably effective nonetheless) in implementing the ideas of human-scale neighborhoods, in a world that had all but forgotten urbanism. The key to this is a vastly increased connectivity acting on many different scales: car, pedestrian, public transport, etc., all interacting but not mutually exclusive. At the same time, scientific results such as small-world networks, inverse power-law scaling, and fractal structure are being used to explain how cities can be alive in a mathematical sense.

- (3) Biophilic design is a new topic of investigation, showing how human beings need intimate contact with natural forms. This is not for aesthetic purposes, but is instead a necessary component for our physiological and mental health. Most recently, a broad group of investigators from a wide range of disciplines: biology, computer science, ecology, economics, medicine, and sociology, has come together to conduct research and exchange ideas. Urban scholars are beginning to view nature (in gardens, roadside trees) as well as the use of natural materials in building, as fulfilling innate biological needs. This new approach reverses the unfortunate tendencies of the 20th century either to replace nature with a dead “machine aesthetic” or to degrade nature to a purely ornamental role. For this second reason, so much urban green today is useless because it has been designed to be seen and cannot be experienced intimately. Representation of our genetic nature in what we build, and in what we inhabit, makes our environment connective in an innate sense.

A short research agenda for scholars of sustainable cities

Jeffrey Kenworthy

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As the pressure grows for cities to contribute to greater local, national, and global sustainability because of global warming, peak oil production, and a host of other pressing environmental, social and economic factors, it is important for researchers to study topics that have immediate policy relevance in helping cities respond to these new realities.

There is a growing practical need in cities all around the world for high-quality case studies of urban development projects that are fundamentally driven by sustainability considerations. Policy people are constantly looking for practical, integrated sustainability projects developed in the real world that involve formal sustainability assessments and which show how particular developments will contribute to improved livability and sustainability in cities. Such projects may involve developing indicators by which to measure performance in different dimensions of sustainability. These developments, be they new housing areas, big transport projects such as new public transport lines with associated urban development, or major inner city revitalization projects, need to contribute simultaneously to enhanced, environmental, social, cultural, and economic well-being, not just balance or trade off these “competing” factors against each other. They need to contribute to reducing a city’s use of resources and its waste outputs while simultaneously contributing to greater livability. This usually requires solid research to provide the answers in each case, as there are still really no “textbook” approaches to any of this. Sustainability assessment is so new and evolving so rapidly.

There is also a strong debate around the world about how far technologies can be relied upon to deliver sustainable solutions to problems in cities, especially when compared with

making other fundamental changes that some see as more difficult or that might take more time (e.g. land-use change and urban restructuring). The classic debate is the one over the world oil situation and how to respond to it. This is particularly true in cities where many commentators insist that new fuel and vehicle technologies will mean that we do not have to worry about the energy issue or indeed emissions and noise as far as urban transport is concerned. Oil will simply be replaced by a new set of technologies for fuel and vehicles, which will address all these issues.

Then, there are those that claim that no amount of new technology and alternative fuels will be able to replace current levels of conventional oil consumption and that fundamentally lower transport energy demand is needed. This means reducing our dependence on private transport in cities through urban and transport planning approaches that reduce travel demand. Research is needed to explore these tensions between providing new technologies for urban transport, which may in fact increase demand for private transport and thus exacerbate many of the other problems of motorization such as land consumption and degradation of the public realm, and how travel demand can be reduced and shaped in new directions through appropriate infrastructure investment and land use change. For example, how true is it that technological change is really faster and more effective than reshaping the urban form of cities? What might an ideal combination be of technological innovation and physical planning changes?

On the same theme, we need research that investigates what the world oil situation and in particular the peaking of world oil production means for individual cities and especially for urban transport. How will cities adapt to increasing transport fuel prices? What will happen to highly auto-dependent cities or parts of cities? Will they go into decline and be abandoned due to being unable to function in transport terms? What implication does this have for food production? Will we see increasing areas set aside within and around cities to provide food with less embodied energy costs? Will some existing sprawling areas sitting on prime fertile soils be demolished and returned to agriculture? How will the impact of steeply rising transport energy costs affect different socio-economic groups? How can cities respond in a way that supports a smooth and as painless transition to a post-petroleum world, especially for those least able to afford increasingly expensive energy for transport?

These are just a few of the bigger questions that fall out of some of the big global changes that are occurring in this new millennium and which require serious and devoted attention by researchers in order to guide policy and decision-makers better.

