Editorial

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The way we interact with our environment is part of what it is to be human. We alter places and the space influences us. More than other art forms, the impact of great architecture and placemaking can be a positive force for good, improving well-being and stimulating positive interactions.

In this issue, we look at the efforts to measure and hence improve the quality of space. As is always desirable, we start off by making sure the right land uses are in the right place. Guided by a view that the most successful economies and societies will tend to be the creative ones, Liu and Silva (2015) report on their work to understand the interaction between spatial and economic considerations for creative industries.

To increase their understanding of the creative industry needs, Liu and Silva (2015) have created an agent-based model. Using a relatively simple and accessible structure (and with the major advantage of being open source), the model uses inputs representing the dynamics of in-city behaviour to estimate how creative users might occupy and influence place. It is clear from their paper that the act of creating and calibrating this model required a fundamental understanding of how a city functions. As with many models, it is precisely this understanding and insight – especially when this is shared with the city authorities – that for me can have a value equal to or beyond the numerical output of the model itself.

In their paper, examining the functional, social and perceptual attributes of three urban open spaces, Salama and Azzali (2015) have developed a methodology to share the experience of actual users by walking in their shoes and standing in the (no doubt very warm) public spaces of Doha. For any city where growth has taken preference over other planning considerations, such rapid screening techniques can have enormous potential value. There are thousands of cities around the world that have suffered from very basic errors of urban planning, and for them methods based on guided subjective judgement will help prioritise and ensure that detailed study is directed to where it is most needed.

Another discipline involving science and judgement is sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), representing for me a fascinating mixture of hydrological calculations and the equally complex but subjective interplay between green and blue space

and quality of life. Adding to the knowledge accumulating from new-build areas, Lamond *et al.* (2015) present a review of less well-researched SuDS retrofitting. With flooding risks exacerbated by run-off from impermeable areas, SuDS seek to attenuate run-off rates to near-natural conditions. This requires mechanisms to slow down and store water, with ideas being presented based on holding ponds, green roofs and the like. Lamond *et al.* (2015) suggest that although maintenance cannot be guaranteed to be done well and forever, it should not be seen as an insurmountable problem. This offers some reassurance in the UK, where this is a concern being discussed in current planning legislation changes.

The new UK National Planning Policy Framework offers some hope that health will take a more prominent place in planning decisions, according to the briefing by Chang and Ross (2015). Notwithstanding their concerns that calls for healthy design might, like sustainability ambitions, be left behind in the rush to build economical new homes, English planning policy has adopted improving health as a core aspect of the national framework.

As a transport planner, I firmly believe that movement and access are fundamental to urban planning and healthy living. The overall vision for an area will be influenced by whether the transport system is modelled on Los Angeles or Amsterdam, and the chances of healthy random encounters with other people will be affected by road layouts. So it is good to see the move towards more integrated working among specialists in planning, transport and health. It is perhaps surprising that in many countries health and planning operate in such separate worlds. Chang and Ross report that throughout their work they found a high level of enthusiasm among professionals of all disciplines to prioritise this shared agenda.

One of the key components of a healthy life is to continually engage in new experiences and learning. This journal offers this learning opportunity and demonstrates how the field of urban design and planning embraces a wide range of disciplines; bringing together and embracing skills not often found together from the highly numerate, through philosophical, to aesthetic design.

Part of the skill of bringing together these disparate worlds is to understand the values, culture and motivations of the

partners. Rather than decry a lack of technical understanding among policymakers – for example the technician needs to balance the degree of analysis with accessible means of presentation. In any case, where two worlds collide, the physical act of working together can have more of an impact than any amount of posturing. Joint endeavour in co-creating a model that represents a shared interest allows each party to bring to the table their expertise ready for engagement.

Similar to working together, walking together is a potent way of fostering understanding. A disagreement over a plan can often be overcome by a site visit where the parties walk around a problem looking at it from the same viewpoint, standing side by side. As a consultative method, walking with a group escapes the confines of the seating positions at a conference table and offers valuable opportunities to mingle with different combinations of individuals and groups.

So, for me, the big lesson from this issue is to go outside. To walk with others, listen and talk to them, looking at the world from their viewpoint. Present your expertise at their level and understand theirs. Then use this understanding of motivations and context to create an alignment of interests. Take advantage of these aligned forces to co-create value. Then

go out to encourage and enable a better world. Understand, align and enable.

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