People-oriented urban design

Since the beginning of the 21st century, more than half of the world’s population has lived in cities. Urbanization is developing rapidly around the world. However, it is not a monolithic or linear development, but presents a variety of forms. Cities have become diverse and ambiguous. The connections between cities have transcended national borders, and formed networks with each other. In turn, this also puts the city in the complex dynamic changes. In every corner of the world, there are endless challenges faced by urban planners and city authorities. Building an academic platform for people-oriented urban design is of positive significance for carrying out research on major scientific issues and key technologies in the field of urban design.

At present, the social, economic and cultural factors in the world are undergoing dramatic changes. People around the world are also actively adopting various methods to overcome the difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, new methods based on digital technology are constantly emerging. For this reason, urban design must also integrate the demands of all aspects of society, fully study the potential of new technologies, and comprehensively consider issues such as the overall needs of society, economic development, and respect for history and culture.

The development of urban design depends on the exchange of international experience. How to explore and release the new vitality of urban space while respecting the existing spatial texture as much as possible, and provide a valuable and attractive urban space framework for social, economic and cultural needs? This is an unavoidable basic proposition whether at the strategic level or at the daily planning practice level.

Unlike Western countries, where urbanization has gone through centuries, China’s rapid urbanization has occurred in recent decades. Under this situation, people need to summarize the process more systematically, and grasp the experience of various aspects based on the consciousness of history. The spatial structure, history, culture and other elements of Chinese cities are facing the requirements of transformation and restructuring.

It must be pointed out here that people-oriented urban design is not only about finding new spatial forms, it must also integrate the demands of all aspects of society, and consider issues such as the overall needs of society, economic development, and respect for history and culture. Urban design cannot only think from an academic point of view, but must always respond to current urgent tasks. This special issue summarizes a series of major urban design challenges that can be considered as part of the key challenges facing many of the world’s largest cities.

These papers explore the theory and practice of people-oriented urban design from different dimensions and perspectives. Some work states that the research gap on the evaluation of the relationship between spatial identity and people in historical urban areas is the main reason why previous practice projects failed to solve the crisis of urban spatial identity. The research team has proposed an evaluation method with four aspects of the evaluation object, content, subject and indicators. Looking back at history can help us think about strategies for meeting future challenges. By reviewing Nanjing’s experience in the development of new districts, the second paper aims to analyze the differences in governance structures of land development and knowledge economy development in different periods since China’s reform policy, and to identify the different impacts of events on the city’s social and economic development. Experts from the University of Kassel in Germany introduced the experience of Germany’s “Socially integrative city” project and explored how the livability of socially disadvantaged urban neighborhoods can be improved with the help of publicly funded area-based urban regeneration. People-oriented urban design also pays attention to the microscopic perspective, and constantly obtains new discoveries in the process of interaction between people and space. Another work focuses on empirical research in Chongqing, it then analyses the existing research on the elements and guidelines of environmental design from the perspective of their pedestrian friendliness, while especially discussing their suitability to the needs of the elderly people. The author of the last article focuses on the complexity of plots and point out that this is largely attributable to the inconsistency...
between their spatial boundaries as physical entities and as units of property. The findings contribute to the theory on the compositional hierarchy of urban forms and may shed light on the urban regeneration of Chinese cities as well.

This special issue hopes to stimulate discussion and promote extensive exchanges in the field of people-oriented urban design.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Jin Duan
School of Architecture, Southeast University, Nanjing 210096, China
E-mail address: seduanjin@seu.edu.cn

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