Urbanism in the age of the planetary emergency

Patrick M. Condon

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I am honored to offer to the new *Journal of Urbanism* my suggestions on what I believe to be the critical issues this journal might advance. I will begin with a story for my life. A few years ago, my son William was having difficulty sleeping. He was five years of age at the time. Entering his room I found him sitting in bed crying. When I asked him what was the matter, he turned his tear tracked face up to me and said: "I'm worried about global warming!" and buried his face in his hands. I, of course, wanted to comfort him and said something to the

effect of, “Oh, Will, don’t worry, it will all be OK!” Whereupon he took his face from his hands and turned it to me, his expression a mix of sadness and anger now, and exclaimed, “That’s easy for you to say! You’ll be dead!” Obviously, such a both humorous and heartbreaking moment had its effect. Because of this and other recent reflections, I now suggest that the urban contribution to global warming is now the most important area for the focused effort of urbanists. Eighty percent of people in the advanced industrial countries now live in areas considered urban. This includes both center cities and sprawling ex-urban areas at the edges of metropolitan regions. Since 80% live there, it follows that 80% of the contributors to global warming can be sourced there too, from the way we heat our homes, to the way we move from building to building, to the products we use, and to the foods shipped across the globe to feed us – all of this can be explained by the way the machinery of the city is presently organized. Yet, knowledge of the way this machine operates, in relationship to greenhouse gas (GHG) production, is in its infancy. Despite the gravity of what Al Gore correctly calls “a planetary emergency”, our leaders habitually resort to the kinds of solutions that created the problem in the first place: a new fuel, a new technology, a new subsidy. The rush to ethanol, a fuel that takes as much energy to make as it returns to the gas tank, while starving the world of low-cost food carbohydrates, is the most ludicrous of many examples.

Meanwhile, it somehow escapes the attention of our leaders that the urban patterns we have chosen, through policy, for our post-World War II urban development, are enormously carbon intensive – and are increasingly so. Suburban and ex-urban residents produce three, four, even five times more GHG per capita than their center-city counterparts, all while consuming land that in many cases could be used for low-carbon local food production. Low-density sprawl also eliminates the possibility of energy-sharing strategies and district-scale, ground-source heat pump building conditioning.

Unfortunately, we lack the evidence to prove it. At the moment there are no effective tools to measure convincingly the GHG costs and benefits of one urban development pattern versus another. Almost all of the modeling done to date focuses on the performance of buildings at one end of the urban scale, and on the region state and nation at the other. Very little focuses on the block, neighborhood, or the district scale. Yet the block and district scale are the cellular elements that make up a region, and just as the health of the human body is dependent on the health of the cells that constitute it, so too is the health of the region a function of the sustainability performance of the districts from which it is constituted.

This challenge then falls into two distinct parts. The first need is for more measurements, the kind performed by Reid Ewing of the University of Maryland and Larry Frank at the University of British Columbia. Actual neighborhoods need to be measured for their inherent capacity for reducing or exacerbating GHG production. The first and most obvious information need is for credible evidence of the transportation demand exerted by different forms, and fortunately this work is underway. Less advanced is work that explains how different configurations and densities lend themselves to shared energy use and production and low impact green infrastructure for natural services and food production.

The second need is for strategies and methods for assembling all of this good information in design. Designing a city JUST for carbon reduction could lead to results as disastrous as designing cities JUST for the car – the wreckage of the landscape caused by this folly is all around us – we must not repeat it. How will we avoid the trap of silo thinking that has so often led us astray? Sustainable design must be, by definition, integrative and holistic. Yet, the complexities of this issue are such that the mind quickly boggles, and decision-makers become paralyzed. A methodology for assembling all of the

disparate information and influences on sustainable urbanism must be found, one that is capable of accepting sometimes incompatible and contradictory information, and somehow synthesizing it.

The design charrette, now commonly used for this purpose, hints at the solution. Charrettes, when well organized, have the capacity to synthesize multiple viewpoints and influences, expressing them in the product of the proposal. But charrettes are a baby step along the way. Something much more robust is needed. A sort of *über* charrette methodology which can incorporate information and communication models to feed back rapidly costs and benefits to decision-makers, while never losing sight of the human qualities of the environments anticipated. Applied research on advancing this methodology is crucial if we are ever to learn from past mistakes.

I thank you for this opportunity.

