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## “TOWARD AN URBAN DESIGN MANIFESTO” – REVISITED

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### „W KIERUNKU MANIFESTU URBANISTYCZNEGO” – PONOWNIE

#### Abstract

An urban design manifesto prepared in 1980 by two eminent US urban design practitioners and theoreticians is revisited to ascertain its relevance today. The original work was organised in three parts: 1) Problems for Modern Urban Design, 2) Goals for Urban Life and 3) An Urban Fabric for an Urban Life. This examination focuses on the first part to assess the extent to which the problems are still relevant, how they need to be modified or augmented in the light of current problems.

The Manifesto identifies eight separate sets of problems and this study expands the first problem that of poor living environments so that it is discussed under five sub problems which were not identified by the original authors but proposed in this paper as being of growing concern. They are; Pollution, Extreme Weather Events, Demographic Change, Obesity and Security. The relevance of these to urban form is discussed.

The other seven of the Manifesto problems have been grouped for discussion in this paper under two headings. It is suggested that the first group of four are closely related to one another and have been exacerbated since the publication of the original Manifesto by ongoing processes of globalisation and deregulation. These are; Giantism and Loss of Control, Large-scale Privatisation and the Loss of Public Life, Rootless Professionalism and Injustice.

The final group of three problems consists of those which while being a consequent of the same political/economic processes have been and remain central concerns of urbanists. They are Destruction of Valued Places, Placelessness, and Centrifugal Fragmentation. While professional skills have been directed to seeking solutions to these problems their implementation has been less effective and unforeseen consequences have emerged such as Green Belts restricting urban growth but increasing the dispersal of populations and increasing traffic movements.

With respect to the problems it identified as being of concern for urban design, the Manifesto has proved remarkable resilient over the last 30 years. All the problems are still central and are even more severe than when the Manifesto was first drafted. Under the heading of Poor Living Environments it has been considered appropriate to outline in more detail some issues which have become even more acute. However a major concern, not covered in the original work, is the growing awareness of the importance of urban ecosystems and how human settlements are threatening natural habitats and even changing global systems to the extent that it is claimed a new geological age has been entered – the Anthropocene.

*Keywords: reassessing urban design manifestos, urban problems*

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Manifest projektowania urbanistycznego, sformułowany w roku 1980 przez dwóch uznanych amerykańskich praktyków i teoretyków, jest dziś przywoływany na nowo w celu potwierdzenia jego trafności w czasach współczesnych. Ówczesna praca była podzielona na trzy części: 1) Problemy nowoczesnego projektowania urbanistycznego, 2) Cele miejskiego życia oraz 3) Materiał urbanistyczny miejskiego życia. Niniejsze badanie skupia się na pierwszej części pracy i ma na celu ocenę, w jakim stopniu przedstawione w niej problemy są nadal aktualne, a w jaki sposób należy je zmodyfikować lub poprawić w świetle dzisiejszych wyzwań.

Manifest wskazuje osiem odrębnych grup problemów, natomiast niniejszy artykuł szerzej omawia pierwszy z nich, jakim jest słaba jakość środowiska mieszkaniowego. Autor podchodzi do tematu z perspektywy pięciu kwestii pomocniczych, które nie były wzięte pod uwagę przez autorów Manifestu, niemniej jednak w niniejszym artykule stanowią tematy, które mogą powodować coraz większą troskę. Są to: zanieczyszczenie, ekstremalne warunki pogodowe, zmiany demograficzne, otyłość i bezpieczeństwo. Autor omawia ich znaczenie dla formy urbanistycznej.

Pozostałych siedem problemów wskazanych w treści Manifestu zostało pogrupowanych w niniejszym artykule i poddanych pod dyskusję pod dwoma nagłówkami. Według autora pierwsze cztery z nich są ze sobą ściśle powiązane i od czasu publikacji Manifestu ulegają ciągłemu zaostrzeniu spowodowanemu zachodzącymi procesami globalizacji i deregulacji. Są to: gigantyzm i utrata kontroli, prywatyzacja realizowana na wielką skalę oraz utrata życia publicznego, profesjonalizm pozbawiony korzeni i niesprawiedliwość.

