

The Effectiveness of Planning Tools in Managing Urban Change

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Abstract: Transformational change to urban morphologies has historically been driven by local dynamics which, over time, reconfigured the scales of urbanized territories and the nature of buildings and urban plans. Slow and continuous change generated familiarities and retained traces of the past, all part of a coherent morphologically built environment we love and cherish. The unprecedented scale of growth in the 20th century, changes to demographics and social cohesion, and the complexity of economics associated with development, created the need for a web of regulations and controls which characterizes modern planning with often adverse effects on the built environment. More recently global warming and advances in technologies created a new speculative context as the basis of city transformations and growth adding another layer in the complexities of regulatory frameworks. Planning practice has also shifted from ‘positive’ proactive planning during the post war era to a more ‘marketconscious’ (and sometimes market led) approach by the end of the 20th century, which found planning practice, ‘trouble shooting’ more than decisively guiding towards good practice. The same period paradoxically also signaled a renewed interest in ‘design’ previously labeled as ‘aesthetic control’ abandoned with the introduction of neoliberal urban policies in Europe in the 1960s and 70s. While operating within the same political context, the European ‘South’ still lags behind, in terms of sophistication and multiplicity of mechanisms in regulating change. Places like Greece and Cyprus are just beginning to adopt tools such as masterplanning, area plans, regeneration strategies, design codes etc. The paper examines Urban Briefing as an activity which structures and debates time and place-specific research and analysis, to inform a client’s design objectives and decisions toward the management of urban change. This in contrast with planning as an activity which is primarily descriptive and part prescriptive in nature. The analysis of good practice examples investigates planning tools, of which ‘research-based briefing’ is an intrinsic part of, aiming to directly inform design at different scales. The use of Urban Briefing tools is increasingly important, particularly in the context of the retraction of the public sector’s role in shaping the manmade environment.

Keywords: Research-based Briefing, Morphologies, Developer-led Masterplans, Market-conscious Planning, Tactile Briefing Tools.

Introduction

Transformational change to urban morphologies has historically been driven by local dynamics, which, over long periods of time, reconfigured both the scales of urbanized territories as well as the nature of buildings and urban plans. This slow and continuous change

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generated familiarities and retained traces of the past, all part of a coherent morphologically built environment we hold dear.

The unprecedented scale of growth, since the middle of the 20th century, changes to the demographics and social cohesion and the complexity of the economy associated with development, created the need for a web of regulations and controls which characterizes modern planning with not always positive effects on contemporary urbanity. More recently, climate change and advances in technology created a new speculative context as the basis of city transformation and growth, adding another layer to the complexities of regulatory frameworks (Ioannou *et al.*, 2019).

Planning practice has shifted from a self-claimed positive proactive planning during the post-war period to a more market-conscious (and sometimes market led) approach by the end of the 20th century. This means that planning practice, often trouble shoots rather than guiding towards regulated good practice. The same period paradoxically also signaled a renewed interest, by architects and planners, in design previously labeled as aesthetic control, abandoned with the introduction of neoliberal urban policies in Europe in the 1960s and '70s (Sager, 2011). Localism and public opinion very rarely find their way into decision making on the production of the urban environment other than their – not always productive – indirect influences on property markets. Environmental prescriptions associated with planning practice at the design level and scarcity of space available for development, are becoming a complex mosaic of tools assisting various public and private sector agencies to engage with the production of the built environment (Geddes *et al.*, 2020).

While operating within the same political context, the European South is lacking in terms of sophistication and multiplicity of mechanisms in regulating change. Places such as Greece and Cyprus are only now beginning to adopt tools such as masterplanning, area plans, regeneration strategies, design codes etc., and/or awkwardly introduced public participation as a design tool. Process based briefing and design led research tools are still novelties insignificant in local practice.

This paper attempts to examine the notion of *Urban Briefing* as an active planning and urban design tool which produces time and place specific research and analysis toward the management of urban change as well as design prescriptions. Integral to the notion of briefing is the embodiment of the notion of the client's (generic client) views and behaviours, directly or indirectly into decisions associated with the 'design' of environmental change. This stands in contrast to planning as a primarily top-down activity, bound to engineering logistics of systems, descriptive and prescriptive in nature. The references to good practice examples attempt to illustrate how *research-based briefing* is an intrinsic part of design, informing it at different scales (Kalnis, 2016). The importance of the formulation of such urban briefing tools and mechanisms is increasingly important, particularly because of the public sector's leading role in designing the manmade environment, retracting mostly to the production of strategic planning frameworks. Large scale change, comprehensive development and renewal is nowadays led primarily by private and institutional sector interests.

1. Proactive Planning Tools in the Context of Cyprus

Historically the planning system in Cyprus was based on a relatively simplistic but effective zoning system inherited by the British governance (early 20th century) and based on prevailing planning ideas of the time. The free-standing nature of all buildings clearly derives from 1950s ideas of European suburbia garden city models. Haphazard revisions 'littered' with interventions by development politics reflect the unclear relationship between planning and the central government's economic policy. The result is often incomprehensible in its intend-

ed planning regulatory frameworks. A large part of its activity concentrates on prescribing the basic morphological standards (plot ratio, coverage, distance from boundaries etc.) and defining infrastructural and service prerequisites of development. More intensive management, with additional guidance and advice, as well as the management of subsidy systems and the design of environmental improvement projects are associated with conservation (Geddes *et al.*, 2020).

