

*Original Paper*

Emergent Urbanism & Beyond:  
Times of Transformation and Paradigm Shifts with a Twist on  
Heritage Urbanism

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**Abstract**

*This paper is the product of reflections on the consequences of the latest discoveries of Emergent Urbanism that the authors identify as the specific issue dominating today's urban planning and urban design discourse, arguing that urban planning and design not only results from deliberate planning and design measures, but how these combine with infrastructure planning, and derive from economic, social and spatial processes of structural change. In the paper we reflectively also discuss ideas about urban heritage, urban planning & design, and how heritage and planning & design can contribute to urban development. Urban heritage is understood as an infrastructure comparable with other infrastructures that provide an arena for urban planning & design and urban social and economic development. Moreover, the paper includes a remodeled and novel, short discussion and standpoint about five contemporary urban planning & design ideals that dominate the contemporary planning & design discourse, and their different views of the past and urban heritage. The paper concludes that in any given situation and context, the dominating urban planning & design ideal define the specific urban heritage, and, thus, influence how we will understand the past—today and in the future but also the paper maintains that, we must equally recognize how forces of economic, social and spatial structural change contribute to shaping the contemporary urban landscape.*

**Keywords**

*urban transformation, emergent urbanism, space and place, heritage management, paradigms*

**1. Urban Structural and Systemic Change**

In the age of hyper social, cultural and economic globalization, the world is becoming predominantly urban. New Geographies are emerging bringing rapid rural migrations, new economic opportunities and enhanced global mobilities, cities have spatially expanded dramatically resulting in urban transformations and structural changes as well as posing new challenges to their character and identity. To address large-scale structural change a number of ideals have influenced the practice of urban planning & design. In particular, past urban design ideals are revisited put forward as a solution for contemporary social, economic and environmental problems, where modern planning and design is believed to have failed (Haas, 2008, 2012; Haas & Olsson, 2014).

In the last few decades, many European and American cities and towns experienced economic, social and spatial structural change. Globalization of culture and economy, increased mobility, de-industrialization and the growing importance of service sectors have transformed urban and regional economies into post-industrial knowledge-based economies. Corresponding to these structural changes, the construction of place is a characteristic of urban transformation, as cities shift from being centers of production to centers of consumption (Pacino, 2005). Moreover, urban development also faces challenges from processes of global warming and climate change, and the local implications that follow.

Structural change is evident in motivating initiatives to develop new infrastructures for production (e.g., investments in the education system and re-location of public institutions), transportation and communication (e.g., investments in roads, railroads and mobile telephone systems), and consumption (e.g., development of Internet-based shopping and external shopping centers). It is, in particular, investments in transportation infrastructures which have explicitly aimed for urban regeneration and regional integration, by linking cities together and thereby integrating local labor markets.

The alteration of infrastructure can produce positive and/or negative impacts from the perspective of local places (Graham & Marvin, 2001). It can strengthen the regional connections of some places, but it can also degrade local urban environments and sense of place. Advances in technology have influenced urban activities in a way that has led to a fragmentation of urban space (Madanipour, 2008). In fact, transformation in many cities and towns has resulted in deteriorated urban environments that have lost their use and function, evidence of which can be found in housing areas, industrial structures and public institutions. These cases demonstrate the way in which the transformation of urban form is most probably followed by a change in direct and indirect use, as well as by broader shifts in the perception and understanding of the urban landscape.

To address transformations of this type, as well as issues of climate change, ecological and landscape transmutations and other issues of sustainable development, a number of theories and ideals have directly or indirectly influenced the practice of urban planning and design, where specific strategies for urban regeneration have also included place marketing and city branding efforts (Carmona et al., 2010). It can be noted that urban planning and design, in adopting international trends, has led to the creation of architectural and commercial uniformity in many cities. A move toward sameness of places is further stressed by a strong conjunction between development planning and real estate development, which increasingly exists in the hands of international developers rather than as a local initiative. In this sense, localities and identity in a given urban context are put under scrutiny in terms of their potential for change, rather than forming a prerequisite—site for urban planning and design in themselves.

