

Editorial: Approaches in urban design and planning education

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A brief message from the Chair

As Honorary Editor and Chair of the Editorial Advisory Panel, I would like to start this brief editorial article by welcoming Professor Abeer Elshater from Ain Shams University in Egypt for accepting our invite as a Deputy Editor in Chief. Secondly, we are pleased to inform you that the journal has moved from strength to strength by having more than 50 established international scholars in the Editorial Panel from well-known institutions across academia and industry. What is more, we are thrilled to confirm that we have reached a new milestone as more than 40% of the associate editors are established female academics, and we are committed to diversity in all its forms. Also, over the last six months, the journal has become more robust. There is now a steady inflow of international papers, which means we can become more selective and ensure an even higher quality of the articles.

Editorial message

Multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary approaches are three terms profound in various areas of knowledge and have recently arisen in higher education in urban planning and design. These three terms raise some fundamental questions: Does knowledge-based urban design break ground in producing academic modules or courses, research, and professional practises related to these three terms? Building on a previous focused issue in 2017 in *Urban Design and Planning* by Strickland (2017), how can urban design education and academic practice adapt to changes after the pandemic? This brief editorial message first defines these terms and how the legacy of urban design benefits and adds new lines of thought.

To find some common ground, a multi-disciplinary approach in research and education involves more than one discipline or field of study. While inter-disciplinary studies involve the combination of two or more academic disciplines into one activity to handle specific challenges (Beck *et al.*, 2017). The term ‘interdisciplinary’ refers to a phenomenon that collaboratively spans all areas of society to achieve mutually agreed-upon

goals (Blackwell *et al.*, 2009; Evis, 2021; Finkenthal, 2001). Transdisciplinary is an approach that harmoniously integrates different disciplines to construct new knowledge and uplifts the learner to higher domains of cognitive abilities and sustained expertise and skills (Brewer *et al.*, 2008). Transdisciplinary moves beyond university borders to integrate academic knowledge and skills into more developed and associated practitioners (Abusaada & Elshater, 2018; Elshater, 2014; Rigolot, 2020). The concept of transdisciplinary is to merge academia with professional practice to tackle complex real-life problems and academic subjects that can be better handled by other types of disciplines in academia (Mittelstrass, 2001). It entails the integration of two or more academic fields into a single action to create something new by crossing boundaries and thinking outside the box. Figure 1 shows the differences between these terms.

In this regard, we can consider the urban design discipline in its early beginnings in the 1950s as an inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary area of knowledge, which combines or collects other fields of specialisation, such as architecture, landscape architecture, planning, health, and sociology. Merely now, the trans-disciplinary in urban design and planning educational programmes tackles complex problems in their design studios. However, the urban design process is highly complicated, involving many actors, engaging with multiple contending forces, with highly intricate interactions between actors (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021). This complexity might need an alliance of various disciplines related to artistic principles of cities, civic life, and technological advancement (Alalouch, 2018; Madanipour, 2017) and is linked to the implementation and professionalism of real-life projects (Rigolot, 2020).

Thus far, letting urban design students and early researchers know what is happening in real-life projects has recently become an urgent need and challenging matter. There is a need for urban design students and researchers to address the comprehensive range of skills (Megahed *et al.*, 2019). They need to do so by supplementing their knowledge-based technical urban design and planning domains with the social

