Requalifying the Built Environment

In recent decades significant financial and professional resources have been invested in urban regeneration, housing renovation, and the revitalization of old neighborhoods, with considerable impacts on the social, physical, and economic structure of cities and their inhabitants.

The first objective of this volume is to present the key issues related to these changes, which were discussed at an international symposium of experts organized by the International Association for People-Environment Studies and its Housing and CSBE (Culture and Space in the Built Environment) Networks in Istanbul. The second objective is to show how concepts and methods in the field of people-environment studies can be successfully applied to study complex questions related to the revitalization of the built environment, both at the small scale of specific buildings and at the larger scale of neighborhoods.

The contributions in this volume are centered around the following main themes:

- Key issues concerning heritage and cultural identity
- The institutional, economic, and political contexts of revitalization
- Implementation and how to address the key challenges

This volume will be useful to researchers, graduate students, teachers, and professional practitioners in housing design and construction, the maintenance and upgrading of existing buildings and urban areas, conservation management, and the broad field of housing studies. The book is pertinent to people trained in architecture, urban design, environmental psychology, urban sociology, social policy studies, urban planning, human geography, and building and landscape conservation.
Requalifying the Built Environment: Challenges and Responses
Advances in People-Environment Studies

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(Series Editor)

The new book series *Advances in People-Environment Studies*, published in collaboration with the International Association for People-Environment Studies (IAPS; www.iaps-association.org), is a timely initiative to provide researchers with up-to-date reviews and commentaries on the diverse areas of people-environment studies that are of current concern. The series focuses on significant and currently debated themes. The books are interdisciplinary, drawing on expert authors from the social, environmental, and design disciplines, especially those who are working at the interface between the design (e.g., architects, landscape planners, urban designers, urban planners) and the social sciences (e.g., environmental psychologists, sociologists, geographers). Each volume reports on the latest research and applications of research in the field. The series is meant to provide a bridge, not only between disciplines but also between cultures. The authors and contributors come from many different countries and are undertaking research and practicing in culturally diverse environments. Books in the series are therefore a precious source for those who want to know what is going on in a specific field elsewhere and to find ideas and inspiration for their own work.
Requalifying the Built Environment: Challenges and Responses

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Foreword

Whilst change and transformation are natural and essential traits of urban environments, never before in history have their pace and scale been of the magnitude witnessed recently. For thousands of years cities have adapted to changing social, economic, and political circumstances through the operation of their inhabitants, with or without the driving influence of major plans. Change has been assimilated by our cities in a progressive manner and this has given continuity to places, and to the cultures and habits that are able to take root and flourish. The co-ordination of different actors, requirements, and budgets within malleable environments has made places relatively responsive and where responsiveness lacked, change was relatively easy to pursue and implement, resulting in urban environments characterised by gradual, incremental development.

It is only since the early 1920s that cities have changed their structure and form, to one which makes localised adaptation and transition increasingly difficult to achieve. Urban form today has changed scale and is now heavily reliant on programmed intervention supported and controlled by major investment agencies often indifferent to social processes and vulnerable to fluctuating global and regional economic circumstances. Whilst coordinated action at national, regional, and municipal scales is fundamental, especially in the face of unarguable globalisation and environmental pressures, a more subtle, complex approach inherent to places and cultures remains crucial for the delivery of socially sustainable places. The organised complexity that Jane Jacobs (1961) so longed for is still a dream today; it is also alien to mainstream approaches to urban regeneration and development.

The International symposium “Revitalising Built Environments: Requalifying Old Places for New Uses” was structured to reflect on the potential that “old” places (a relative term, to be intended as lived and existing, not necessarily antique) can hold as locations of local resources, repositories of identity and synergies in the process of urban transformation.

The symposium was jointly organised by two of the International Association for People Environments Studies’ (IAPS) most active Networks – Housing and Culture and Space in the Built Environment. This collaboration has drawn together expertise in the built form, as well as the cultural values of those who live and use it in the routine of daily life.

Almost 50 countries were represented in the Symposium, a proof that the theme addresses an issue of prominent and urgent global significance. The symposium linked current phenomena (globalisation, urban change, and transformation), to different types of environments (traditional settlements, residential, industrial, green and brownfield sites), and to different strategies (revitalisation, gentrification, adaptive reuse), through the discussion of critical issues such as social integration, equity, efficiency of the built environment, and reuse of buildings.
Urban development is putting almost every country, albeit at different pace, under pressure for land and resources. Calculations of our ecological footprint have shown a heavy current imbalance between consumption in developed and developing countries, and a dangerously speedy trajectory towards the overall depletion of productive land (Frey & Yaneske, 2007); the impact of this change on culture and values is homogenizing traditions and diversity. In the face of these events, it is fundamental to question whether the practices we are using to address their implications are appropriate or if they are undermining even more the values they were set to protect.

The content of this book, which is an edited collection of contributions and a reflection on the discussions which occurred in Istanbul, offers the reader many important messages. Amongst these are:

- policies need to critically re-assess their motives rather than efficiently pursuing their set goals;
- there is value in what is not new, a value which could contribute much to efficiency and sense of place even if through unconventional and non-mainstream angles;
- the approaches, theories and frames of mind which make up “environment-behaviour studies,” and the disciplines represented by the authors of these chapters, are an immensely valuable repository of that complexity of facets which are so natural of urban environments, and that policy should be much more alert to this;
- the links between theory, practice, and policy need to be strengthened and at times re-imagined in order to accommodate a more critical and problem specific approach where values of the receivers of policies are properly addressed.

The important lesson from this book is that the speed and efficiency of development required today does not necessarily have to conflict with targets such as social and environmental sustainability. The challenge though is to not become complacent in how we pursue such efficiency. There is in fact such an abundance of practices pursuing sustainable development that delivery becomes often a matter of selecting and applying one, aligning actions to goals or presumed requirements. We have in our contemporary approaches to urban development an over-professionalization of these approaches, which only increases the gap between programmes and delivery, and reduces their long-term efficiency. Perhaps we have allowed ourselves to succumb to an “all hat and no cows” approach, where the style and status of professional action has become more valued than the social quality of what it delivers. We need to offer a more balanced form of collaboration between all parties involved. In so doing, their efforts in understanding places and requirements, in engaging with local situations and traits, and in reflecting strategically on the adaptiveness of action need to cut across disciplinary barriers to be truthful to place and people.

Whilst no panacea is offered, this book provides important reflections on some of the faults of complacency. It includes numerous examples where this risk is avoided.
by an excellent targeted balance of expertise. As an output of an event organised on behalf of IAPS, it well illustrates one of our main ambitions, the joint pursuit of social and environmental sustainability.

Ombretta Romice,
IAPS President

References

Introduction