The revision of local plans – a key planning tool – occurring every 5-10 years often reiterates and maps changes driven by development activity, more than opening the way to new thinking on city planning and design reflecting good practice, with the ability to shift trends more than managing them. In parallel, a plethora of ministerial and departmental directives impose short term objectives originating from short term development economics, undermining the efficiency of an already hesitant planning system. A main activity beyond plan making of local planning departments focuses on the control of indecisive planning frameworks (Ioannou *et al.*, 2020).

The production of Local Plans (produced solely by public sector departments) is one of two main proactive tools of development control practice in Cyprus. They focus primarily on the design of infrastructure (roads and utilities), defining/redefining development zones including a plethora of (mainly) restrictions aiming at preventing bad development practices. Local plans and the Dilosi Politikis (the framework which regulates all territories outside the urban plans), remain at the level of strategic prescription, and often the examination of implications in terms of the negative instead of positive impact of a specific direction. At the development practice end, design competitions are mostly associated with the design of buildings and increasingly large-scale architecture often associated with the rapid expansion of the tourism industry, second homes and special infrastructure (schools, casinos, etc.). Masterplans are primarily commissioned by the private or institutional sectors, as a way of securing the capacity and terms of development proposals in the absence of outline planning permission practiced in most of Europe. The Public sector commissions associated with design investigation are less interesting because of the terms of their tendering practice. Government departments are obliged to commission the cheaper tender which often refers to “technical infrastructural design rather than aesthetic choices” associated with each inquiry. (Pissourios & Serghides, 2023).

More recently tools, such as masterplans have become necessary when attempting to secure approval for large-scale developments. Although local authorities are often accused of paying lip-service to associated Environmental Impact Statements, such new developments (Aphrodite Hills, 1990s Minthis Hills 2020s, etc.) clearly mark a significant positive change in the quality of new city expansions, compared with the piecemeal urban additions elsewhere. Such masterplans are primarily developer-led and reflect international practice, including the privileged treatment associated with large scale, inward international investment (Ioannou, *et al.*, 2019). The design often reflects adaptations of architectural models, based on representational imagery (simulating the materiality and selective architectural elements, arched openings, roofs etc.) more than traditional typo-morphological models associated with the locality.

A marked change to practice has begun with the adoption of area plans or masterplans attached to statutory regulation (Nicosia centre, Limassol centre, Karnagio Limassol, Pissouri bay, etc.). Depending on their objectives, plans take different shapes in terms of their level of prescription, their focus or the level of participation in their production, often stopping short of addressing detail design issues or references to decisive delivery mechanisms compared to their European counterparts.

The void in planning practices seems to be the *middle ground* between statutory regulation and design competitions, which could inform design intelligence in the form of flexible

briefs and advisory guidance. This does not only inform good practice and design, but advances knowledge on issues through empirical research drawn from local and international best practices. The diagram of Figure 1 sketches the middle ground between strategic planning and design in Europe, where a plethora of design-led briefing activities draw from a variety of prescriptive tools focused on a place, its people, and processes associated with its delivery.

Empirical research activity associated with such tools in Europe is driven by central governments, local authorities, and most importantly a rich and diverse institutional sector decisive in supporting good planning and urban design practices (Reimer *et al.*, 2014).

This lack of briefing at the intermediate scales in Cyprus results perhaps from the undeveloped and young planning system, the lack of interest in environmental issues on behalf of the institutional sector and the lack of capacity within local authorities to proactively ‘plan’ environmental change. Responsibilities for plan making are concentrated within a centralised planning department inherently susceptible to political pressures for the promotion of economic growth and the support of the central government’s economic policy (Pissourios & Serghides, 2023). Local authorities, on the other hand, do not have the responsibility or capacity to proactively drive city design and are unable to respond effectively to the scale of the task (Constantinides, 2019).

2. Informing the *Middle Ground*

Urban Briefing is in no way a standardised practice nor can it be characterised as an ‘exact’ science. Research tools are tactile and tailored to specific conditions, while research questions can shift faster than their answers. The policy context of empirical research on urban issues in recent years is very much driven by the sustainability agenda and climate change crisis which emerged during the end of the 20th century.

Since the 1980s, the academic community has been deeply involved in the question of how conurbations, particularly large and increasingly growing ones, can plan a more energy aware rapid urbanization (Hall, P. 1993; Sudjic, 1992; MVRDV, 1999). The city’s intensification, allowing for walking and cycling as well as the use of effective public transport to