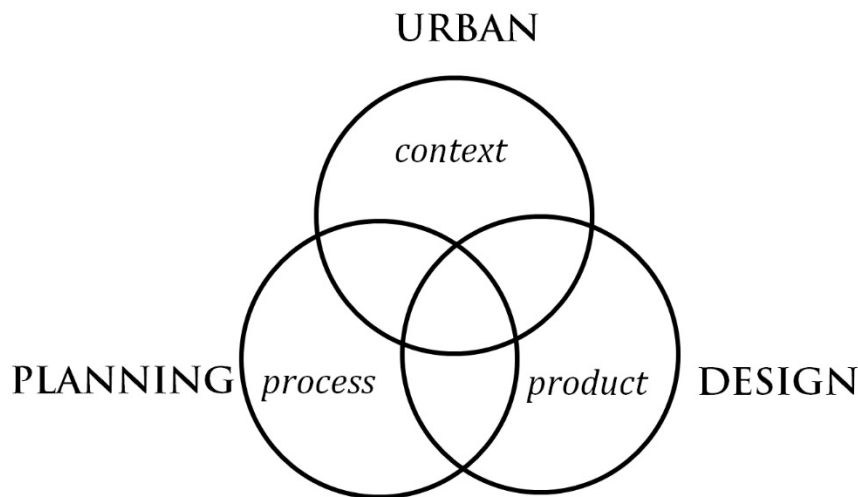
A stimulating theoretical and practical conundrum lies in the possibility of using urban planning and design measures to revive cities, communities and neighborhoods and achieve associated prosperity, status and financial gains. Can urban planning and design be viewed as an effective measure for the reinvention of cities and towns that experience structural change? Or are the current planning and design proposals exacerbating the problems that such change poses for local communities?

## **2. What is Urban Planning and Design?**

Urban design is not a straightforward concept, and there is no commonly accepted definition of urban design in academia or in practice. In its simplest interpretation, urban design can be described as architecture on a larger scale and within a broader context, or as a bridge between architectural design and urban planning (Haas, 2008; Krieger & Saunders, 2009). Urban design connects many disciplines: architecture, planning, landscape architecture and engineering. “The process of urban design is to resolve the political, economic, and social vectors with the goal of arriving at urban forms that works” (McCullough, 2008, p. 4), and as such urban design can be understood as a deliberate action to shape urban form, upon the basis of political, economic and social considerations (Cuthbert, 2006).

Urban planning is defined here as a political, economic and social ‘framework’ that has direct and indirect consequences for technical and political processes. It is primarily concerned with the welfare of the citizens; with water and land use management; with shaping and composing—designing—the urban environment, including transportation, (tele)communication networks; and with ecology, through the protection and enhancement of the natural environment (Levy, 2000, Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2009). Planning can be distinguished as a process-oriented activity and design as a product oriented activity. Therefore, urban planning and design is a cross-border field specializing in static and dynamic urban conditions. Dynamic processes are characterized by flows of people and their interactions, as well as the infrastructure arteries that give kinetic energy to the environment. The dynamic defines the way we look at our spatial landscapes and the manner in which we experience a particular urban condition and

context. Static processes are defined by their permanence of assemblage, i.e., the creation of stable built forms and shapes—the streets, buildings, squares and open spaces that define the environment in order to provide a stable reference system and a structure of performance. One cannot exist without the other and both permeate space, place and time. Thus, following this reasoning urban planning and design is here understood as an amalgamation of Context—the specific urban setting and its development characteristics, Process—processes of structural change and of planning and design, and Product—the urban landscape that derives from these processes in the specific context, see Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Urban Planning and Design—Relation between Context, Process & Product**

Throughout the last three decades, a number of theories, approaches, models and ideologies—ideals—have influenced the practice of urban planning and design. The effects of these ideals can be seen in the form of our urban environments. Dominant ideals within today's urban planning and design discourse have been examined and defined in various ways, often resulting in differing categorizations and definitions: territories of urban design (Krieger, 2006), images of perfection (Madanipour, 1996), the four movements (Schwarzer, 2000), urban design force fields (Fraker, 2007), integrated paradigms in urbanism (Kelbaugh, 2008a, 2008b), urbanist cultures and approaches to city making (Talen, 2005), new directions in planning theory (Fainstein, 2000), models of good design practice (Lang 2005), and typologies of urban design (Cuthbert, 2006).

