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An introductory review to the Special Issue: Attractive Places to Live

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Introduction

Presently, almost 75% of Europeans live in cities and urban areas, and this figure is expected to rise an additional 5% by 2020 (European Commission, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that national governments across Europe are committed to making their cities more attractive and sustainable in order to increase citizens' quality of life, now and in the future (DETR, 2000; European Commission, 2010; ODPM, 2005; Urban Task Force, 1999). But what makes an attractive urban living environment? Attraction is a subjective preference and people of different ages, cultures and gender, for example, may have diverse views on what is attractive. Accordingly, the elements that contribute to making places attractive to live in are wide ranging and may be different for each person. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the attractiveness of an urban area appears to centre on the quality of life of its users (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1999). In order to increase quality of life, principles of good urban design, planning, regeneration and sustainable communities are widely promoted (DETR and CABE, 2000; DTLR and CABE, 2001; ODPM, 2003a, 2005; Urban Task Force, 1999). Good urban design is central to creating high-quality and attractive places to live (DETR and CABE, 2000; DTLR and CABE, 2001). Well-planned, well-designed and well-managed living environments are likely to create a far superior quality of life than for those who live elsewhere (DTLR and CABE, 2001).

What makes an attractive urban living environment?

Sustainable urban design is a crucial tool for cities wishing to create attractive, high quality and sustainable places to live. This may be achieved, for example, by designing mixed-use developments that promote walkable communities and are well connected to high quality public transport networks, thus reducing private transport use. Urban design may form high quality open green spaces, well maintained landscapes and streets to promote social integration, civic pride, identity and sustainable communities. These are just some examples of how design can be utilised to create attractive urban living environments. These elements will be considered in more detail along with further aspects of urban design that contribute to creating attractive places to live.

• Nature and Landscape

Landscape must be considered as a central part of any development activity as it is essential to urban living (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). It is frequently suggested that the presence of urban parks and open green spaces are highly important in order to enhance the quality of urban life and to help make neighborhoods attractive to live in (Burgess *et al.*, 1988; Chiesura, 2004; DTLR, 2002; McPherson, 1992; ODPM, 2006; Urban Task Force, 2005). The presence of natural components, such as trees and water, are also said to positively contribute to urban quality of life (Chiesura, 2004). A green environment can provide contrast to the hard lines of urban buildings and visually counteract the stresses involved with city life, i.e. noise and traffic

(Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Open green space is also seen as a base for public interaction, social integration and for fostering local pride (Urban Task Force, 2005). Urban areas without green space and attractive landscapes give little opportunity for people to stop, relax, interact and enjoy their surroundings. As well as being aesthetically pleasing, nature in urban areas is said to improve the local micro-climate, reduce environmental pressures, create wildlife habitats and improve biodiversity (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009; DTLR, 2002). Moreover, there are health benefits that can be derived from urban landscapes. Green space and nature are said to reduce stress (DTLR, 2002) and positively affect our mental well-being and physical health (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Accordingly, high quality landscapes and nature are vital urban design considerations as they will aid in creating healthier, more sustainable and attractive urban environments.

- **Mix of architectural styles**

Attractive urban areas provide a diversity of building types, styles and designs. Attractive cities must have distinguishing elements, such as unusual buildings that act as landmarks (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1999). These may be modern or historic architectural styles. The existence of historic buildings can contribute to the character, diversity and sense of distinctiveness in urban areas (DETR, 2000). Good urban design will promote diversity through a mix of compatible developments that create viable places that can respond to local needs (DETR and CABE, 2000). A variety of architectural styles will assist in creating vibrant and attractive cities that have a sense of uniqueness. However, there must also be a coherent order to the urban streetscape. This is examined in the first article of this special issue, 'Visual evaluation of urban streetscapes: How do public preferences reconcile with those held by experts?', where Morten Gjerde explores preferences for urban streetscapes, along with the reasoning behind them, using photographic evaluations and a streetscape analysis tool. Preferences of the general public and professionals are then compared in order to determine if they have consistent or differing aesthetic judgements.