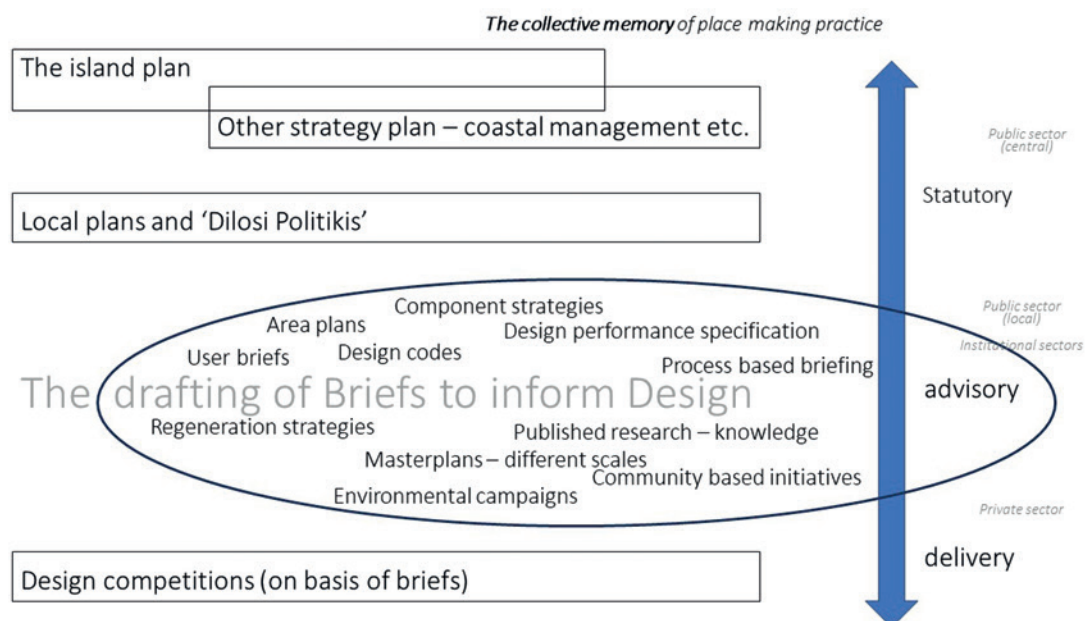


Figure 1. Role of Urban Briefing in Development Control practice (Source: authors).

service a large part of its plan became the doctrine of the time. It was recognized early on that the compactness of cities can be advantageous in other ways, such in encouraging social interaction (Elkin *et al.* cited in Jenks *et al.* 1996: 5). While the context of the compact city as a tool to achieve sustainability was very quickly adopted with enthusiasm by both the public and private sectors, they soon understood that the relationship was “neither simple nor straightforward” (Jenks *et al.* 1996: 5). Classic texts such as *The Compact City: A Sustainable Urban Form* edited by Jenks in 1996 consists mainly of a series of diagnostic exercises and ‘well-articulated’ questions with arguments that remain ‘largely theoretical’ (Jenks *et al.*, 1996: 341), highlighting a need for further research. Despite that, the support of the private sector in adopting new policies was decisive in ‘the re-imagining of the city required by a post-industrial consumerist economy, and in the role of urban design in making cities more competitive in attracting global firms, property investment, regional shoppers and tourists’. (Madanipour, 2006, cited in Punter 2006: 344).

Under this immense pressure, changes to government policies in Western Europe were swift and plethoric. In the UK, the immediate publication of several Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) was decisive in changing planning policy in the 1990s (on Housing, Transport, etc.). Public response to change kicked off another set of policy measures advocating public consultation as a necessary procedure for planning any kind of large-scale change set in policy (PPG1). In the following decade, this led to the branding of the term ‘good design’, distinct from good planning (ODPM, 2005) as a key focus of planning. This term was a far more constructive and expansive/complex term compared to aesthetic control in the key Planning Circular (DoE, 1980) that had launched the Conservative deregulation of planning and the introduction of neoliberal urban policies’ (Punter, 2010: 343).

Since then, Urban Planning and Design have been prolific in the progression of academic discourse, and academic and empirical research regardless of impact on policy practice. In many ways, Urban Design continues its tradition as a *mongrel discipline* (Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007), borrowing information and methodologies from a much wider field of environmental sciences, free of the constraints of architecture, engineering or planning. The nature of Urban design/planning research is multifaceted and adopts inter-disciplinary and often empirical approaches in the investigation of strategic and/or place-specific conditions. The physical design, the consideration of its economic and socio-cultural dimension, the consideration of futures, are inquiries complex in nature attempting to articulate all aspects, including delivery mechanisms, into a single research question. “Urban design is a far from clear area of activity” with perhaps no need for a short, clear or more precise definition (Madanipour, 2007, cited in Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007: 12). The strong links between academic research and empirical research associated with practice appear to make both design led methodologies equally valid with “neither form of research being intellectually superior” (Carmona, 2014: 4).

The table in Figure 2 outlines the context of urban briefing in the UK in the early 21st century, in relation to urban change (Nicolaou, L. 2017). It refers to published policy research prescriptions, which systematically record realities and are directly relevant to specific localities. In parallel, they construct models (morphological/social/economic) and develop methodological approaches, applicable not only to the study but to design prescription in a wider context. The Matrix sets out to review the methodological tools, varying from investigatory design tools (points 1, 2 and 3 – column 4), to more inquiry based qualitative evaluations, (points 4 and 5) and the use of scenario building as a learning and design tool (points 6 and 7). The patterns emerging across the case studies reflect the nature of the topic, established knowledge patterns in the field and the nature of the required output. Most importantly, it becomes obvious that the application of a variety of methodological tools is necessary to construct the answers to the research question. The collective application of tools is what adds value and sophistication to otherwise conventional research methods in planning and Urban Design (Nicolaou, 2017).

