

Journal of Urbanism

Editors

Matthew Hardy, *Prince's Foundation, UK*
Emily Talen, *Arizona State University, USA*

Reviews Editor

Susan Parham, *University of Hertfordshire, UK*

Editorial Board

Eran Ben-Joseph, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA*
Harald Bodenschatz, *Technische Universität Berlin, Germany*
David Brain, *New College of Florida, USA*
Matthew Carmona, *University College London, UK*
Patrick Condon, *University of British Columbia, Canada*
Ellen Dunham-Jones, *Georgia Institute of Technology, USA*
Nan Ellin, *Arizona State University, USA*
Cliff Ellis, *Clemson University, USA*
Robert Fishman, *University of Michigan, USA*
Jan Gehl, *Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Denmark*
Tigran Haas, *Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden*
Besim Hakim, *Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA*
Jeff Kenworthy, *Curtin University, Australia*
Gerrit Knaap, *University of Maryland, USA*
Michael Mehaffy, *Structura Naturalis Inc., USA*
Taner Oc, *University of Nottingham, UK*
Pedro Paulo Palazzo, *Unicentro Universitário, Brazil*
Attilio Petruccioli, *Politecnico di Bari, Italy*
Yodan Rofé, *Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel*
Wolfgang Sonne, *University of Dortmund, Germany*
Michelle Thompson-Fawcett, *University of Otago, New Zealand*
Anne Vernez Moudon, *University of Washington, USA*

Aims and Scope

The *Journal of Urbanism* is a peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary journal that focuses on human settlement and its relation to the idea of sustainability, social justice and cultural understanding. The content will focus on Urban Regeneration, New Urbanism, European Urbanism, Landscape Urbanism, Urban Sustainability, Smart Growth, Livable Communities, Transit-Orientated Development, Walkable Communities and more. It will highlight research on the various concepts, methods and theories on creating an attitude of sustainability toward urban form.

Peer Review Statement

All research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review, based on initial editor screening and anonymous refereeing by three referees.

Business correspondence, including orders and remittances relating to subscriptions, back numbers and offprints, should be addressed to the: Routledge Journals, T&F customer services, T&F Informa UK Ltd, Sheepen Place, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3LP, UK.

Journal of Urbanism is anonymously peer-reviewed and is published three times a year (March, July, November) by Routledge Journals, Taylor and Francis, 4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RN, UK.

Cover illustration: View of Damascus, Syria © Bernard Gagnon.

JOURNAL OF URBANISM

Volume 5 Number 1 March 2012

PAPERS

The impact of urban form on downtown stadium redevelopment projects: a comparative analysis of Phoenix and Denver

Stephen Buckman and Elizabeth A. Mack

1

Imposing a rigidly coded master plan on a generated organic context: a case in Damascus, Syria

Helal Alwaz

23

Urban social sustainability: a study of the Emirati local communities in Al Ain

Khaled Galal Ahmed

41

An historical perspective on the viability of urban diversity: lessons from socio-spatial identity construction in nineteenth-century Algiers and Cape Town

Benjamin W. Stanley

67

VIEWPOINT

Urban desiderata

Nan Ellin

87

BOOK REVIEW

93

VIEWPOINT

Urban desiderata

Nan Ellin*

Department of City & Metropolitan Planning, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Over the last several decades, broad-based sustainability efforts have been contributing to improve quality of place on a global scale. Indeed, a virtual consensus has been emerging among planners, urban designers, municipalities, private developers, public health professionals and communities around what constitutes good urbanism.¹

This consensus holds that networks of quality public spaces should be lined with and punctuated by vital hubs of activity. Stated inversely, urban regions should comprise of mixed-use cores (large hubs and smaller nodes) connected by corridors of transit, automobile, bicycle and pedestrian routes as well as other quality public spaces to ensure walkability.² These public spaces include outdoor places – for circulation, recreation and preservation of natural landscapes – as well as indoor cultural institutions and gathering places.³ Good urbanism honors the past by preserving historic fabrics and adaptively reusing existing structures. It also honors the future by celebrating creativity through supporting new and innovative architecture, public art and creative entrepreneurship at all scales. Good urbanism offers a full spectrum of housing options, accommodating a wide range of household types and income levels, comprising a diverse community that is engaged in shaping and managing its future.