Na ostatnią grupę ww. trzech problemów głównych składają się kwestie, które – będąc konsekwencją tych samych procesów politycznych/gospodarczych – były i wciąż pozostają przedmiotem troski urbanistów. Są to: niszczenie wartościowych miejsc, brak identyfikacji z miejscem oraz fragmentacja odśrodkowa. Pomimo faktu że profesjonalści dokładają wszelkich starań w celu znalezienia rozwiązań dla tych problemów, skuteczność wdrażania takich rozwiązań nie jest bardzo wysoka. Ponadto pojawiają się nieprzewidziane wcześniej skutki, takie jak np. pasy zieleni, ograniczające rozrost miast, lecz również zwiększające rozproszenie ludności oraz wzmożony ruch uliczny.

Przez ostatnie 30 lat Manifest okazał się niezwykle odporny względem problemów, które wskazał jako przedmiot troski dla projektowania urbanistycznego. Wszystkie te problemy nadal są bardzo aktualne, a nawet uległy zaostrzeniu od czasu publikacji Manifestu. Pod nagłówkiem słabej jakości środowiska mieszkaniowego za celowe uznano bardziej szczegółowe przedstawienie pewnych kwestii, które stały się jeszcze bardziej palące. Natomiast głównym zmartwieniem, zupełnie pominiętym w Manifestcie, jest rosnąca świadomość istotności ekosystemów miejskich oraz stopnia, w jakim osiedla ludzkie zagrażają naturalnym siedliskom, a nawet zmieniają systemy globalne do tego stopnia, że istnieją głosy, według których weszliśmy w nową epokę geologiczną – antropocen.

*Słowa kluczowe: ponowna ocena manifestów projektowania urbanistycznego, problemy urbanistyczne*

## 1. Introduction

*Toward an urban design manifesto* was first presented in 1980 by Alan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard, two notable United States urban design practitioners and academics. The former is perhaps best known for his *Great Streets* (1995), *The Boulevard Book* (2003) and *The Good City: Reflections and Imaginations* (2011) and the latter for his important work *Liveable Streets* (1981).

The Manifesto is organised in three sections. The first part discusses *Problems for modern urban design*. This is followed by a section setting out six *Goals for urban life* which they consider “essential for the future of a good urban environment” and the final section covers their proposals for *An urban fabric for an urban life*. This paper concentrates on the first part.

The document was presented at an American Planning Association conference in 1980 but only published in 1987. A generation later, this review examines its continuing relevance in response to changed circumstances and whether this document has any value in the European context in general and, in particular, to the United Kingdom. Jacobs, in a prologue to the publication of 1987, writes of “the need for a lot more work and research on all the terribly important pieces that make up good urban living environments” [10, p. 112]. This paper represents a small contribution to this process.

## 2. Problems for modern urban design

The manifesto is introduced by a discussion of what the authors describe as eight *Problems of modern urban design*. These will be considered for their relevance to current problems:

Poor living environments:

- Giantism and loss of control,
- Large-scale privatisation and the loss of public life,
- Centrifugal fragmentation,
- Destruction of valued places,
- Placelessness,
- Injustice,
- Rootless professionalism.

### 2.1. Poor living environments

These are considered to be the problems of the external conditions of urban life since the authors suggest that internal “housing conditions in most advanced countries have improved in terms of such fundamentals as light, air and space”. In a British context this assertion can be questioned as discussed below. In order to understand the current problems of poor urban living environments in more detail the following sub problems are proposed in this paper as a basis for discussion. They are all interrelated and all have implications for the future form of our towns and cities.

- Pollution,
- Extreme weather events,
- Demographic change,
- Obesity,
- Security.

### 2.1.1. Pollution

The principle source of the most dangerous form of air pollution is the burning of fossil fuels. In *The Mortality Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Particulate Air Pollution* [21], the United Kingdom Health Protection Agency reported that this pollution was responsible for 29,000 deaths in 2008. Other sources suggest this figure may be higher. In a 2016 report *Air pollution causes early deaths*, the BBC quoted European figures which indicated that the worst affected countries are the Benelux, North Italy, Poland and Hungary. Another form of pollution is that of noise, in particular from traffic which it is claimed bothers over 40% of the population of the UK as well as impacting on human health generally [21].