			observational data - mapping of conditions user / mapping social cultural attitudes literature review consultation (stakeholder and public) inquiry by design participatory design Quantification of type-morphology scenario building Qualification through modeling Comparative case study evaluation change management Peer learning - internal seminar works												
TOPIC AREA	KEY RESEARCH	ADDITIONAL RESEARCH											COMMON GROUND	DISTINCTIVENESS	VALUE
1 RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION	1 The quality of London's Residential												all supportive to design either as background to policy formation or large scale design / masterplanning	EVIDENCES BASED case study evaluation and morphological modeling planning policy research	informed decisively the change of UK compact city policy
	2 Providing More Homes														
	3 the Use of Density in Urban Planning														
		13 Sustainable residential Quality													
2 CITY CENTRE REGENERATION		24 UK round table on sustainable											use of multiple set of methodological tools qualitative and quantitative evaluations design led empirical tools	KNOWLEDGE BASED modeling of change and extensive stakeholder consultation and change management programmes Research to support decision making, background to policy change and use as guidance documents	policy guidance with longer term value of research material.
	4 High Rise Rotterdam														
	5 A Strategy for Dublin Building Height														
	6 London Skyline; views and High Buildings														
	7 European approach to Managing Higher														
	8 Proof of Evidents - Vauxhall Tower,														
		30 Urban Transformations in East Dublin													
		32 Barrow street Framework													
3 DELIVERY GOOD DESIGN		31 DODA skyline study											same central research thesis - value of intensification in sustainability agenda	RESEARCH JOURNEY investigation of design development process through live projects and puping of user and stakeholder practice	investigation of understanding and processes associated with good design practice more than guidance
	9 Masterplanning Guide														
	10 StrUD strategic Urban Design														
	11 Design Coding														
	12 Thames Gateway renaissance														
		14 Planning and Developemtn Briefs													
		15 South Oxfordshire Design Guide													
		16 Tidal Thames Landscape assessment													
		25 Medway Renaissance 2020 vision													
		25/26 Learning Laboratories research													
		28 Northamptonshire Workplace Strategy													

See full reference in published research in appendix 2

only main methodological tools marked

Figure 2. Research tools matrix (Source: Nicolaou, L., 2017, The Value of Briefing in managing Urban change, Doctoral thesis, Oxford: Brookes University, Table 1).

3. Prescriptions of Urban Character – Methodological Tools

Typo-morphological analysis is still in the center of contemporary planning research based on the investigation of built form in relation to its land use, and the processes which give rise to it. As a method, it establishes an up-front dialogue between building, its originating factors and the quantitative and qualitative attributes of built space. Despite unresolved disparities across different morphological approaches in academic discourse (Li & Zhang, 2022), it is recognized that reading and analysing the physical form of cities can be understood at different levels of resolution and can provide insight on its origins and generating factors. Another key aspect, controversial in its validity as a scientific research method, is the use of precedents (case study evaluations) as tools for understanding and prescribing design and place (Bunschoten, 2014; Bunschoten, *et al.*, 2001). Ongoing debate suggests that the reading of reality through case studies does not constitute theoretical knowledge which is superior to a practical one. The statistically significant aspect of case study evaluation in relation to the detailed evaluation of a single case study, also points to how much case studies can be used as a tool for deriving scientific knowledge or simply assist with the construction of a hypothesis. In defense of the use of precedents in urban planning research, Ben Flyvbjerg concludes that “the case study is a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences and it is a method that holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology” (Flyvbjerg, 2006). He continues to suggest that comparative relevance, the credibility of data and the quality of mapping templates are key aspects of the credibility of case study evaluation as a research tool.

The nature of both tools (typo morphological analysis and case study evaluation) is dramatically changing in line with technological advances on the one hand and the shifts in urban planning debates on the other. A new condition which decisively impacts how morphological and reference information is produced and used is the advancement of GIS information systems in surveying and interpreting three-dimensional form. “By 2030 more

than just enablers, digital technologies including 5G, the Internet of Things, edge computing, Artificial Intelligence, robotics and augmented reality will be the core of new products that will enhance the digital transformation of business and ensure a fair and competitive digital economy” (European Commission – March 2021). Despite promising technological tools, there are concerns about the ability of societies to generate vast databases by various agencies mapping relevant data (Mills *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, commitment toward continuously updating and maintaining databases and systems relying on multiple agents does not seem to support a full digitization of frameworks. Not to mention the dangers entailed of unregulated practices at every level (public and private sectors) of these vast ecosystems (Ma *et al.*, 2013 cited in Mills *et al.*, 2021) with the “devil already hidden in the details” (Cendic & Gosztanyi, 2022).

In parallel, the urgency brought about by climate change on strategies to understand and resolve shifts the focus of European debate on research, associated data collection and guidance from sociocultural and morphological factors to that of a place’s environmental performance. The sustainability agency is already well embedded into European Regulation (Reimer *et al.*, 2014) in several different formats with the United Nations SDGs filtering down to all strategic and place specific activities.