Key to good urbanism is the connective tissue: infrastructure, public space and community engagement. Whether retrofitted or new, for practical purposes or pleasure, infrastructure is integrated with public spaces and both are multipurpose, technologically advanced, attractive and harmonious with natural and cultural settings.⁴ Community-building and engagement occur spontaneously in the quality public space as well as more deliberately through interesting and fun initiatives sponsored by municipal organizations, community groups or businesses.⁵ In sum, good urbanism is vital, vibrant, safe, comfortable, legible, accessible, equitable, efficient, elegant, convenient, walkable, sustainable, beautiful, distinctive and dynamic.

While there are many iterations with a range of foci, most recommendations converge on these principles. Despite this emergent consensus, however, good urbanism still eludes in far too many instances. Why? How can we achieve good urbanism more reliably?

Learning from exemplary practices, obstacles along the path toward good urbanism can be overcome by enriching the conventional approach that advances proposals informed by initial research (Figure 1) with a process that builds upon existing assets, while leveraging the resources and support to realize them.

I have described this enriched approach as VIDA, Spanish for ‘life,’ Latin for ‘light,’ and acronym for Visioning, Inspiring, Demonstrating, and Advocating (Ellin 2010). VIDA (Figure 2) begins by identifying strengths in places and communities, rather than

*Email: nan.ellin@utah.edu

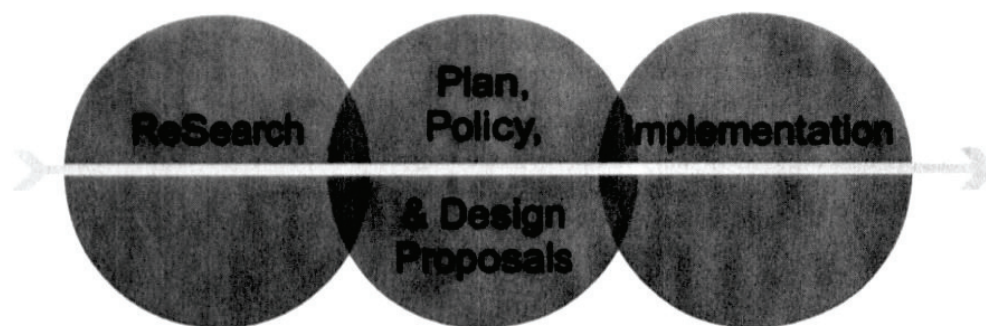


Figure 1. Conventional approach.

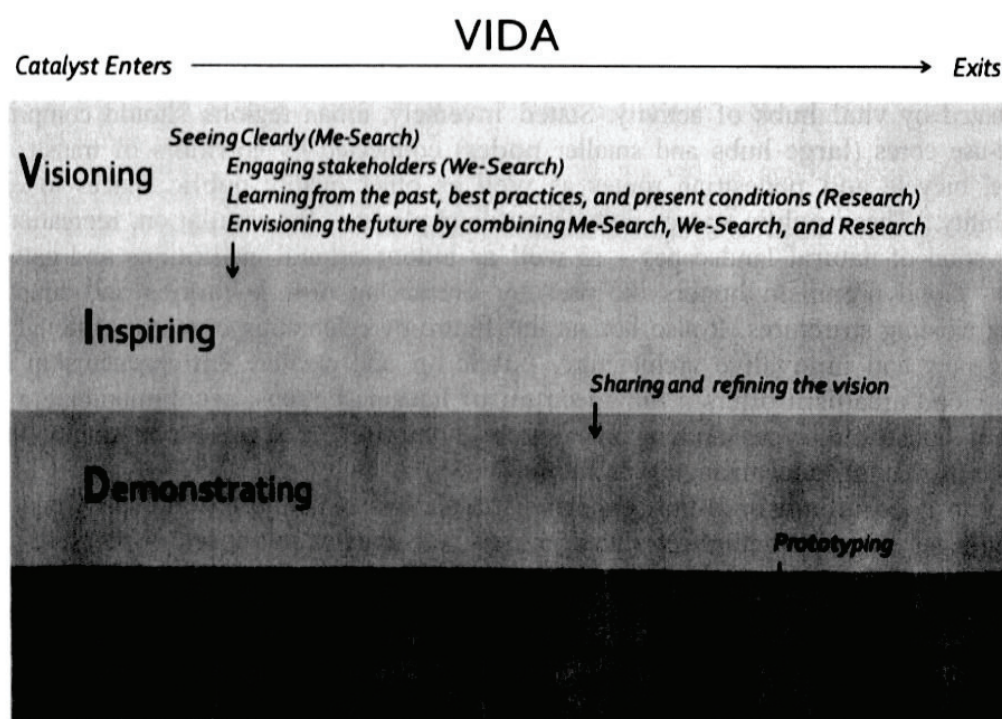


Figure 2. The VIDA Process: Visioning, Inspiring, Demonstrating, and Advocating.

