

Public Places Urban Spaces; The Dimensions of Urban Design
3rd Edition 2021

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ISBN 9781138067783

Routledge

GBP £39.99

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Exploring what constitutes 'urban design' has been at the heart of all three editions of *Public Places Urban Spaces* (2003, 2011, and 2021), each of which was published at the beginning of a new decade. The act of mapping knowledge inevitably engages with the dynamic contexts of that knowledge, as well as the researcher's approach and mindset. In the last decade, the context of urban design has dramatically changed, and its content has overwhelmingly progressed. Meanwhile, the single author of the third edition – the previous editions were co-authored – has played an instrumental role in some of the most influential research projects in the discipline, often through his role as chair of the Place Alliance (www.placealliance.org.uk). The result is a third edition that is almost an entirely new book and, indeed, a much longer one too: with 672 pages compared to 394 in the second edition! The key changes are the generous inclusion of numerous new studies and a few changes to the book's structure. Encouragingly, this third edition has a much simpler structure. Two new dimensions (Chapter 9 on *Design Governance* and Chapter 10 on *Place Production*) are added to the famous six dimensions of urban design previously introduced in earlier editions. The added dimensions replace the third part of the second edition on *Implementing Urban Design*. Perhaps this insinuates that implementation is an integrated part of urban design.

One must define what urban design can do in order to legitimise it as a valid area of intellectual endeavour and practice. One outstanding research project included explores 'place value' (Carmona 2018), proving that urban design can generate different sorts of value (pp. 7-8). This shows why and how designers aim to deliver place quality (pp. 22-4). Nevertheless, this should not be seen as a static reality. Knowledge always evolves in its socio-political context. On reading the book one may imagine that the fourth edition is already in the process of emerging, as values, design methods, and places continue to change.

The shifting context for urban design is acknowledged in Chapter 2 before being translated into the content of the following chapters. In particular, the aftermath of the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis that caused cuts in local authority and private sector design budgets and the consequent impact is acknowledged. Such cuts challenged the then *status quo* of urban design practice. Nevertheless, it occurred at a time when the so-called 'urban renaissance' in UK planning practice and a focused demand for design quality was becoming more widespread. This, perhaps, brings the question of 'design governance' to the fore. What urban design can do will only materialise when design governance is effective. Studying the works of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) shortly after its abolition in 2011, led Carmona and colleagues at UCL to introduce a range of 'formal' and 'informal' tools of urban design (Carmona 2017; Carmona, Magalhães, and Natarajan 2017). This ground-breaking study is included in the book and will aid urban designers in

their search for the right tool(s) for the right action(s). Informed by Carmona's (2014) research, the book also presents a more process-oriented and power-informed picture of urban design. The context of urban design described in the book's framework consists of three elements: local, global and power. This enables a deeper appreciation of market, state, culture and technology information. Urban design, therefore, is a multitasked agent situated in the myriad processes that manage development in the built environment. The change in using the term "*shaping places*" instead of "*making places*" in the definition of urban design, i.e. "shaping better places for people than would otherwise be produced" (xviii), echoes this.

The French postmodern philosopher Lyotard (1984) argued that the questions of knowledge and mapping knowledge are inevitably questions of power, investigating who develops knowledge and what the underlying purpose of that knowledge development is. He also states that knowledge in postmodern societies is generated both by the speaker and the listener. This is directly relevant to the multi-cultural, complex and increasingly political condition of urban design. In this respect, Carmona's book acts as a metaphoric lighthouse helping individuals first to situate their approach and then navigate their own routes through research and practice. But one also needs to bear in mind that many research conclusions are not fully applicable to specific case studies. The condition of each case may vary so much that the urban designer has to appropriate the knowledge provided by the book to the project in hand or, in some examples, to produce new knowledge for their specific case. Relating knowledge to reality is an active intellectual endeavour, not only when developing knowledge in research but also when applying it in practice.

One can see this book itself as a new report on the condition of urban design knowledge that provides a knowledge baseline for urban design. "The book frames the increasingly extensive conceptual and interdisciplinary underpinning of the discipline in the hope that those who read it will bring more informed, even enlightened perspectives to bear on the production of urban space" (xviii). This is a much-needed contribution at a time when the pressure to deliver housing seems to undermine the quality of new public spaces. The book echoes several intellectual traditions and plenty of voices. In particular, text boxes add more easily digestible points and diverse voices to the book, many of which comprise graphics, tables, and visual materials which make the book available to explore at different speeds and depths. Therefore, this book can be read in two ways, either cover-to-cover (but I doubt if many busy practitioners and students get to read this book in one go) or as a handbook to return to again and again. Those who read the book will have a good understanding of what urban design is about at this point in time, but this is different from what urban design *can be* in our rapidly changing world, where we will face inevitable social, political, environmental and economic crises. In other words, one should not be satisfied with answers, however good they are, but must explore future questions as they read this book.

Public Places Urban Spaces has been an undoubtedly successful textbook that is used in many urban design programmes globally (Foroughmand Araabi, 2016) in so much as it contributes toward providing a shared vocabulary for urban design. Therefore, substantial changes to the book are not risk-free. As far as I have experienced, students have very much welcomed the new edition of the book. Therefore, the third edition is an essential item for reading lists of interdisciplinary modules that aim to explore ways of delivering place quality, putting "urban design at the core of an interdisciplinary, creative, problem-solving discipline" (first edition p. v).

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