One possible danger driven by environmental urgencies and technological advances is the understandable priority given to the investigation of measurable data of performance over qualitative descriptors of an extremely complex and heterogeneous landscape, particularly in large metropolitan scenarios. “The development in urban climate science, based on observational programs coupled with theoretical understanding of near-surface processes, now allows the integration of cities into regional-scale models. Whereas previously, such models treated the urban surface as simply warm, dry, and rough, the newest models incorporate variations in building dimensions and layout that numerically describe the urban landscape” (Mills *et al.*, 2021). Although such sophisticated morphological modeling and urban micro-scale models are progressing fast with the establishment of regional databases, the focus is mainly on recording the physical and functional attributes of space (nature of construction materials, materiality, morphology of urban landscape, occupational patterns). A key question is how much they will guide urban planning practice toward descriptors associated with larger scale components, climate change risk averse strategies, factors associated with urban resilience and sustainability more than ‘place making’ in its sociocultural context.

The danger of the digitization of environmental performance and *big data* is the diversion of researchers’ and policy makers’ attention away from tangible considerations such as sociality, urban character and micro economics as generators of urban character. The view of landscape as a cultural expression needs equally urgent attention as an integrated consideration to the measurable attributes of climatic performance (Averchenkova *et al.*, 2016; Neef *et al.*, 2018).

On the other hand, traditional investigatory tools are concerned with tactile, temporal, often unpredictable urban conditions, the accumulative mapping of which sketches out the specificity of place in time, all central to what we refer to as sense of place (Norberg-Schulz 1960s). Observational data and recording of abstract conditions, not always connected to the patterns and behaviors found in the work of Jan Gehl (Gehl & Svarre, 2013) have decisively influenced city regeneration approaches across Europe during the last few decades. A variety of consultation mechanisms (Arnstein, 1969), observational techniques and various types of ‘gaming’ (public, stakeholders, etc.) impacted strategic and detailed designs for change. Inquiry by design (Groat & Wang, 2002) tests and verifies views and opinions and investigates intellectual contracts continuously in today’s practice. Furthermore, urban design competition platforms such as European demonstrate how the making of urban design projects can obtain hybrid characteristics, depending both on the specificity of the actual context and

the dynamics of networks of actors that span all European cities involved (Kalnis, 2016; European Europe, 2009; Stratis, 2006, 2009).

The development of 'user briefs' using these methodologies and most importantly the process for producing them through a progression of data collection leads seamlessly to a parallel synthesis of ideas and solutions. It does not only contribute toward the mapping of the less tangible descriptors, but often acts as a change management tool, leading stakeholders and users to not only accepting new space configurations but changing attitudes toward more effective ways of using space. The process of urban briefing involves problem formulation and problem solving at the same time. "The urban brief is an opportunity for all parties to agree on a vision and clear objective for an area, before beginning detailing urban design studies. Precedent and generic design are powerful tools to help access options and dimension the appropriate design response" (Blyth & Worthington, 2001).

Briefing as a process which generates valid and creative solutions encompassing their delivery mechanisms was very popular in UK practice during the 1990s and early 2000s. CABA (Commission for the Architecture and the Built Environment) a public sector quango set up by the Labor government in 1999, established a national scale 'enabling programme', designed to support local authorities with expertise needed in preparing briefs for large regeneration projects. The appointment by CABA of specialist consultants in project teams within local authorities demonstrated a deep understanding of relevant practice precedents. 'Live assistance' to policy maker teams as objective sounding boards for local interests, concerns and evaluations of their mission statements proved to be extremely successful and productive. The process itself captured the dynamics of a 'process based urban brief' successful in absorbing tactile shifts and turns associated with urban design strategies and regeneration projects in the making. The two briefing projects presented in the following section attempt to illustrate some of the attributes of process based urban briefs adept in captivating the sociocultural making of place as well as its physical attributes.

4. The Nature of the 'Process Based Urban Brief'

Briefing as design is a political process, reflecting values through the ethics and morality of the society it refers to. Creating a better human experience of place is inevitably derived from a society's ability to 'be present' – not necessarily through conventional participation programs – but through conveying its needs and convictions in some kind of manner. Simultaneously, the formulation of any design ideas needs to come from the ability of the institutional base of each society to deliver change – whether through building space or not. Bjögvinnsson, *et al.*, take a step further towards what he calls an *infrastructuring* process and argue about *design after design* as a contemporary form of collective processes instead of *use before actual use*. They argue that a new challenge is presented in designing "beyond the specific project and toward future stakeholders as designers" (Bjögvinnsson, 2008; Bjögvinnsson *et al.*, 2012).

The following two briefing projects attempt to illustrate how the tactical mapping of a place and its cultural connotations, through user research (needs, opinions, preferences, and behaviors) directly inform the design and associated policy. The nature of participatory design varies and does not necessarily rely on conventional public participation programming. The consideration of users derives from research on patterns of behavior, recorded requirements for space and place (Patel, 2020; Thomas, 2019; Duffy, 1998; Duffy *et al.*, 1993; Whyte, 1980; Gehl & Svarre, 2013), observational data of space utilization (often associated with case study material in sociology, anthropology and environmental psychology).

Process-based briefing also allows the continuous feedback of stakeholders and users in a dynamic and flexible way (Habraken, 1988; Habraken *et al.*, 1999) and another key attribute

is the ability of the tool to consider the tangibles of built space simultaneously in its detail and strategic implications on their policy context (buildings, outdoor spaces, infrastructure). Being interactive and parallel to the timeframe of the project can often resolve polarized positions, by negotiating issues at each stage of an unfolding formulation of a common view.