problems or deficits, by applying two kinds of Vision: the ability to see things clearly and a vision for a better future. The initial phase includes MeSearch, ReSearch and WeSearch. MeSearch looks inward, uncovering our own intuitions, hunches and preconceptions.⁶ ReSearch investigates the past, best practices elsewhere and current conditions. WeSearch engages in co-creation, inviting others to participate in imagining better futures, welcoming them when they do, and partnering with them. Combining all three – MeSearch, ReSearch, and WeSearch – we can envision best possibilities while building support to implement them.

Inspiring shares the vision with others in words and images, enlarging the ripples of co-creation and support. Demonstrating prototypes and refines the vision. Ultimately, the initial catalyst, which can be an individual or group, may bequeath the project to those who will carry it forward and inhabit it, moving on to catalyze other projects. Advocating

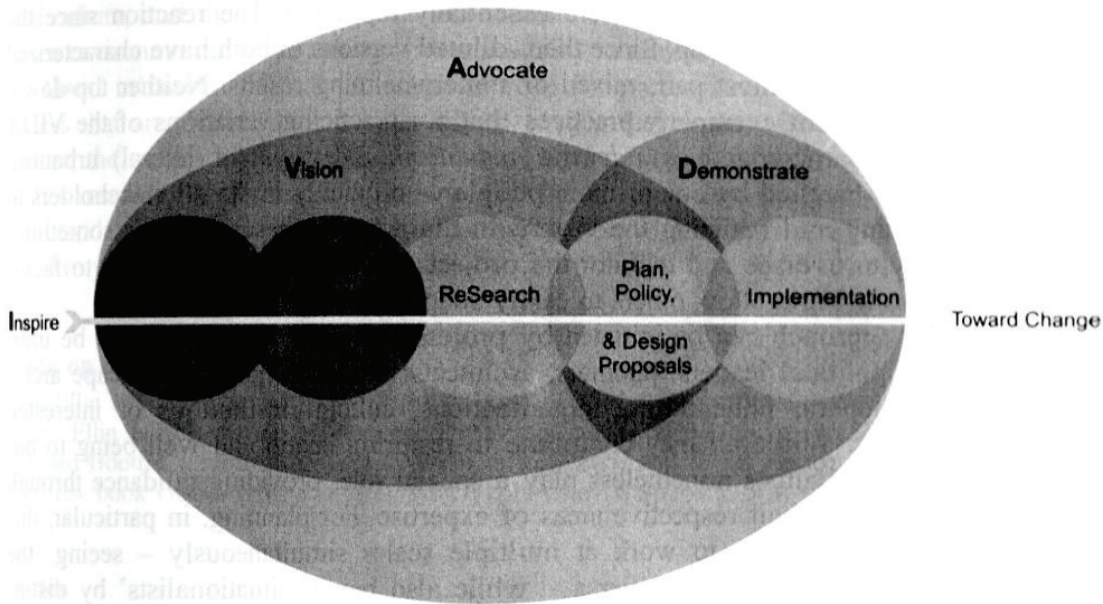


Figure 3. Enriching the conventional approach with VIDA.

takes place throughout the process. Depending on the project, it could involve public forums, public scholarship, meeting with public officials and private or non-profit boards, forging public-private partnerships, and generating long-term environmental, economic and quality of life impact scenarios, assessments and projections. If we cannot be advocates for our projects, we probably should not be doing them.⁷

In sum, the VIDA process introduces subtle changes with large impacts (Figure 3). It builds on our own strengths and those of stakeholders in order to build on the strengths of places. The VIDA process takes cues from the data (or gifts), connects the dots among these assets, and adds value to them through collective envisioning to effect significant and ongoing change. It also contributes to rallying resources to realize the vision along the way.