- **Internal accessibility**

Internal accessibility, such as an excellent public transport system, road network and walkability, are all vital elements for creating an attractive city (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1999). Most people travel, in some form, every day of their lives. Therefore, it is essential that transport systems are effective and enhance quality of urban life, but do not have a high negative impact on the environment. Today it is widely recognised that minimising transport use and alternating to sustainable transport options can make a positive contribution to the environment, by reducing our carbon emissions, and increase quality of life (Department for Transport, 2007; Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). The design of an area can influence the method of transport people select. Urban design must shift away from focusing on automobile use and prioritise sustainable transport options (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). In order to encourage people to alternate from private car usage to using public transport, cycling and walking, such methods of sustainable mobility must be promoted, attractive and people must be confident in them. Sustainable transport can be made attractive by designing high quality bus stops, cycle racks and traffic free routes (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). The tendency to walk or cycle will be, in part, influenced by the quality of the experience; thus consideration must be had for the safety of such routes and landscaping factors when they are designed (Department for Transport, 2007; 2008). Well-designed streets will encourage people to use them, and make the outside experience pleasant and safe (DETR and CABE, 2000). Giving pedestrians, cyclists and public transport priority over private car users should also ensure that sustainable mobility becomes safer and more appealing. Judith Thomsen's article, 'Reflections on the opportunities of urban planning to promote non-vehicular transportation in a sustainable settlement in Norway', explores possible ways in which private transport use can be minimised by urban form and its subsequent

influence on travel behaviour; factors such as residential densities, accessibility and distance are examined. Relevant possibilities are then applied to a proposed sustainable housing settlement in suburban Brøset, Norway in order to examine which options may effectively contribute to increasing sustainable transport use in the area.

- **Mixed-use developments**

Well planned sustainable mobility options will be more attractive and successful if urban areas are designed to be dense and mixed-use, where homes, jobs, community facilities, entertainment and leisure, for example, are all within close proximity. Accordingly, urban design priorities must focus on higher-density and mixed-use developments that are close to public transport stops and interchanges in order to aid sustainable transport (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). This will also support 'walkability' within urban areas. Forsyth and Southworth (2008) advocate that "Walkability is the foundation for the sustainable city" (p.1). The requirement to travel by private transport, and even public transport, is reduced as walkability increases with shorter journeys attributed to mixed-use environments. Walkable communities are those where facilities and services for daily living are within a walking catchment area of around 10 minutes (800m) (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). A walkable environment involves short distances, is traversable (without major barriers), is safe, is full of pedestrian infrastructure and is pleasant (e.g. architecturally interesting streets, attractive green spaces) (Forsyth and Southworth, 2008). Moreover, the services and amenities available ought to be high quality. Mixed-use developments and walkable neighbourhoods can aid in encouraging sustainable urbanism and counteracting urban sprawl. Pere Vall-Casas, Julia Koschinsky and Carmen Mendoza explore solutions to the problem of urban sprawl in their article 'Retrofitting suburbia through pre-urban patterns: Introducing a European perspective'. The need for retrofitting approaches that reintegrate historical and cultural patterns, such as homestead systems, agricultural plots, rural grids and watercourses are emphasised and examined. These approaches are tested on the Barcelona Metropolitan Region in Spain as an example. The applicability of retrofitting suburbia through pre-urban patterns is also examined in Boston and Phoenix in the US as a comparison to Europe.

