Editorial

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Today, all cities within the international milieu compete to be perceived as favourable places with international reputations for safety and investment. This resulting competition, along with the increasing urban population and heterogeneous quality, the expansion of urban areas, the intensification of developments within existing cities and towns, the continued proliferation of the high rise and other intensive building types, and the deterioration of both natural and cultural resources has been threatening the image and identity of settlements in the last few decades. In this context, urbanisation and globalisation processes, which have caused a rapid change to our environments, need to be considered together and the concept of identity, which in turn reflects on urban sustainability, to be reintegrated into the agenda of architects, urban designers and planners while hopefully challenging today's orthodoxies. In line with these ideas, the Editorial Panel of *Urban Design and Planning* has decided to bring into focus the problems and challenges of the cities and towns in the era of globalisation.

This issue, as one of the two parts devoted to the theme 'Urban identity in the era of globalisation' contributes to the debate on whether and how urban identity can be a vital element of an enriched programme of urban design, which recognises the complexities, pluralities and democracies of our contemporary societies. Featured papers cover the full scope of this timely subject and its related challenges, including issues of multicultural and heterogeneous cities, city centres against consumer culture, place making and reclaiming the public realm in cities/towns, and management and conservation of local heritage and values in cities/towns of transformation.

The need for place identity was first highlighted by Relph (1976: p. 147), and the topic of specialisation of identity has been developed further by some other authors since the 1970s (Feldman, 1990; Proshansky *et al.*, 1983). They have generally defined the concept of place identity as a substructure of self identity, which comprises cognitions about the physical world in which individuals live. However, the aforementioned literature, like many studies in the field of urban design, have been restricted to form perspective, and neglected to consider the social dimension of environment. Place identification, in fact, is supported not only by the physical dimensions of the place but also social environment associated with it (Choi, 2011; Lalli, 1992; Kyle *et al.*, 2005; Pol, 2002; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996) and good urban design is only possible through

the recognition and enhancement of both tangible and intangible features of a place.

In the last four decades, cities have experienced dramatic changes due to the pressure to accommodate an increasingly concentrated population, dominance of vehicular movement and inappropriate urban planning approaches. These are undesirable side effects of modernisation that have transformed the shape of cities in a way that their urban blocks have been amalgamated into larger units, and diversity within them has been reduced significantly; hence, they became specialised zones of single use with high dependency on the car (Bentley *et al.*, 1985). Specifically, neighbourhood environments have fallen into considerable decline as experiential variety among them has decreased. As advocated first by Jacobs (1961), in her seminal book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and Bentley *et al.* (1985), in their highly influential book *Responsive Environments*, diversity is one of the essential needs in urban environments. That is to say that in order to ensure a variety of experiences, it is essential to have a rich mixture of functions and activities that could benefit different people from all walks of life across all age groups. In other words, if development is not diverse in the mentioned ways, the result might be homogeneous built forms, monotonous urban landscapes or segregated social communities that may in turn cause not only physical, functional and spatial disorder, but also social, psychological and environmental problems. Diversity is still one of the key issues of urban design in the era of globalisation, and its desirability has engaged planners and policy makers since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In this first part of the themed issue on urban identity in the era of globalisation, we are lucky enough to have a new piece from Jon T. Lang on the issues of designing in multicultural societies into perspective. While not ignoring the differences among people in other cities by socioeconomic status, Lang (2016), with a sceptical view on self-conscious urban design decisions made by municipal authorities, interrogates how successful they have been and how future perspectives could become regarding urban design for diversity both at the local scale and the city scale. Considering the issues involved in designing for diversity, Lang (2016) reminds us that all urban design schemes, whether for new development or urban renewal projects, explicitly or implicitly, have a social agenda, and advocates that the designing process has to follow a

bottom-up as well as a top-down approach to the formation of social policies and to urban design. In his paper on the present issue, Lang contributes to our holistic perspective that good urban design requires the recognition of both tangible and intangible features of a place, and accordingly, place identity is supported not only by the physical dimensions of the place but also by the social environment associated with it.

In the second paper of this themed issue, Ashraf M. Salama and Florian Wiedmann (Salama and Wiedmann, 2016) highlight the need for attention on the impact of multicultural aspects of migrant cities on future urban developments. Carrying out an attitude survey of migrant professionals from different communities in Qatar's capital city, Doha, they advocate that inhabitants' resultant spatial and lived experiences and their influences on the urban realm should be better understood in order to sustain local culture identity and liveability against the current global condition that has created a sense of 'placelessness' in many cities.

Since identity is related to the character of an area, it is important to make a distinction between character and appearance because character has more than a purely visual or spatial dimension, and cannot be instantly achieved following the implementation of a new urban design scheme. In Rossi's words

the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape, and as certain artifacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge. (Rossi, 1984: p. 130)

The erosion of formerly distinctive cultural characteristics by the effects of global and national environmental legislation and standardised planning practices is the major concern of Alan Derbyshire's study (Derbyshire, 2016). He appraises current sustainable planning and design practices in the context of the former republics of Yugoslavia and questions the present-day effects on the cultural, aesthetic and architectural infrastructure. Identifying the necessary frameworks for maintaining a distinctive identity in the face of standardised environmental models, will contribute to a more culturally representative urban landscape.

A city centre has the most significant impact on the urban identity (Oktay, 2002) both for its residents and its visitors. As Bromley *et al.* (2003) state, the centre of a city is a spatial, temporal and social area, with special policies aimed at creating inclusive and safer spaces as the heart of a city. In many cases, the city centre coincides with the historic core of the city, and the challenge of the local authority is to combine all functions with the preservation of historic buildings and places. On the

other hand, the perception of the visual forms, which constitutes the physical environmental context, strongly affects how we make use of the city, and relates to the following qualities: the form, proportions and style of the buildings and their relationship with other buildings and urban spaces (morphology), their colour, materials and texture, landmarks, vistas, meeting places, street furniture, signs, and ground surface.

In their paper, Adriana Portella and Alan Reeve (Portella and Reeve, 2016), considering the importance of 'city marketing' and the concept of 'urban tourism' and their influence on the design and display of commercial signs, highlight the need for the image promoted by marketing and urban tourism strategies in historic centres to emphasise the historic appearance and its broader role, not just its commercial function. They discuss how forms of aesthetic control over commercial signage can be applied to sustain local identity in the city centre and to stimulate commercial and touristic activities simultaneously.

Taken together, the papers in this issue reveal the increasing attention on urban identity in the era of globalisation featuring gradual destruction of character and distinctiveness in cities and their precincts, and address a range of issues that should be of interest for academic researchers, policy makers, developers and citizens.

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