The shortcomings of modern urbanism are due to both product and process, both the *what* and the *how*. With regard to product (the *what*), modern urbanism's principal banes were the separation of functions, the death of the street, and the reliance upon the automobile. In terms of process (the *how*), problems inhered in the imposition of these plans upon places without meaningful community engagement or a sensitivity to place (built and natural), history and culture. In the wake of modern urbanism's demise, numerous 'open society' and participatory efforts emerged that avoided the heavy hand, but proved largely unremarkable in terms of improving places.

Since then, the first shortcoming (product) has been ably addressed by the converging prescriptions for good urbanism described above.⁸ The second one (process), however, has been largely evaded, severely impairing the professions of planning and urban design. Retreating from addressing core issues, these professions deflected attention to more narrow pursuits, technological preoccupations and turf wars (contending urbanisms rather than good urbanism, competing for commissions and notoriety, and so forth). Needless to say, prescribing good urbanism without the ability to heed such prescriptions cannot fully repair the shortcomings of modern urbanism, explaining perhaps the ongoing lament about the paucity of bold plans ever since the failure of modern urbanism.

Happily, another kind of visionary planning and urban design has been on the rise that responds to both shortcomings. Throughout history, all the way through modern urbanism,

visionary planning and urban design were essentially top-down. The reaction since the 1960s was emphatically bottom-up. Since then, diluted versions of both have characterized most efforts with, for the most part, mixed or underwhelming results. Neither top-down, nor bottom-up, the recent exemplary practices that are practicing variations of the VIDA process might be characterized as *sideways urbanism*. Sideways (or lateral) urbanism begins with an idea hatched by one or more people who quickly invite all stakeholders to participate in refining and realizing the vision. In the process, these practices sometimes establish an entity to oversee and monitor the project as well as enabling policy to facilitate its implementation and allow others to easily adapt it to other circumstances.

Although this approach can be initiated by professional urbanists, it can also be initiated by others⁹ – political leaders, planners, architects, urban designers, landscape architects, artists, developers, philanthropic organizations, cultural institutions or interested community members. While all may contribute to restoring health and well being to our places, professional urbanists nonetheless play a special role, providing guidance through the process and lending their respective areas of expertise. For planning, in particular, this expertise includes the ability to work at multiple scales simultaneously – seeing ‘the world in a grain of sand’ and vice versa – while also being ‘situationalists’ by distinguishing among mandates to employ appropriate techniques and strategies.¹⁰ The planning toolkit also includes collaborating, facilitating, benchmarking, assessing impacts, imagining alternatives, community-building, consensus-building, listening, communicating, storytelling, stewarding, educating and placemaking.

Bringing this expertise to the VIDA process has been contributing “to recover the creative dynamic of the planning project,” as recommended by Patsy Healey (Healey 2006, 336–337) and to transforming “planners into big-picture thinkers with the courage to imagine alternatives to the status quo,” urged by Campanella (2011). As Cliff Ellis maintains: “The planning profession is being offered a golden opportunity to finally ‘get it right’ with respect to the design of cities and regions, as well as to become linked in the public mind with accomplishments of the highest order” (Ellis 2005, p. 144).

Professional urbanists and others practising VIDA can be *connectors*, *mavens* (researchers) and *salespersons* (advocates), the three capacities required for real transformation, according to Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point* (2007). These good urbanists can become civic leaders, place healers, entrepreneurial creatives (artists aligned with the business world), urban entrepreneurs (entrepreneurs who creatively contribute to placemaking and community-building), and catalysts for positive change.

Asset-based and place-based, good urbanism builds upon what is integral to people and locales – their DNA – rather than focus on deficits and problems. Good urbanism enhances places by leveraging existing conditions including natural settings, history, culture, buildings, and the talents, ideas and skills of community members as well as those of professional urbanists. Good urbanism brings people together to have conversations that matter because they paint a vision of what could be and energize all to implement the vision. Rather than use fear and control, good urbanism practices community-building, inspiration and co-creation. In this way, a generative and dynamic self-adjusting feedback mechanism is set into motion, enabling communities to build dynamically upon their strengths in an ongoing fashion.

As a result, good urbanism contributes to supporting existing local businesses and incentivizing new creative entrepreneurship while also providing an attractive place for national and global businesses to establish themselves. It builds upon cultural assets, supporting the rich diversity of our communities, including historic buildings and districts, expressive arts

and culture, and the wide range of talent, creativity and skills in any given place. It showcases environmental assets, along with our ability to reclaim and enhance them.