### 2.1.2. Extreme weather events

Even rich, well organised countries have been afflicted with flooding in the last few months with lives lost in Germany and France. It is arguable that these events are no more frequent than in the past [14] but there is no doubt that they have impacts on urban areas and, therefore, precautions must be taken to minimise future impacts. This has to be undertaken on a collective basis which means urban planning is needed to coordinate private developments.

### 2.1.3. Demographic change

Population ageing is a global problem but it is most acute in Europe with profound future economic, social and cultural implications. The World Bank [24] forecasts that Poland is expected to increase the ratio of the country's population over 65 from 29% in 2010 to 58% in 2050 and 70.7% in 2060.

Some attention has been given to the implications of these changes for the internal layout of dwellings. In the UK the Life Time Homes [15] protocol was applied to all new dwellings to make them usable by people with reduced mobility. However, little attention has been given to the impact of urban form on ageing populations and it is suggested that this is another task for urban designers.

### 2.1.4. Obesity

While it may seem out of place to cite this issue it is suggested that it is an urban design problem. Obesity is a major epidemic; Ng et al [17] record that the worldwide proportion of overweight or obese men rose from 28.8% in 1980 to 36.9% in 2013 and the proportion of women increased from 29.8% to 38% over the same period. In developed countries, 16.9% of boys and 16.2% of girls were overweight or obese in 1980. By 2013, those figures were 23.8% and 22.6% respectively.

As a response some countries have imposed taxes on sugar and large sums are spent on bariatric surgical interventions. However, one of the generators of obesity is physical inactivity and, by making active transport (walking and cycling) easy, safe and relevant to everyday activities, urban form can make a contribution to alleviating this problem. In spite of the dangers of accidents and pollution, the health benefits and increased life expectancy of active transport have been convincingly documented [4].

It is not argued that making provision for walking and cycling will automatically make people use these modes of transport, but it gives them the possibility of benefitting from a more active life style. There is evidence that by increasing investment in providing for these modes of transport a greater proportion of the population will take advantage of them.

Table 1

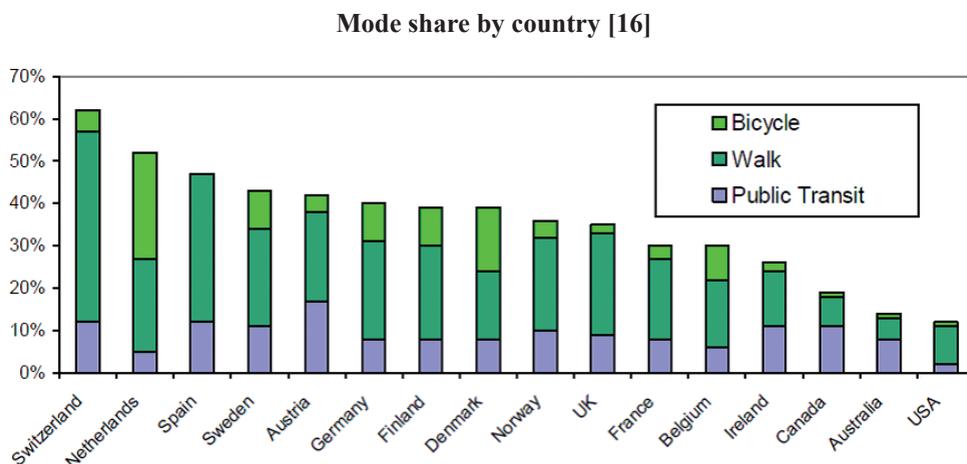


Table 1 shows the proportions of journeys made according to different travel modes including public transport in 16 developed countries. Increased bicycle use correlates with increased investment in infrastructure. Excluding London, the UK spends £1.38 per person on cycling infrastructure and only 1.2% of all trips are made by bike. The Netherlands spends £20 per person with 25% of all trips made by bike [16].