Wanted: built environment specialist

Anne Vernez Moudon

College of Architecture & Urban Planning, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

The following advertisement should soon appear on employment websites or in the want-ad section of multiple large city newspapers.

Research positions available

BUILT ENVIRONMENT SPECIALIST WANTED for large urban development consulting firm. Will be responsible for geospatial analyses of the built environment applied to regional planning, neighborhood planning, public and personal transportation, public and individual health, real estate development, public finance, climate change, and other societal and environmental outcomes of the human habitat. Must possess the following qualifications: familiarity with attributes of the built environment, including residential and commercial building types, street network characteristics, and micro-level distribution of land uses. A minimum of 3 years' experience in geographic information systems (GIS) using assessor's data bases, as well as census data; transportation and other public infrastructure network data. Basic knowledge of statistics and specifically spatial statistics required. An urban design and planning and/or geography background preferred. Excellent compensation based on experience. Send application to the International Design and Healthy Environment Associates (IDHEA), Medium and large City, Worldwide.

If this type of advert does not appear over the next few years, it is not because these functions are not performed, but because they are done by professionals trained in fields other than geography or urban design and planning. Already, the built environment is being integrated and its effect quantified in transportation and health. In transportation, planners have incorporated land use and urban form in their research for more than a decade. While some of their characterization of the built environment remained rudimentary at first (for example, considering development density and basic land use at the coarse level of neighborhoods), they are now increasingly sophisticated (using relatively small rasters to capture differences in uses on the ground). Transportation planners have also developed norms projecting how many trips specific land uses "produce". These norms have been at the source of the oversupply of parking characterizing suburban development over the past decades. Until recently, few have been able to demonstrate empirically the erroneous assumptions made regarding the

association between built forms and travel. In public health, professionals first began to look into the health impacts of air and water quality. They are now assessing the effect of the built environment on physical activity and access to food. They use some of the same coarse tools that transportation planners employed before them, but are also beginning to zero in to the details of the built environment (even considering cracks in sidewalks), and spending considerable time and financial resources to do so. In both instances, the inclusion or greater presence of urban designers and planners who are knowledgeable about the built environment would add a much needed design dimension to the work. Specifically, non-built environment specialists typically see the built environment as static – they see “what’s out there”, but have difficulty imagining “what could be there”. They also tend to overlook heterogeneity in the built environment, focusing instead on the typical and the state of the art. Including a built environment specialist would greatly improve the quality of the work by refining the way the built environment is characterized and by opening up visions for a better future.

Lessons from indigenous Indian urbanism

Ranjit Mitra

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Mixed-use development has been an established model of urbanism in India for many centuries, having evolved largely through processes of negotiation within the community, fulfilling its needs and aspirations. These historic developments have been traditionally regulated and controlled through administrative mechanisms set up by its rulers, the elite or religious bodies, and later during colonial rule passed onto municipal bodies or local governments. Though there are differences in the built form, the patterns of land use in these historic towns and cities, developed organically such as in Varanasi or Jodhpur or planned as in Jaipur or Madurai, are largely the same; they represent imageable, adaptable, inclusive, and sustainable city structures which have successfully accommodated varied and numerous changes over time. Despite the fact that post-independent planning initiatives have largely ignored these historic areas, relegating them as blighted areas that needed to be demolished and rebuilt, these precincts continued to flourish and retain their importance, and an abundance of examples exist all over India. It is only now that the central government has launched initiatives to refurbish their crumbling infrastructure. Existing studies of such areas have been largely restricted to their historical buildings and artifacts; there is inadequate research and documentation thereby leading to a lack of understanding of the ability and tenacity of the fabric that has allowed remarkable change in built form, function, administrative and economic mechanisms over several years, while retaining its inherent characteristics of form, space and function.

In contrast to historical processes, post-colonial urban development in India adopted modernist concepts of master plans based on use zoning, influenced by American planners, compliments of the Ford Foundation, and neighborhood planning patterns introduced by Le Corbusier in his plan for Chandigarh. Le Corbusier’s plan continues to have a great influence in the design of neighborhoods of new residential areas throughout India; while planning regulations introduced by the Americans have persisted as the predominant development control and regulating mechanism. The state prides itself on the new developments as images of modern India, the residents, largely affluent upper class, are smug within their islands of gated communities and exclusive domains, satisfied in the spaciousness of their enclaves and the efficiency of their road systems. Undoubtedly, these new developments allow the introduction of new typologies such as shopping malls with

greater ease than the historic cores, but they are unsafe, anonymous and ecologically unsustainable. The conflict of interests between planned and negotiated development processes particularly of the informal sector came to a head and resulted in riot-like conditions in Delhi in 2006; a debate between the judiciary (upholds the law) and the politician (upholds the right to livelihood) over the strict implementation of the Delhi Master Plan regulations; the conflict continues. Given the present accelerated pace of urbanization in India, it is critical to reconcile between the two paradigms creating inclusive communities to reduce conflicts and avoid riot-like situations like that of the Paris suburbs or Delhi.