In addition to encouraging the use of sustainable mobility options and walkability, a mix of land uses in urban areas can help to create lively and attractive environments. A variety of uses can ensure that there are opportunities to live, work and socialise in one environment. A range of activities in one location should strengthen social integration, civic living (Urban Task Force, 1999) and ensure that life and movement are always present in the area (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). "The mix can be at the scale of the building (one use above another), the street (one use next to another) or the neighbourhood (groups of uses next to others)" (DETR and CABE, 2000, p.32). Mixed-use developments also allow for adaptability, ensuring that areas can respond to changing social, technological and economic circumstances, rather than only being suitable for one type of activity or land use. To be adaptable, developments should have flexible layouts and design and places should be capable of being used for a range of activities (DETR and CABE, 2000). Revitalisation of declining urban areas may be achieved, in part, by adapting land use mix in order to, for instance, encourage new economic activity; an example of such can be seen in the article, 'Sustainable revitalisation as a tool for regenerating the attractiveness of an inner-city historic commercial district: "Han District" as a case'. Here, a theoretical model of a sustainable revitalisation project in Bursa, Turkey is proposed by authors Tülin Vural-Arslan, Neslihan Dostoglu, Ozlem Koprulu-Bagbanci and Nilufer Akinciturk. The focus is on, not only physical enhancement, but economic and social revitalisation of a historic commercial district.

- **Cultural quarters and public squares**

As well as commercial, residential and leisure uses, mixed-use developments may include cultural quarters and public squares in order to add to the vibrancy and attractiveness of urban areas. In order to create successful cultural quarters Montgomery (2003) advocates that a combination of *activity* (a variety of, at different times of day and night), *built form* (that is mixed and/or highly adaptable) and *meaning* (e.g. history and identity) are necessary. One of the most important characteristics of cultural quarters is their distinctiveness (Montgomery, 2004). Identity and uniqueness are crucial elements in a city's attractiveness (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1999); well designed cultural quarters can offer such factors. Montgomery (2004) argues that if cultural districts and lively small-businesses are not offered then cities will be left behind. Public squares can also aid in fostering a sense of place and identity for urban society, in addition to acting as a meeting point and venue for social events. A more detailed discussion can be found in 'Public squares in European cities' in which Bob Giddings, James Charlton and Margaret Horne analyse the importance and re-introduction of public squares, specifically in Europe. The authors utilise an existing public square in Birmingham, UK to demonstrate how software can be used to predict microclimatic conditions and pedestrian movement to aid in the design of public squares. Virtual city models are subsequently suggested and examined as an alternative design tool.

- **Safety**

The presence of mixed-use developments that promote round the clock activity will assist in ensuring that cities are not deserted at certain times, but instead appear lively. This ought to subsequently increase residents' sense of security and reduce feelings of vulnerability in urban areas in the evening. The '24 hour city' concept and cultural strategies have been endorsed to revitalise city centres and create night-time economies in order to make cities safer and to enhance their image (Heath, 1997). However, there are contentions over the 24 hour city concept concerning the type of activity that is available and the subsequent consumers that are attracted to cities at night [see Roberts, 2006]. For example, the ODPM (2003b) suggest that, in Britain, evening economies centre on young people and alcohol, rather than people of all ages participating in a variety of activities (as in seen in many other European cities). It is therefore essential that a varied clientele is attracted to cities at night by encouraging a wider range of activities than merely bars and nightclubs (Heath, 1997). The differences between creativity, cultural resources and the consumption of alcohol as an entertainment activity must be understood (Roberts, 2006).

Crime and the fear of crime are major factors that may discourage people from residing in urban areas. The fear of crime is actually thought to be a more extensive issue than crime itself (Hale, 1996). The Urban Task Force (2005) proposes that middle class families are moving out of urban areas in search of, *inter alia*, safer environments. Accordingly, as well as reducing incidents of crime, it is imperative that people 'feel' safe and secure in their living environments. The way in which urban areas are designed is crucial in achieving a sense of security and safety. The concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) promotes the way in which architectural design and the built environment can reduce both the fear of crime and the occurrence of crime by affecting human behavior, subsequently enhancing quality of life (Crowe, 2000). CPTED is based on three principal elements: natural surveillance, natural access control and territorial reinforcement. Urban design can encourage natural surveillance from both the interior and exterior of homes and buildings by, for example, positioning entrances, doors and windows so that they open onto and overlook the street (DTLR and CABE, 2001), the use of landscaping and lighting (Cozens, 2002) and by allowing a flow of passing traffic (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Such design considerations will ensure that publicly accessible places can be overlooked at different times of day and night. Natural access control involves spatial definition to deny access to a crime target (Crowe, 2000), for example by differentiating between public

space and private space, using entrances, exits and fencing in order to limit access or control movement. In terms of territorial reinforcement, physical design such as fences, signage, beautifying gardens and landscaping may be utilised to visibly express a sense of ownership (Cozens, 2002). Authors Miguel Saraiva and Paulo Pinho discuss the theory and development of CPTED and evaluate existing best practice design manuals in their article, 'A comprehensive and accessible approach to crime-prevention in the planning and design of public spaces'. Subsequently, the authors present an empirical application of a new best practice design manual on a housing estate in Porto, Portugal.