The specific ideals and trends dominating today's urban planning and design discourse in a comprehensive and problematizing way, including in particular analysis of how forces of structural change contribute to shape the urban landscape are extremely important. Hence, the discourse needs to contribute to a discussion about various urban planning and design ideals, approaches and investigations in the light of urban transformation happening in cities in the larger sense of economic,

social and/or spatial structural change. The central objective is to contribute to a conceptual framework for discussion and analysis of contemporary theory and practice in the field of urban planning and design, i.e., the interdependency of the urban context, processes of planning and urban change & urban design product.

### 3. Urban Planning & Design and Heritage

Planning can be distinguished as a process-oriented activity and design as a product-oriented activity. Therefore, urban planning & design is a cross-border field specializing in static and dynamic urban conditions. Dynamic processes are characterized by flows of people and their interactions that give kinetic energy to the environment. The dynamic defines the way we look at our spatial landscapes and the manner in which we experience a particular urban condition and context. Static processes are defined by their permanence of assemblage, i.e., the creation of stable built forms and shapes—the streets, buildings, squares and open spaces that define the environment in order to provide a stable reference system and a structure of performance. One cannot exist without the other and both permeate space, place and time (Haas & Olsson, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Throughout the last three decades, a number of ideals have influenced the practice of urban planning & design. In particular, five different ideals dominate today's urban planning & design discourse:

- **Re-Urbanism**, which could be described as being oriented towards constant urbanity, in particular addressing the repair of the urban fabric;
- **Green Urbanism**, which is focused on ecological sensibility;
- **New Urbanism**, which, among other things, is based on a neighborhood concept and walkability;
- **Post Urbanism**, which could be labelled as generic hybridity, with a focus on reinvention and restructuring;
- **Everyday Urbanism**, which could be described as vernacular spatiality with a bottom-up approach.

Ideas about contemporary and future society, and, hence, approaches to the past is expressed in different ways in these five urban planning & design ideals. For example, post urbanism connects to an idea that the past has no real relevance for future development. It is based in a rejection of, or a freedom from, traditional ideas about what characterize the urban environment and urban planning & design. Instead it emphasizes, in particular, architectural monuments and iconic buildings that claim to be innovative and to express a new era. This reflects directly the heritage of the future—which is being created in cities and towns by “starchitecture”—new iconic flagship architecture (or called also posturbanism) (Kelbaugh, 2008a, 2008b, Ponzini & Nastasi, 2016; Ponzini, 2020). New urbanism, on the other hand, is based on ideals and qualities from the time before the modernist planning and is trying to re-create these qualities in contemporary urban planning & design. It includes ideas of mixed

use and an emphasis of public space and environments suitable for pedestrians. Moreover, in everyday urbanism emphasis is put on the present and, thus, ideas about the future and approaches to the past are not important at all. Everyday urbanism can in this way be connected to an idea that society is the unintended consequence of peoples' actions, rather than urban planning & design efforts.

In Table 1 and Figure 2, all five ideals are, in short, positioned vis-à-vis the past and urban heritage. We are also aware that the "sixth ideal" could be brought in here, that one of Placemaking Urbanism. But we also believe that Placemaking Urbanism transcends all of these (having bits and pieces of each and adopting certain strategies omnipresent in all five ideals) and that all five ideals-trends-paradigms-urbanisms do have a tendency and intention to create "good and livable" placemaking environments, though from different perspectives, intentions and ideologies.