The first example is associated with the current and ongoing issue of the appropriateness of tall buildings in European policy. European cities have taken a different stance toward this decisive change to their morphologies according to their physical setting, economy, social-cultural context as well as the nature of their planning systems. Some, like London and Rotterdam, have liberalized their policies, lifting locational restrictions to the placement of taller buildings. Others, such as Frankfurt, Paris and Dublin, were very careful with prescribing appropriate locations that would not have 'interruptions', to their traditional morphologies (Managing Intensification and Change: A Strategy for Dublin Building Height, DEGW for Dublin Corporation 2000 – DEGW was a London based architectural firm specializing in workplace briefing).

The Barrow Street masterplan in Dublin (Barrow Street Masterplan; creating a new business district, for Treasury Holdings, Dublin, DEGW 2004) associated with the regeneration of a decommissioned industrial area, with a robust but distinctive scale, attempted to address the polarization between conservative and liberal views of city height configurations which put projects within the area on hold. Drafts of alternative typo-morphological options, their feasibility and implications on public space and existing infrastructure were debated over a long period in stakeholder workshops, street surveys and working sessions with policy makers. It soon became clear that the notion of *acceptable height* was not driven by rational planning implications or the environmental impact of increased height but the *level of change* the Dublin society was prepared to accept at that point in time. The key to unlocking unresolved differences between stakeholders was the common denominator across views on the level of modification to the city skyline in Barrow Street. Interestingly, results suggested that the scale of growth of the morphological volume of the area by 25% appears to be acceptable by all population groups comfortably (verified by similar earlier research in London). At the other end of the scale, a 40% growth of volume and height was seen as the point beyond which the area's character would fundamentally change by all survey groups (Figure 3). Further modeling investigated the change of perception of density associated with the shape of built space. The same volume arranged in a tall slim building gave the impression of a much denser development than a *short and fat* one, particularly when the volume was articulated with references and alignments to their context (street width, adjacent buildings, etc.) (Figure 3, top).

Such 'evidence based' explorations of the density issue in a specific context at a particular point in time, fulfilled a number of client objectives (Dublin Planning Department) without prescribing a density as was originally expected. The simple experience of the process, the understanding of parameters impacting the perception of appropriate density by the public was enough to confidently assist with development control decisions of the new application. Furthermore, the participatory process including stakeholders in the design, confused and defensive at the outset of the process, arrived at a consensus, understanding the variety of cultural views on space, offering city planners and policy makers a framework for the negotiation of a new plan.

One other interesting evidence-based strategic briefing project was commissioned by Northamptonshire Invest (a public sector organisation responsible for the economic development of the region), which was tasked to help the County with the delivery of an aggressive job growth strategy. The purpose of this study into the nature of the future of *workspaces* and *workplaces* was to inform Northamptonshire decision-makers and key business stakeholders on the shape of the future property portfolio associated with work. It aims at enabling the transformation of Northamptonshire from a place of 'comfortable liveability' to a memorable place in a very competitive regional environment for a new generation of business. The

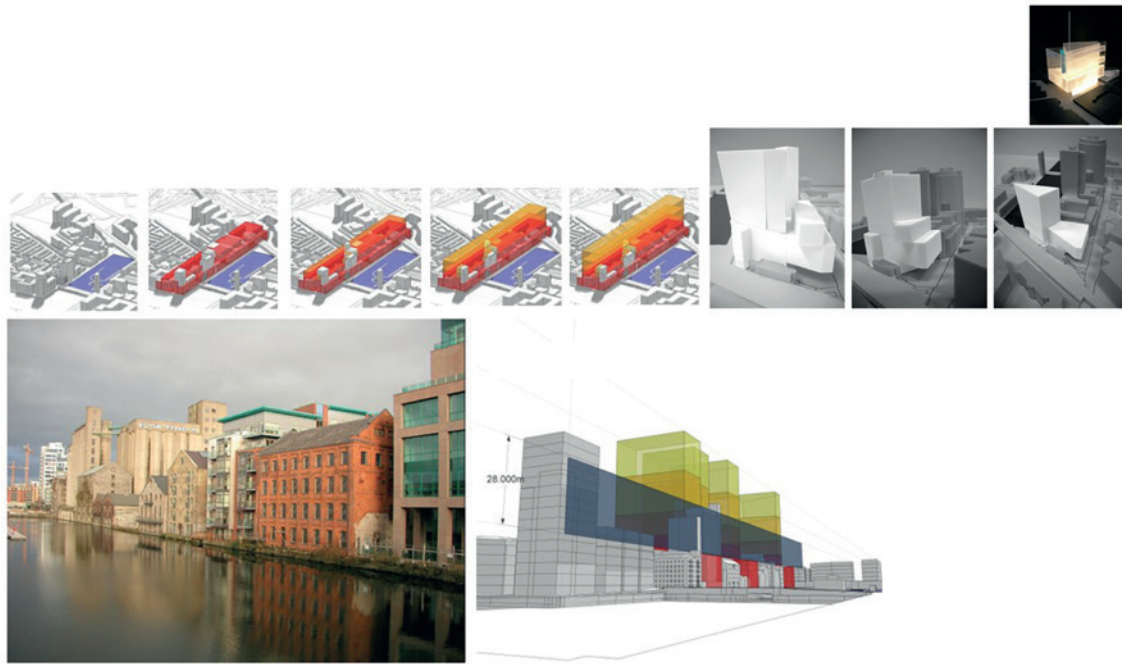


Figure 3. Different levels of acceptability of change by different social groups on Barrow Street, (planners considered dark yellow as appropriate while the public view favoured the light yellow as a potentially interesting townscape and skyline) Barrow Street Masterplan (Source: DEGW 2005 Treasury Holdings).

assumptions were that the supply of leading-edge workspaces and high value associated infrastructure could attract new business in its own right (supply led regeneration).