Emerging urban forms

Christopher B. Leinberger

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Current US Census and private-sector data sets regarding metropolitan development are based on, at best, a crude understanding of market trends and, at worst, complete ignorance of those trends. It works under the assumptions that 19th-century political boundaries have meaning in the 21st century and that the division between “principal city” and the rest of the metropolitan area is useful. Both are flawed.

There are two dimensions of metropolitan development that are not being adequately captured today. The first is the *pattern* of development; there is development which is drivable sub-urban (low density and modular) and that which is walkable urban (high density and integrated). Obviously drivable sub-urban is far more prevalent after two generations of basically only building that pattern in the US and most developed countries, plus it is far more land consumptive. Defining the areas of the metropolitan regions that are following each pattern is a crucial first step, followed by determining the size of each of these places in total square footage, market performance, relative market share gain or loss, green house gas emissions, and other indicators.

The second dimension is the *market position* of development; there is development which is regional-serving (concentrations of employment, entertainment, retail, higher education, medical, sports, etc.) and development which is local-serving (bedroom communities with support commercial). Those places with a regional-serving market position are far more important economically to the metro area since these places tend to generate higher rents/sales prices per square foot and higher net tax revenues though they occupy less land. Those places with a local-serving market position tend to generate lower rents/sales prices per square foot and lower net tax revenues (many of these places are subsidized by the regional-serving places) though they occupy much more land.

The matrix resulting from these two dimensions results in required data on the market, economic, environmental, and fiscal performance of four kinds of places:

- Drivable sub-urban/local-serving places.
- Drivable sub-urban/regional-serving places.
- Walkable urban/local-serving places.
- Walkable urban/regional-serving places.

Having data sets addressing these four cells of the matrix would help answer many questions about the costs and benefits of developing the metropolitan built environment, tracking the actual universe of options available.

Inclusive urbanism

Michelle Thompson-Fawcett

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In many places I work, in both the northern and southern hemispheres, there has been a combination of changes over the last couple of decades that I find intensely challenging in terms of the design, function, and process surrounding the creation of urban spaces. First, there have been major transformations to the urban demographic profile. So many cities have diversified significantly in recent years, particularly in terms of ethnicity and culture. Municipalities struggle with the plurality of their “identity” – a notion which is no longer static or coherent. The translation of that struggle into our forms and processes of urbanism is often problematic. Many places are created that relate poorly to the dynamic locality in which they are sited. Second, there have been considerable changes in regard to the expectations people have of their role as citizens in the public decision-making process. As societies have diversified, elected decision-makers have quickly become recognized as less “representative” of their constituents than they might have been in the past. Hence, new strategies for governance (at all levels of government) that better mirror the actual citizenry are being sought, many in the name of moving towards social sustainability. For example, there has been a shift to instituting approaches that acknowledge difference, that hear a multitude of voices, and that take account of complicated power relations. And third, there has been the escalation of the privatization of “public” space. Public space in the city is one of the prime locations for meeting with this new, deepened demographic diversity; of interacting and debating alternative politics; and of engaging in democratic transformation. But how is that possible when access to what was commonly public space has now been restricted and consequently limits the potential for association with others? The proliferation of private shopping centers and gated communities, for example, is shaping citizenship in profound ways. The impacts and implications need to be understood, particularly by those employed in place making.

Research in relation to these three areas of urban change (diversification, participatory governance and privatization) has emerged strongly and matured since the early 1990s. In particular, there is really provocative material coming out of disciplines like geography, sociology and politics. However, as is frequently the case, there is still a need for such research to connect specifically with those involved in the conception, design and implementation of 21st-century urbanism. The mission of good physical urbanism can be so easily foiled by poor process and exclusionary practice. There is absolutely no doubt that inclusive processes and designs are difficult to achieve. However, it is important for researchers and practitioners to link with each other in order to recognize and respond better to the often obscured effects of practices that institutionalize exclusion.