

An Academic Review and Critique of the following text:

Jerke, D., Porter, D. R., & Lassar, T. J. (2008). *Urban Design and the Bottom Line: Optimizing the Return on Perception*. Washington, DC: ULI - The Urban Land Institute.

Introduction

Urban Design and the Bottom Line was written by Dennis Jerke who serves as a managing principle for the Jacobs Carter Burgess architecture firm. Focusing mostly on landscape-oriented endeavors associated with the field, Jerke has been a part of numerous significant landscape design initiatives including recreation and transportation projects as an example. In this book, he looks to inform readers on the benefit of good design. By providing examples of how designed space can lead to enhanced economic returns as well as provide extensive cultural benefits, Jerke illustrates how closely these aspects are connected to good design practices.

Summary

To better explain the overall topic of urban design, Jerke separates the book into larger segments that cover the overarching elements of design in the urban setting. He classifies this into four sections: architecture, green infrastructure, transportation, and the element of water and describes how to implement these aspects in a cohesive matter in order to create so-called “good” design.

As a major part of an urban landscape, architecture plays a major role in the overall composition of a project. Whether occupied or sculptural, good architectural design is imperative in the success of a project as it often serves as the anchor for a specific site, landscape, or region. Jerke explains this in the introduction to the architecture section, stating “while an area’s natural

features, water settings, and transportation systems may be remarkable – and often remarked upon – the quality of the vertical built environment tends to leave the most lasting impressions” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 35). Moving through the topic of architecture in a greater designed landscape, Jerke once again separates the section into four main concepts: residential design, retail design, educational facilities, and civic structures. In explaining these aspects, he focuses on how the image of good design contained within these specific projects creates value in both economic and social aspects.

The second section Jerke analyzes is the natural setting, or “green infrastructure” as defined in the book. While the architecture of an area may serve as a visual anchor, the organic landscape provides the seat in which this architecture sits. This provides excellent value to the project, Jerke explains, “the value of green infrastructure goes beyond its environmental benefits by improving the economic and social well-being of people living in natural areas...” and, “the economic, environmental, social, cultural, and visual benefits of green infrastructure add up to a higher quality of life” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 96). Continuing his dividing technique, Jerke splits up this section into four main parts: green infrastructure by design, natural areas, greenways, and urban parks, in order to highlight these main sub-topics in the section. Additionally in this segment, Jerke calls out a particular project, the Louisville Waterfront Park, and speaks on the various types of returns it provides through the lens of green infrastructure. Jerke goes on to analyze each sub-topic, providing a description of each, stating the benefits, and providing numerous examples of the style being discussed.

Moving forward through the book, Jerke introduces the topic of transportation. In the first opening sentences of the section that covers transportation, Jerke claims, “complex transportation systems connect and enhance the activities of nations, economies, and societies.

Transportation raises the efficiency of production and manufacturing, enlivens trade, expands markets, spreads knowledge, offers restful recreation, and promotes social interaction” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 145). In these statements, he explains clearly, yet concisely why transportation is a vital piece of infrastructure to countries and their economy and culture. This third section is split into subsections that cover: highways and roads, transit-oriented development, bridges, and airports, as Jerke discusses each and states the importance of the various divisions, following suit and citing various examples from around the world. He uses these examples to make his argument on the value and necessity of transportation in development and speaks on how it is well integrated in order to increase this benefit making it important for everyone.

In the last section on water, Jerke speaks on the rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, and waterfronts that all add to the site of a project. Starting off the section, he goes into detail on the harm placed on rivers by development and the adverse effects this has on economy and society, stating, “stream corridors are complex ecosystems...[that] generate exceptional economic, environmental, social and cultural value...but are sensitive to changes in...ecosystem conditions – including those occasioned by urban development” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 192). Going through the rest of the section, Jerke analyzes the damage, benefit, and solutions to lakes and waterfronts through the use of various examples such as San Antonio’s River Walk, explaining the value of incorporating water into a project while preserving and protecting it as best as possible.

The final chapter of the book wraps up the concepts laid out earlier by explaining how to incorporate these factors into “good” cohesive design. Entitled “Implementing Good Design” this section looks to demonstrate how all characteristics can be fused together in urban

development, explaining how the cooperation between them leads to economic and social benefit, calling this “holistic design”. Jerke claims, “holistic design process can integrate the four image systems – architecture, green spaces, transportation facilities, and water settings – to achieve the qualities of design that make a place great” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 227).

Analysis

While it is understood that a major goal of development is a good return on investment, monetarily speaking, the social return on investment on the other hand could be just as impactful and should not be ignored. Although design can happen at many levels, Jerke explains, “good design requires a thoughtful response to characteristics of the site and its surroundings, market demands, available technologies, and several other factors, many of which are not directly sensed by beholders” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 8).

