

The Blind Man and the City, Community Design, Identity and Professional Praxis

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Abstract

A city has multiple and individualized characteristics in different parts of the world. Professional practice attempts to shape cities through a multitude of techniques, tools, regulations, laws and strategies. Each city is influenced by its natural surroundings as well as by its history, socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions. This paper utilizes the cities of Phoenix, Porto, Venice and Hong Kong to examine how the built environment has been impacted not only by each city's context, natural events, man-made processes, but also cultural and professional praxis. Each city's set of ultimate goals is relatively similar among all four cities, but their evolution, community design, identity and professional praxis have considerable local, regional and national nuances. The research question is whether professional practice in different parts of the world increases or decreases utility (variously defined as rent, progress, wealth and welfare) for the community. The hypothesis is that the city is, like Aesop's elephant metaphor, much more complex than professional practice can grasp. The ultimate question, then becomes what else can add meaning, direction and value to city building processes? Tentative suggestions point towards specializations, collaborative practices, short and long-term perspectives into the past and stability toward the future, and the creation of new technologies in the form of theories, practices and processes.

Keywords: Community design, Identity, Professional praxis.