**Table 1. Urban Heritage in Different Urbanisms—Urban Planning & Design Ideals**

Urban planning & design ideals	Urban heritage	Symbol	Hallmark
<b>Re-Urbanism</b>	Adaptation to the existing urban environments. Restoration and interpretation of historic, conventional and contemporary form of the city.	Buildings-fabric-people-context-time-density-reality-public transportation-publicness.	City based living & tourism; visitor economies of urban heritage re-creating present, past and future;
<b>Green Urbanism</b>	Past and present is subdued to a healthy and sustainable future of biophilia and resilience. Focus on the nature of order and sustainability and adaptability with innovative ecological approaches.	Nature-gradience-connectivity-accessibility-preservation-rehabilitation.	Revitalising the city and nature; Innovative systems of protection and planning urban heritage.
<b>New Urbanism</b>	(Re-)Creation of the past as a dynamic reference for the present. Physical structures and complete town making principles have more importance than objects.	History-human scale-density-accessibility-fabric-urbanity-walkability-publicness.	Heritage as city memory and sense of place; Urban heritage as a form of social capital and placemaking.
<b>Post Urbanism</b>	The past is irrelevant. Monuments have primacy as works of art. Objects are more important than structure. Built environment is used as a quasi-contextual backdrop.	Transformation-hybridity-time lapses-self formation-reconfiguration-medialization.	Global and mega-city competition; Cosmopolitan urban heritage and re-creating new identities.
<b>Everyday Urbanism</b>	Everyday culture more important than physical features. Focus on the present. Reproduction of existing urban environments through culture, place and identity and narratives.	Continuity-kineticism-grounded reality-hidden dimensionality-spatial justice and social geographies.	Urban spaces, traditions and intangible heritage; Community approaches to and uses of, urban heritage and place

#### 4. Outroduction: Some Final Thoughts

Profound and highly visible changes in city skylines and urban spatial boundaries, that are transforming the sheer notion of urban heritage as we know it, are often accompanied by more subtle transformations that aim at preserving the present but also promoting their pasts against competitive demands for space that cities compete for. As heritage managers, urban planners and designers we must be cognizant of

the way that the urban landscapes and structures that we provide, and the built objects that we conserve or design, affect people and spaces directly and indirectly. Such interventions form habits and create ways of life; they give the user a chance to pursue individual happiness and to create relations to other people when embedded in space and time. However, we must equally recognize how forces of structural change contribute to shaping the urban landscape. The resulting urban heritage affects people's urban experience, either stimulating or limiting how people live their everyday lives as well as, provide opportunities, or restrictions, for business development. In the end, it is all about "designing the past". In any given situation and context, the dominating urban planning & design ideal will define the specific urban heritage, and, thus, influence how we will understand the past—today and in the future (Haas & Olsson, 2014; Olsson & Berglund, 2009). Urban development projects, especially ones of the Starchitecture-Post Urbanism type as well as Re-Urbanism ones and Landscape Urbanism, usually follow an inverse path: planning goes first, according to global medialization trans urbanistic aesthetic standards, and then the cities designate specific spaces for 'heritage and culture' within the plan or they are integrated if already on site. However, heritage urbanism and culture - no matter how we define them—cannot be neatly fitted into a cookie cutter box; at least not without depriving them of their creative potential. If a city and its planners and designers genuinely want to activate heritage urbanism and cultural forces to generate sense of place, link to history, urban and place identity and stimulate (local forces of) economic dynamism, they need to open up the projects for all, i.e., permit creative appropriation by local actors and citizen groups (in all their diversity according to principles of Everyday Urbanism) (Olsson, 2008, 2010).

Urban planning and design is a result not only from deliberate planning and design measures, but a complex product of those measures and infrastructure planning, as well as derive from economic, social, cultural and spatial processes of structural change, including also the impacts that are the product of massive transformation of our societies in the wake of climate, energy and costs. In a world faced with the increasing scarcity of energy and natural resources, especially water resources, the loss of environmentally rich land reserves, and an increased population, discussion and analysis of the urban planning and design field from different angles, serves as a call to rethinking, to assembling new information, and begging for a possible intellectual road map for moving forward—a road map for *Emergent Urbanism*. The way we define, analyze and discuss Emergent Urbanism has almost nothing in common with the other strain of thought and usage of this concept, namely in "new science" (urban) of building cities, complex morphology, systems and complexity theory of urban fabric coined by Mathieu Hélie (Wolfram, 2002; Salingaros, 1998; Jacobs, 1961; Alexander, 1965, 2004; Hillier, 1996; Batty, 2017; Hakim, 2007; Arida, 2002; Hélie, 2009). These scientific revolutions, that have direct impact on urban science, have culminated in three major treatises within the last two decades, from physicists, mathematicians, but also urbanists practicing in a field of complexity. The first was *A New*