- **Lighting**

Good quality lighting, during both day and night, can make a significant contribution to the attractiveness of an area, in terms of the quality of its appearance and its safety and security (DTLR and CABE, 2001). Lighting may be created naturally or artificially. A varied mixture of the two is desirable (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). The use of natural daylight reduces the need for artificial lighting and passive solar gain can lessen the need for internal space heating (DTLR and CABE, 2001; Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Thus, our energy requirements and can be reduced by effectively utilising the natural daylight available during the design process of buildings and spaces. Natural daylight can also provide benefits such as better health and a sense of well-being (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Urban areas must be artificially lit at night in order to make places inviting and ensure public safety. Areas may be vibrant during the day, but without lighting at night such areas may be unused, unsafe and consequently unappealing.

- **Housing**

A basic element of an attractive urban environment is a diverse and high quality supply of housing (Van den Berg *et al.*, 1999). There ought to be a range of housing options available to meet the changing needs of residents, for example, in terms of tenure, size and affordability. A mix of housing types and uses will facilitate in providing a diversity of building forms and scales, which can contribute to the creation of more attractive environments (DTLR and CABE, 2001). A diversity of housing types will also promote social mix and choice, thus avoiding concentrations or ghettos of particular housing tenures (Ritchie and Thomas, 2009). Housing should be tenure blind and integrate into the surrounding environment. For instance, housing should be designed so that people are unable to distinguish whether properties are private or social and developments should be tailored to reflect their surrounding environment, rather than a one size fits all approach. Additionally, the structure of the residential environment is important. The arrangement of streets, homes, gardens and places for leisure and parking are fundamental to the success of an area; the urban structure ought to be clearly defined and coherent (DTLR and CABE, 2001). Emphasis during design also needs to be given to movement and the linkages between new housing and local facilities, community infrastructure, public transport, walking and cycling routes (DTLR and CABE, 2001). New services may need to be provided or the quality of existing services may need to be improved. Good connections and movement will ensure that housing developments are not isolated, but instead support walkable communities and reduce the requirement for private transport use. As indicated previously, mixed-use developments will support this. Moreover, residential properties should be designed to allow for adaptation to meet changing needs; adaptable homes will prove more robust over the long term than those which have been tailored to a particular need (DTLR and CABE, 2001).