### 2.1.5. Security

Safety in residential areas is of great public concern. An article in the London Times [9] noted that according to a UK Government Home Office report “two thirds of people in England and Wales feel unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood at night”. The prevalence of gated communities as a response to insecurity will be discussed below under privatisation. While the form of our towns impacts on security there is debate on the relative safety of different arrangement. For example, the argument between the advocates of cul-de-sacs and those of connected streets is still unresolved [23].

The UK Police have responded to public concerns for urban security by publishing their own design guide entitled *Secured by Design* [20]. This sets out commonsense suggestions for housing designers such as inserting windows to overlook corners and to avoid planning routes without houses opening onto them, as well as measures to secure doors and windows.

### **3. Global problems: Giantism and loss of control, Large scale privatisation and the loss of public life , Injustice and Rootless professionalism**

Following the consideration of some aspects of the general problem of poor living environments, it is suggested that the other seven problems identified in the Manifesto could be considered in two groups. The three above problems are discussed in this section form a closely interlinked group whose significance has been exacerbated by deregulation and globalisation since the Manifesto was first drafted.

Housing is of great political and social concern and is central to the shape of our cities. In the UK housing development is increasingly dominated by a few large operators whose main responsibility is to grow their profits for their shareholders. These corporations operate through regional offices where the lead role is taken by land buyers. They have accumulated large land banks and make it difficult for smaller house builders to compete in the market [13]. This has resulted in a rise in house prices, a fall in ownership and an increase in private sector renting with lower space standards and problems of tenure insecurity [5]. This situation has been exacerbated by the withdrawal from housing of the public sector so that in the 1970s almost one-third of Britons lived in social housing in contrast to the one-fifth who now do [6].

The developer domination of the market is paralleled by the growth of multinational consultants, for example Savills employs 30,000 people in 700 associated offices worldwide offering a range of services covering all aspects of property design, development and management. On the Savills website [18] the most prominent graphic is the company's current share price.

The introduction of systems of control, the smart city, is driven by large corporations. such as Siemens which has built the Crystal in London's Dockland as a "a global hub for debate on sustainable living and development" The question is whether these initiatives will result in more local control or be an opportunity for large global firms to control the smart city technologies. The struggle for control between national states and international corporations for the internet and the new media is a continuing saga.

As an aside it should be noted that the visualizations that these firms produce of future cities are often illustrated by aerial views which portray an urban environment under strict top- down control and which demonstrate little concern for any qualities of place like Cisco's *Infographic; the city of the future* [2].

"Starchitects" also operate on an international scale. Whether the client is an international corporation or an ancient university the main concern is to deliver buildings which brand their international clients rather than respond to their contexts. An example is the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government inserted into a nineteenth century street by the architects Herzog and de Meuron. It is a building without front or back which makes no acknowledgment of its neighbours on the street (Ill. 1).



III. 1. The Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford



III. 2. Residenze Hadid and Libeskind, Milan

While architects are rarely involved in housing, an exception from Milan are Residence Hadid and Residence Liebeskind. These large gated communities inserted into a nineteenth century tissue of blocks and streets completely ignore the logic of the established street system (Ill. 2). Of note is the way in which the architects' names are used for branding and marketing purposes- not dissimilar to the way fashion houses use their designers' names.

In addition to the prevalence of gated communities the insertion of shopping malls on central and peripheral sites is a common form of development. These have the effect of moving retail uses away from streets and reducing their diversity and mix of uses. Another result is the presentation of blank walls and inactive edges to the streets as in Krakow's Galeria Kazimierz (Ill. 3). A UK example of the privatisation of public space was the sale of the centre of Milton Keynes by the New Town Development Corporation. The result is that the internal pedestrian routes crossing it now close at 8.00pm and even earlier at weekends thus obliging the public to make long detours around the 700 metres long building.