Architecture in the field, while aesthetics are important, is moving toward a more sustainable design methodology, improving not only a site visually, but from an environmental standpoint as well. “For example, green building designs reduce energy requirements for heating and cooling by using high-performance window glazing, incorporating passive and active solar heating, planting roof gardens, taking sun and shade into account in siting buildings, and making use of natural light” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 14). By doing so, the overall value of a project is greatly enhanced in multiple ways, providing benefits for many levels of people from investors to residents.

“Ideally, nature’s green spaces and features – especially those nestled within or defining the edges of built environments – are best conserved as strategically planned, interconnected networks, just as gray infrastructure systems are planned in a strategic manner to provide the foundation of basic services for communities” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 94). For the most

part, the green surface provides multiple appeals to the senses providing comforting visuals, aromatic scents, interesting textures to the touch, a setting for wildlife that supply sounds, and potentially good tastes, depending on the vegetation. By planning the green space as defined in the quote, the quality of the benefit it provides can be heightened while still providing the other aspects of the site necessary to complete a project, such as the built elements of architecture and infrastructure.

From Jerke's explanation of the topic, it can be inferred that the transportation system serves as an integral piece of infrastructure, controlling the arrival to and departure from a site, having a major impact on the project as a whole. While the main appeal to a site may be the architecture, green spaces, or aquatic connection, the transportation is the means by which a user is linked to the site. Providing a connection from work or home, the transportation system is a very important characteristic of any project given that without this type of infrastructure, the site may be inaccessible. This is demonstrated in the section covering transit-oriented development stating, "local bus service operating on fixed routes carries two-thirds of the transit passengers in the United States..." and "stops are usually within a short distance of riders' homes" (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 158). While transit-oriented development is only one subsection of transportation, this short explanation is still a significant statement that shows the necessity of these types of systems. Having a project connected to such infrastructure not only enhances the accessibility of the user, but also sparks economic benefits as well. In providing facilitated transport between spaces throughout a region whether from a country to another or simply from a neighborhood to a city center, large-scale commerce is influenced by these types of systems.

Being that almost all settlement in civilizations throughout history has taken place solely on the location of water, it is clear that it is important piece of the development puzzle. In some

cases water is like green infrastructure in that it provides the connection of the user to nature, supplying sights and sounds, tactile senses, as well as smells and sometimes tastes. However, water – as with most cases in larger-scale urban development – serves as a form of transportation, becoming part of that infrastructure as well. “[Water] provides pleasant scenery and recreational opportunities, supplies drinking water, offer a mode of transportation to support economic activity, and provides habitat for fish and wildlife” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 202). Due to this quadruple service water provides to an urban landscape, it sets itself up to be yet another vital piece to developments.

As a designer, it is important to take all aspects into consideration when developing a space, especially in an urban landscape that will have a large impact on a widespread collection of users. Jerke makes this point stating, “focusing on each image system individually does not generate as much community value as can be gained to coordinating their design holistically” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 227). When designed in conjunction with one another, each system is heightened to the greatest extent, providing the best return on investment for the developer and the best experience for the user group.

Response

In reviewing this piece, Jerke demonstrates his support of employing design techniques that are considered “good” that encourage multiple aspects of economy as well as social benefits. Drawing from his statements, it is clear that certain aspects of the field are reverting to an old-world style of design, incorporating all the important elements in a cohesive way. In this long quote, Jerke proves this point, citing quick examples that are reminiscent of the past, invoking an almost European feel to the projects.

“Many residential and mixed-use projects, for example, are including green infrastructure networks and accommodating multimodal transportation. Developers are creating retail centers modeled on historic small-town main streets. Public buildings are being designed to incorporate place-making qualities that heighten citizens’ identity with their communities” (Jerke, Porter & Lassar, 2008, p. 35).

It is important – serving as examples that improve social and economic aspects of an area – that American development is following suit behind these principles, heading in a more design based rather than production based system of building. Although certain developers have an antiquated view on the industry, focusing solely on monetary value alone, Jerke demonstrates how employing heightened design can not only have a positive social impact, but also increase the return on investment in an economic manner as well.

Conclusions

The overarching concept that good design influences good economics and good societies is very clear throughout Urban Design and the Bottom Line. In this piece, the author segments this topic into easy to digest sections that look to explain the different aspects that lead to good design. Citing examples of multiple projects around the world, he provides a large range of precedents to be used to apply the principles he lays out.

Today’s developers should use these “new” techniques that seem to follow the styles of the past in order to create space for current society. Incorporating all these important elements and making them a vital part of design can bring a great improvement to an urban setting, adding economic and social value, while subtly instilling good design principles in the users’ everyday lives.

References

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