*Kind of Science* by computer scientist and stellar mathematician Stephen Wolfram (Wolfram, 2002), where he presents an alternative scientific method necessary to explore the type of processes that traditional science has failed to explain, elaborating a theory of the universe as a computational rule system instead of a mathematical system. The second was *The Nature of Order* (Alexander, 2004) by architect and urbanist Christopher Alexander, where he presents a theory of morphogenesis for both natural physical phenomena and human productions. Last one was from Michael Batty (Batty, 2017), urban planner, geographer and spatial data scientist. In *The New Science of Cities*, Batty suggests that to understand cities we must view them not simply as places in space but as systems of networks and flows. To understand space, he argues, we must understand flows, and to understand flows, we must understand networks—the relations between objects that compose the system of the city. Drawing on the *complexity sciences, social physics, urban economics, transportation theory, regional science, and urban geography*, he introduces theories and methods that reveal the deep structure of how cities function. Also, when it comes to the regeneration and revitalization of important city urban areas through the redesign of public spaces with the intense involvement of local communities, then it seems that the central focus is towards placemaking approaches (widespread practices in academic, but more so in professional circles like PPS/Project for Public Spaces, Gehl Architects and many others). Recently, new research maintains that placemaking could be an innovative and potentially autonomous field, competing with more traditional disciplines like urban planning, urban design, architecture and others (Palermo & Ponzini, 2014).

All of these urbanism ideals—a.k.a. paradigms will and are already having consequences for the public places and urban spaces of our cities. The new hybrid possibilities that for example post urbanism (starchitecture and iconic buildings) through architecture offers in union with new technologies, materials, innovations and design, and Landscape and Ecological Urbanism (Green approaches) do through new eco-tech landscapes, give us avant-garde and unpredictable forms of freedom and mobility in form, context and content. It is precisely this post-structuralist medialized disorder (or decentering process that puts a challenge to traditional communities based on physical place and proximity “exposing” them as conservative, out of touch, repressive, and no longer relevant in light of modern technology, social networking and telecommunications.

On the other hand, in urban planning & design movements such as New Urbanism this is often addressed with a desire to design spaces - from front porches to main streets, from coffee shops and bookstores to public squares and local pubs - that will change public life. Third places that are in the heart of New and Everyday Urbanism have manifested themselves as important nodes for civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place and building social capital. Another non-utopian ‘celebration of everyday life’ is Everyday Urbanism that really celebrates and builds on the ordinary life and (found and hard) reality in a city or given district; neighborhood. It

doesn't envision an ideal urban environment as New Urbanism does. Rather it explores ways to improve what already exists in incremental ways in a common, almost repetitive, or spontaneous citizen actions that take place in the in-between and often forgotten or visible places and spaces between as well as clearly defined territories and boundaries of home, work and recreation, as when a yard sale transforms a street corner, lawn or parking lot into a venue for economic exchange or a street art activates an underpass.

In the end, having all this in the back and -foreground, what we need to see and understand, is that as urban planners, architects, social geographers and designers we must be cognizant of the way that the urban landscapes and structures that we provide, and the built objects that we design, affect people and spaces directly and indirectly. However, we must equally recognize how forces of economic, social and spatial structural change contribute to shaping the urban landscape. The resulting Emergent Urbanism affects people's urban experience, either stimulating or limiting how people live their everyday lives.

<b>NEW URBANISM</b>	<b>POST URBANISM</b>	<b>RE- URBANISM</b>	<b>EVERYDAY URBANISM</b>	<b>GREEN URBANISM</b>
<b><i>Controlled heterogeneity</i></b>	<b><i>Generic Hybridity</i></b>	<b><i>Constant Urbanity</i></b>	<b><i>Vernacular Spatiality</i></b>	<b><i>Ecological Sensibility</i></b>
				

**Figure 2. Five Dominant Ideals in Urban Planning and Design**

Source: Haas, T. and Olsson, K., 2013, "Transmutation and reinvention of public spaces through ideals of urban planning and design", *Space and Culture Journal*, Sage, Volume 17, Issue 1, 2014.

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