Access to an extensive workplace associated database at DEGW along with local investigations sketched the initial framework of space and business support attributes which could trigger changes in the real-estate demand markets, and the interest of new tenancies for the region. The study, in a unique way, seeks to filter data on regional economics and real estate demand into specifications for a new generation of workspace models and the accommodation lifestyles associated with them. Consequently, work and home spaces would be revised, along with the types of desirable locations in terms of accessibility and qualities, infrastructure frameworks and services associated with each, etc.

A shift in key conceptual thinking, based on an extensive body of users' research, led to the construction of 'workstyles' (work lifestyle-based typo-morphological models) instead of workspace models (space typologies) which are often associated with conventional sector-based descriptors of organisations (banking, tourism, financial sectors, industrial, etc.). The qualification of 'workstyles' adds new descriptors on accommodation models, based on an analysis of organisation purpose, process and culture, rich in information on the type of environment in general for work, living and leisure associated with these new business sectors (Figure 4). These new accommodation models do not correspond to particular sectors but run across them – for example, corporate functions or research can be found across the financial sector, the pharmaceutical industry or manufacturing. Aspects such as the 'culture' of different activities (i.e., visionary, products development/design part of organisations) and not sectors, have very different demands not only in terms of the 'space' they occupy but also the 'place' they want to contact business within.

The exploration of this conceptual framework of 'workstyles' directly informs development and real-estate products driven by new trends in demand but also planning policy and creative land use planning which can deliver the kind of places people want to live and work in, in the future. Figure 5 begins to suggest the distribution of 'workstyles' in the form of development types, their infrastructure, and their environment across city locations – from

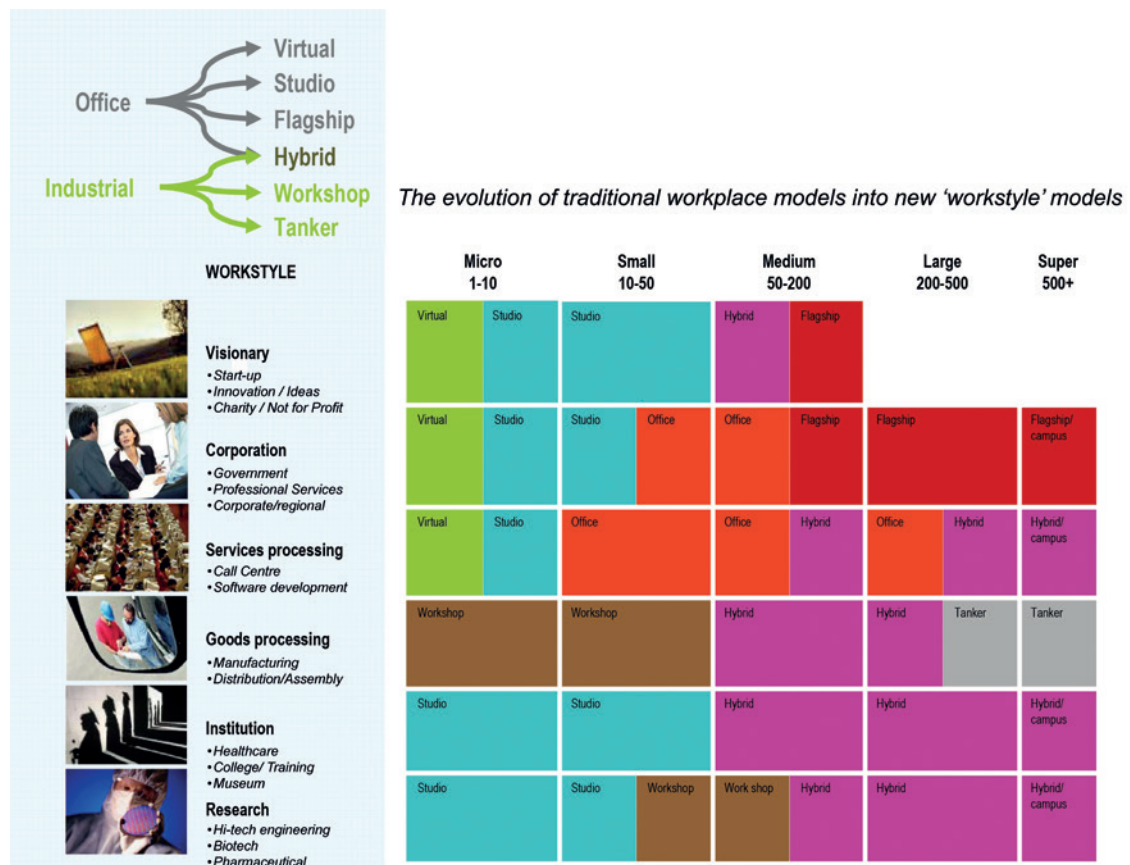


Figure 4. Northamptonshire 'Workstyle' strategy – Cross referencing of 'workstyles' to sectors' workplace / activity and space types (Source: DEGW 2005).