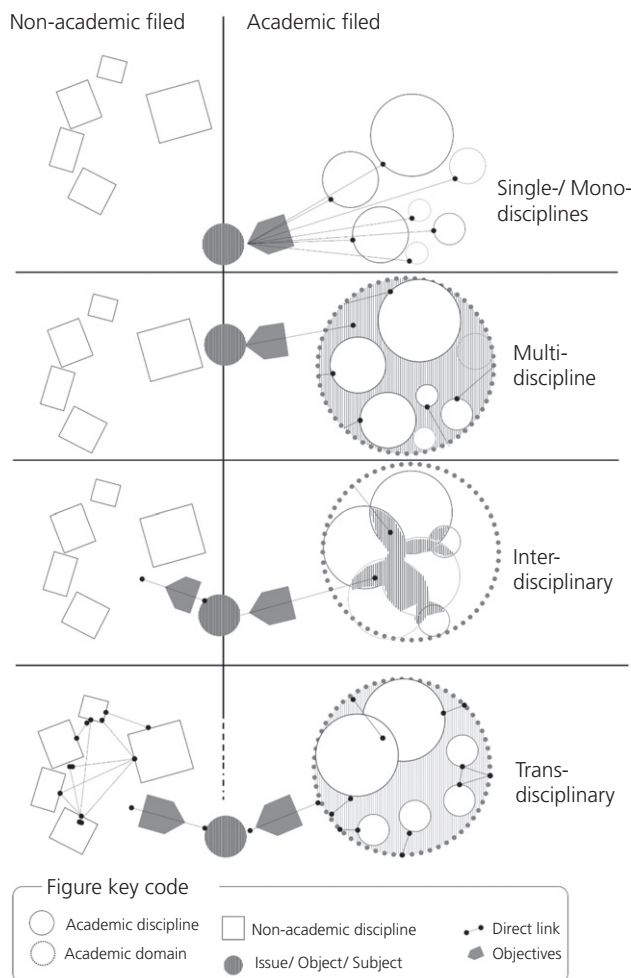


Figure 1. The nexus between academic and non-academic fields

competencies required for effective processes and outcomes (AlWaer & Cooper, 2019; Elshater, 2015). Examples of these challenges are how planners and designers deal with the lives of non-human creatures like free-roaming cats and dogs in public places, the local evening economy, post pandemics, health inequality, and climate repair/emergency (Abusaada & Elshater, 2020; 2021; Abusaada *et al.*, 2021; MacLean & Salama, 2021; Salama, 2020; Tiesdell & Slater, 2006).

Suppose the overall goal in urban design and planning education and professional practice is to create 'liveable' and environmentally responsible, economically productive, and resilient places and able to reach changing contexts and time-scales. In that case, the stewardship of the process and outcomes of urban design cannot be reset with a single hand or discipline', however 'responsible' they may appear (AlWaer and Cooper, 2020). A more comprehensive network of shapers framers and contributing stakeholders is required, which is

more inclusive and brought together by enrolling and empowering members of the built environment professions to engage in decision-making about interventions in their built environment (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021). In other words, producing better urban design outcomes requires a rethinking of professional roles, according to Cooper and AlWaer (2017). The ideology of urban design trans-disciplinary might benefit from a 'new professionalism' that unlocks multi-disciplinary knowledge (Abusaada and Elshater, 2018). For instance, Ravetz (2017) suggested that to meet residents' diverse needs; the architect may be a sociologist; the planner may be an advocate of local economic development; and the landscape designer a food activist.

A possible resolution for the interdisciplinary approach in urban design and planning education is in the amalgamation of academic and non-academic disciplines. This integration can confront the challenge of 'working in silos' that has become one of the explanations for failed places at different scales. These can be competing or conflicting professional disciplines, authorities, client departments, or organisations. Lack of collaboration or information sharing, lack of a shared vision or a sense of purpose can lead to dysfunctional, if not disastrous, outcomes for places. Hence, crossing disciplinary barriers via silo-busting to achieve common objectives and duties is seen as necessary to establish a consensus about the linked nature of health, economic, social, and environmental consequences. As a result, there is no single paramount paradigm around organising thought and action in this arena. There is certainly no 'one-size-fits-all' approach likely to be appropriate across the board. There is likely to be a wide range of opinions on how to improve urban design and planning (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021). Addressing such complexities requires nuanced handling of urban design.

Thoughtful reflections in three articles

As such, articles in the first issue of *Urban Design and Planning* of the year 2022 raise a question related to the new directions of education in higher education institutions after pandemics. Salama and Burton (2022) examine the consequences of the Covid-19 condition and its associated 'transitional emergency model'. This model confronts the utilisation of online technology, maintaining student motivation for using tutorials for small groups, and the supportive services for instructors to cope with the new technology. The model also suggests making assessment protocols available aside from other online activities. The analysis articulates persistent challenges and examines current adaptations while outlining the scope of future opportunities for a post-pandemic responsive design pedagogy in architecture and urbanism. Their concluding remarks highlight the necessity of revisiting architectural and urbanism education through virtual environments.

In linking academia to the practical application of aesthetic quality of urban spaces and green areas, the second article by Wang *et al.*, (2022) addresses coloured foliage trees on aesthetic preference. Their results from a qualitative survey launched for around five months indicated that to improve the visual appeal of a summer landscape, red-leafed trees may be planted in green areas. There is little impact on aesthetic preference if a mix of red and yellow leaf trees is added. Foliage comes in a wide range of colours, which may enhance the colours of a landscape, particularly during the summer months when the colours are more monotonous. Green areas in any public space may thus benefit from trees with a diverse range of leaf colours and textures.

In the third manuscript of this issue, the Bath and Northeast Somerset Unitary Authority in the United Kingdom's Southwest has been assessed in global hectares needed per population. Another practical implication of sustainability was addressed here by Hammond *et al.*, (2022). Aside from the healthy ground initiative of thinking globally from an evermental perspective, the authors of our last article in this issue recommended acting locally for five reasons. These reasons include lobbying decision-makers, individual behaviour change, shifting consumption to less resource-intensive items, reducing environmental impact, the local effect on global footprints, and promoting sustainably produced goods and services markets.

In conclusion, there is an advantage to rethinking urban design education. There is an urgent need to be developed into a multi-disciplinary science and extend the knowledge beyond the universities' borders to involve practitioners in our teaching process. This involvement provides our urban design students with the opportunity to be in touch with the implementation process and discover what they are learning together with what is implemented in real-life projects. Considering this, we felt the terms that best define knowledge-based urban design are interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and transdisciplinary—the decision of which type of discipline involvement is the sort of challenge that scholars might face. When faced with these kinds of challenges of integration, it may be necessary to use a wide range of knowledge and experience from beyond the usual urban designers and planners.

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