- **Liveability**

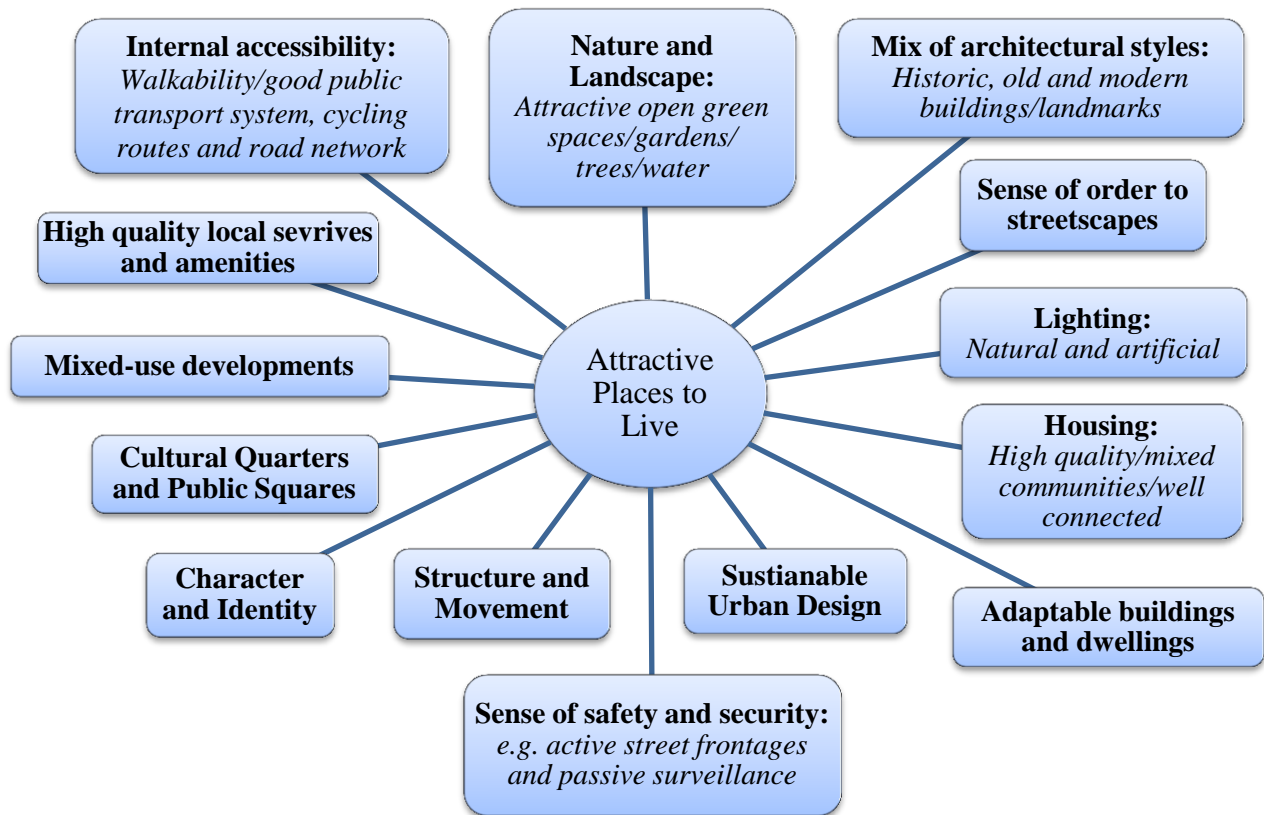
Not necessarily all aspects of sustainable urban design will increase the attractiveness of place. One element of sustainable urban design that is debated is increasing residential densities. Although high density development may be more sustainable in an environmental sense, is it

socially sustainable and attractive to residents? Residents frequently object to compact city policies, including higher residential densities, for the reason that they greatly reduce liveability (Howley *et al.*, 2009), which in turn may diminish the attractiveness of urban areas. There is a perception that high-density development is unattractive as a place of residence due to subsequent negative issues such as noise, lack of open space and gardens, traffic problems and reduced parking spaces (Howley *et al.*, 2009). It is important that urban design strikes a balance between increasing sustainability and maintaining resident satisfaction and liveability in order to create attractive living environments. Corinna Morandi touches on how retail can support liveability in urban areas in the final article of this special issue, 'Retail and public policies supporting the attractiveness of Italian town centres: The case of the Milan central district'. The importance of retail in creating attractive and liveable urban environments is strongly emphasised. Focusing on Italy, policy options for revitalising town centres through retail are discussed. Possible consequences that may result from town centre retail revitalisation are also considered, such as how it may negatively affect the resident population.

Summary

Attraction is important to assist in creating sustainable living environments. People's satisfaction and perceptions of the quality of their environments is thought to be important in order to assist in creating sustainable cities (Chiesura, 2004). If people do not wish to live in cities then how will they become sustainable? In order to enhance cities' attractiveness economic, environmental and social sustainability should form strategic pillars in urban design and planning policies. To create sustainable and attractive places to live several elements of urban design and planning must be integrated and considered simultaneously. See Fig.1 for a summary of some of the wide ranging elements that contribute to making attractive urban living environments.

Fig.1. Elements of attractive places to live



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