Good urbanism secures an essential role for professional urbanists while producing places that are livable and lovable, where people feel connected with themselves, others, nature, the sacred, the past and the future. Good urbanism envisions best possibilities and rallies resources to realize them in a world that needs it now more than ever.

Good urbanism is increasingly apparent and possible everywhere.

Are you a good urbanist?

Note on contributor

Nan Ellin is Professor and Chair of the School of City & Metropolitan Planning at University of Utah. Ellin is the author of *Integral Urbanism* and *Postmodern Urbanism*, collaborated with Edward Booth-Clibborn on *Phoenix: 21st-Century City*, and is the editor of *Architecture of Fear*. Her new book *Good Urbanism*, from which this essay is adapted, is forthcoming.

Notes

1. Zeynep Toker and Henrik Minassians (2011) also suggest this.
2. Earlier versions include Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities, the 'neighborhood unit' of Clarence Perry, the 'cellular city' of Lewis Mumford, Pedestrian Pockets (Kelbaugh 1996), and Transit-Oriented Developments.
3. Ray Oldenburg describes these informal public gathering places as the 'third place', after home and work (1999).
4. See Morrish and Brown (1993), Berrezbeitia and Pollak (1999).
5. For example, VW sponsors The Fun Theory (<http://thefuntheory.com/>) "dedicated to the thought that something as simple as fun is the easiest way to change people's behaviour for the better."
6. The concept of MeSearch is adapted from Lynn Nelson (2004).
7. This approach loosely parallels Otto Scharmer's 'Theory U', applying it specifically to enhancing quality of place. As Scharmer maintains: "Learning from the past is based on the normal learning cycle (act, observe, reflect, plan, act), while learning from the future as it emerges is based on the process and practice of presencing (suspending, redirecting, letting go, letting come, envisioning, enacting, embodying)" (Scharmer 2007, p. 467).
8. The most significant urban visioning of recent years has consisted of efforts to learn from earlier city-building traditions (New Urbanism) along with efforts to achieve sustainable or net-zero cities by applying the most advanced construction, transportation, and communication technologies.
9. In *Urban Design Reclaimed*, Emily Talen provides step-by-step instructions for anyone interested in advancing an urban design proposal (2009).
10. Alex Krieger (2000) identifies nine points that encompass the ideal planner, among them is the ability to be "situationalists" as opposed to ideologues.

References

- Berrizbeitia, A. and Pollak, L., 1999. *Inside outside: between architecture and landscape*. Gloucester, MA: Rockport.
- Campanella, T., 2011. Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning. The Design Observer Group. In: M. Page and T. Mennel, eds. *Reconsidering Jane Jacobs*. Chicago: American Planning Association. Available from: <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/jane-jacobs-and-the-death-and-life-of-american-planning/25188/>
- Ellin, N., 2010. Canalscape: practising integral urbanism in metropolitan Phoenix. *Journal of Urban Design*, Special Issue, 15 (4), 599–610.
- Ellis, C., 2005. Planning methods and good city form. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 22 (2) (Summer), 138–147.
- Gladwell, M., 2000. *The tipping point*. London: Little Brown & Co

- Healey, P., 2006. *Collaborative planning: shaping places in fragmented societies*, 2nd edn. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kelbaugh, D., ed., 1996. *Pedestrian pocket book: a new suburban design strategy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Krieger, A., 2000. The planner as urban designer: reforming planning education. In: L. Rodwin and B. Sanyal, eds. *The profession of city planning: changes, images and challenges: 1950–2000*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research/Rutgers University Press.
- Morrish, W. and Brown, C., 1993. Infrastructure for the new social covenant. In: D. Kelbaugh and K.K. McCullough, eds. *Writing urbanism*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Nelson, G.L., 2004. *Writing and being*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Oldenburg, R., 1999. *The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other great hangouts at the heart of a community*. 2nd edn. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Scharmer, C.O., 2007. *Theory U: leading from the future as it emerges*. Cambridge: Society for Organizational Learning.
- Talen, E., 2009. *Urban design reclaimed*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association.
- Toker, Z., and Minassians, H., 2011. Good cities and healthy communities for a better quality of life. Abstract, ACSP Conference Salt Lake City, Utah 2011.