

Recognise Urban Design

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RECOGNISE URBAN DESIGN

It comes as no surprise to me that both the Institute of Landscape Architects and the Planning Institute have initiated forms of professional recognition for urban designers. There has been a trend in thinking toward independent recognition over the past nearly twenty years and I conclude that this is a reflection of the success of urban design advocacy, education and practice over that period.

Many UDF readers will be aware through participation in the three surveys of urban design practitioners that I conducted commencing in 1992, gathering data across several topics including gender, age, educational background, key activities, methods and underpinning theories. There were about 30 respondents for each survey which was sent to every individual who could be identified through professional and public media as offering urban design services in Australia. In response to the question "should Urban Design stand as a separate profession" it is clear that there has been ever growing support for the idea.

30% support - 1992

50% support - 2002

65% support - 2007

The profile of respondents for the 2007 survey, by initial discipline, was approximately 57% architecture, 20% landscape architecture, 15% planning and the remainder from arts or sciences backgrounds. The earlier survey profiles had a similar percentage for landscape architecture, but there were fewer from architecture (45%) and more from planning (30%).

What I find surprising about the current situation is that the two professions with the lesser percentages of urban designers, sampled by the survey, are the ones that are elevating urban design through a category of recognition: 'Registration' in the case of Landscape Architecture and 'Chapter Membership' for Planning. The Architecture profession with probably more than half of the urban designers in Australia appears to be unmoved, or is Architecture comfortable with urban design being seen as cross-disciplinary and don't feel the need to corral it?

I subscribe to the 'broad-church' of urban design approach, essentially that the knowledge and skills needed are both broad and specialised and they span across several disciplines. Urban design is a team sport that does not fit narrowly with any one discipline or professional body. If we continue down recently constructed territorial paths then I predict confusion in the marketplace that is likely to undermine the field of urban design.

My advocacy is that for urban design to prosper and gain coherence and a stronger voice we do need a form of recognition but one that is at hands length from the existing professional bodies. This should derive from a unified approach to educational standards and practice experience criteria across the professions.

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