Ill. 3. An external wall of Galeria Kazimierz, Krakow

One expression in the UK of the widely noted growing inequalities in developed countries [10] is the way younger people are excluded from the housing market because house prices are rising much faster than incomes. Housing is regarded as an asset to be invested in rather than a home. In London it is reported that 70% of new homes are purchased by foreign investors. This results in the workers who are needed to support the economy of the city

being forced to live long commuting journeys from their places of work. The housing crisis is so acute in London that Local Authorities, with a reduced stock of social housing, are offering tenants bribes to relocate to other towns [12].

Injustice or inequality is represented by a reduction in the size of new homes because of deregulation. A decade ago Evans and Hartwich [8] revealed that the average size of new homes in the UK was the smallest of 15 European countries – 70 square meters as compared with 139 square metres of the average new Danish home. In the UK there are no minimum space requirements for new homes with a result that, today, within the same development, houses sold on the open market may be smaller and of a lower standard generally than those few units which are still built for housing associations for social renting, which are designed to older, more generous public housing standards.

#### **4. “Professional” problems; Centrifugal fragmentation, Destruction of valued places and Placelessness**

The remaining three problems, while to a great extent being consequences of the same political and economic forces as the four discussed previously, have been and remain a central concern of urbanists who are able to contribute more effectively to their resolution. Policies to restrain the extent of urban sprawl have been a preoccupation of British urbanism for the last century. These have resulted in Green Belts around many British cities. However these barriers to expansion have resulted in a new set of problems.

Oxford has a Greenbelt tightly drawn around its built up area and local authority boundary, with little room for further expansion without intruding on the territory of the adjoining District Councils. These insist on retaining the Greenbelt intact so that new development is forced to locate in small towns some distance from Oxford. Since this city is a major employment centre, the resulting commuter traffic overloads existing rail and road capacity at peak times. People no longer live, work and play within the same built up areas and boundaries of planning authorities and the plans they make must correspond more closely to the areas within which people live their everyday lives. This more extensive scale of urban design was being developed until 2011 by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) as Strategic Urban Design (STRUD) [2].

Planners have developed sophisticated instruments to protect historic buildings and groups of buildings. In the UK these include the listing of buildings according to their historic and architectural importance and the designation of 8,000 Conservation Areas which ensures that changes to the physical fabric are made in a way which does not detract from the overall quality of the area. However, today there is also a well established awareness that natural habitats and their sustainability, particularly within built up areas, have also to be valued and conserved [1].

A concern for the qualities which make localities distinct from others is a reaction to the quest for universal qualities of the Modern Movement. This has been traduced in the design of the placeless housing estates of much modern development. In the UK the reaction to these circumstances dates from the 1970s, initiated by public agencies through the Essex Design Guide [7] which attempted to reintroduce those qualities of settlements characteristic of a specific part of Southern England. This guide was frequently misinterpreted with the

solutions appropriate for the County of Essex adopted in other parts of the country with different building traditions. This movement has been reinforced in recent years through the renewed interest in vernacular architecture and in the UK the transfer of the concepts of the US New Urbanism and Form Based Codes have realised in such developments as Poundbury.

## 5. Conclusion

This short examination of the relevance of the Jacobs and Appleyard perception of urban design problems suggests that they all are still central and are even more severe than when the Manifesto was first drafted. However, under the heading of poor living environments it has been considered appropriate to outline in more detail some issues which have become more acute. A major concern, which is not covered in the work, is the growing awareness of the importance of urban ecosystems and how our urban environments can be designed to respond to the range of issues which these pose. Whether the whole of the Manifesto is as resilient as the first part must await a detailed discussion of its goals for urban life and its proposals for an urban fabric which would meet these goals.

Finally, the publishing history of this Manifesto deserves attention. The authors report that the Journal of the American Planning Association refused at first to publish it on the grounds that the assertions it made were not supported by research. Its editors only relented six years later because, in the words of the authors, initially they did not acknowledge that “professional experience had the value of research” (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, p. 112). That this divide between practice and research has become even wider is witnessed by the introduction of research assessments which allocate funding according to the quantity of published works which, in their quest for originality, are ever more divorced from the world of practice. Perhaps Schon’s reflective practitioner [19] is becoming extinct.

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