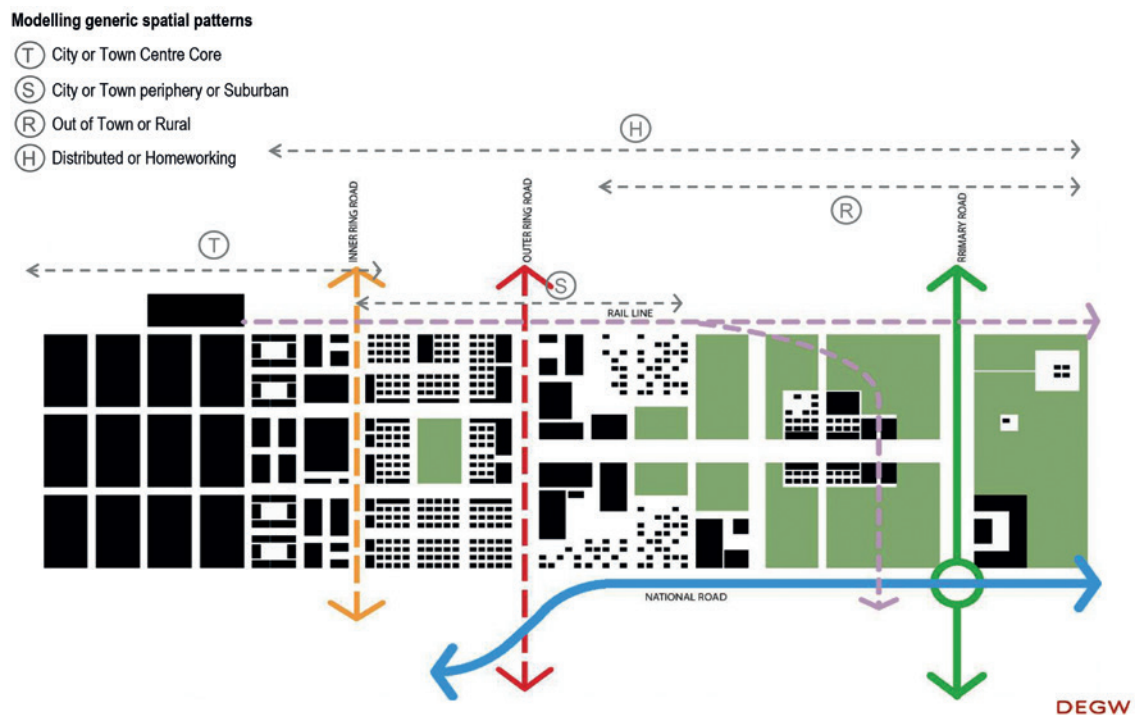


Figure 5. Northamptonshire, WorkStyles strategy, Land use planning (Source: DEGW 2005).

urban to suburban and out of town places. This land use framework is based on the nature, culture and economics of 'workplace activity' instead of simplistic sectoral characterisations of demand used by real estate markets.

This 'bottom up' approach led to a high level of 'specificity' in the interpretation of land use, which informs a detailed understanding of the drivers of change and aspirations for the qualities and attributes of a future environment. The transferral of conventional classifications of use to more tactical characterizations of function and activity informs new space typologies loaded with more detailed environmental specifications on the shell and fit out of space typologies.

Both projects in Dublin and Northamptonshire, were commissioned by 'clients' situated between the formal public and private sector delivery mechanisms. Barrow street was proposed by the dockland's development agency in Dublin, tasked with delivering the regeneration of old industrial harbor areas over a specific period of time and independent from the local planning department and processes. Northamptonshire Invest was also an independent body representing private interests, funded partly by the public sectors and with strong links with local interests. In both cases, the nature of the investigations and urban briefs produced did not only reflect the formative and responsive-to-change nature of the output, but also the ability of the commissioning organizations to work towards delivering change with soft ergonomic frameworks instead of spatial prescriptions.

Concluding Note

Inquiry by design and process-based investigations toward the development of Urban Briefs do not only lead to evidence based design but construct briefs that are flexible to change. Design, as an activity, examines space (explicitly or intuitively) from a number of different perspectives simultaneously. It sketches out the complex nature of multi-faceted characterizations and constructed solutions necessary to determine the building environment of the future – at all scales. Tactile briefing tools can assist with the understanding and measuring the scale of impact, the definition of thresholds of appropriateness in the context of policy regulation, and the testing the temporal compatibility of concepts with stakeholders views necessary for a creative policy formulation.

Key barriers identified earlier in this paper, for the adoption of such fertile tools of the *middle ground* in planning practice in southern Europe need to be studied further, since there are several systemic weaknesses in systems driving environmental change. The centralized plan making processes, the rigidity of a zoning system, the under-developed institutional sector, and the lack of pressure by public interests demanding participation in place making are some of the systemic shortcomings, blocking more inclusive and in many ways sophisticated urban briefing. The lack of capacity at the local authority level for policy making at the local scales retains the perpetuation of the deployment of an inflexible strategic policy, uniform in its prescriptions, in the delivery of urban space. Associated mechanisms for environmental design do not seem to facilitate or explore the contemporary international urban planning debate, or process based briefing practices.

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