Special Issue:

Pedagogies in urban design: Broadening the perspective

Dossier Editors

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Editorial

This editorial introduces a special issue that offers glimpses of formation, evolution and the current state of urban design education in the international scope. Bringing together Viewpoints, Research Articles and a Book Review from diverse geographical and institutional contexts, the issue traces multiple dimensions and pathways through which diverse pedagogies in urban design are formed, challenged, and reconfigured. The contributions reveal urban design pedagogies as contingent, adaptive, and shaped by shifting urban agendas, institutional organizations, agency of academic communities, and technological transformations. The synthesis foregrounds studio education as a key site where disciplinary foundations, core competencies and professional capacities, and working cultures are negotiated, and where enduring questions of legitimacy, specialization, professional recognition, technological mediation, and ethical formation concerning the future of urban design education are productively challenged.

Keywords: urban design, education, pedagogies

Framing the Special Issue

Amid attempts to define what urban design is and what it is not in terms of its disciplinary grounding, its theory and practice, the institutionalization of urban design education has persistently continued. Only recently have scholarly works, though still limited in number, revealed a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and experiments in teaching urban design. Like any other field still in the process of becoming, the academic organization of urban design has not been without challenges. On the one hand, literature reflects a variety of voices yet lacks a coherent overarching framework within which different perspectives can be meaningfully situated.

On the other hand, a right pedagogy for urban design' has been debated or searched for to secure the legitimacy and creditability of the field. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the existing body of literature *en masse* suggests that urban design education is emergent and evolving.

In assembling this special issue, we situate our work in dialogue with these earlier scholarly efforts that sought to grasp urban design education as an emergent and evolving field—most notably one of the earliest collections *Who Needs Educating in Urban Design* and *The Future of Urban Design Education: Bridging the Gaps* published in the Urban Design Quarterly in 1993, 1997, which were followed by *Education Reviewed* and *Urban Design Education* in 2009 and 2019 and among the recent ones *Emergent Pedagogy in Urban Design* published in the Journal of Urban Design in 2016. That collection foregrounded the unsettled nature of urban design pedagogy internationally, at a moment when the field was still negotiating its disciplinary boundaries and educational foundations. A decade later, the challenge persists. Furthermore, in an era of increasingly interconnected urban challenges, urban design education renews its call for critical engagement with its academic foundations.

However, the present issue takes that premise as its starting point rather than its conclusion. Accepting emergence and evolution as quintessential characteristics of urban design education (Cidre, 2016), we extend the conversation by shifting attention to *pedagogies*, by asking how these are formed, sustained, and transformed across different institutional, cultural and geographical contexts. We aim to foreground the dynamic

interplay of institutional, curricular and pedagogical structures and practices. It is, therefore a timely and necessary attempt to discuss **design "pedagogies" in urbanism** from a broader perspective to develop a collectively formulated response to the urgent challenges facing urban environments today.

In doing so, the special issue expands both the geographical reach and scope, bringing together experiences from diverse regions while examining the processes that shape pedagogical trajectories over time. Such an approach helps sustain international discourse that embraces the unique characteristics shaping urban design education through institutional and curricular formations, design studio pedagogies as well as normative grounds or thematic orientations that guide them. Moreover, identifying and examining the situated practices of academic communities in different regions can serve as key reference points in the institutionalization process, offering valuable insights for future research into the historical development of urban design education.

To that aim, the special issue of *Design for Resilience in Architecture & Planning* seeks to broaden the scope of graduate education in the field of urban design. As an academic endeavor, it aspires to lay the groundwork for holistic, systematic and robust research into urban design education within an international context. From a practical standpoint, the issue aims to inform educators, academics, students, practitioners, and decision-makers on how to collectively respond to both enduring and emerging challenges and opportunities on the urbanism agenda.

Within this framework, we invited contributors to reflect on their own experiences in urban design education through a specific lens, as exemplified by the thematic categories outlined below.

Institutional Structure

- What are the regulative, normative, or cultural pillars in the institutional organization of urban design graduate education?
- How have institutional identity of urban design programs formed, constructed, and negotiated?
- How does urban design education institutionally emerge, persist, or change over time?
- How does the institutionalization of urban design graduate education unfold in wider national or international higher education policy standards or frameworks?
- What are the modes of top-down institutional constitution and bottom-up construction, invention or negotiation?

Epistemological / Curricular Content

- What constitutes the knowledge domain of urban design education? What do urban design curricula entail? How has urban design as a field emerged and formulated through curricular organization?
- How were the curricula formed or structured in urban design programs? What are the dynamics of shaping urban design curricula?
- How have the curricula evolved in terms of disciplinary domains, specializations or certain themes?
- How are syllabi of urban design courses structured, communicated and executed? What are the ends and means of urban design courses?

Thematic / Discursive Orientation

- Are there certain thematic focuses that drive the (re-)formation of urban design programs?
- How are certain themes infiltrated in urban design education or how is urban design education coordinated around certain themes?
- How do thematic focuses of urban design programs relate to geographical contexts or local/global urbanism agenda?

Organization of Design Studio

- How are design studio courses organized in urban design education?
- What are the situated pedagogical practices in the urban design studio?
- How do urban design studio courses link with the profession, respond to real life and user needs, or local / global urbanism agenda?
- What are the distinguishing contextual and methodological frameworks in urban design studio education?
- Do urban design studio pedagogies evolve over time?

· What capacity does the design studio have to produce, reproduce, change or challenge the existing conditions?

Urban design pedagogies emerge through the careful curation of multiple, interrelated dimensions, and changes in any of these can trigger their evolution. Each contribution in this special issue engages with one or more of these dimensions, often in combination, revealing how pedagogies are assembled, challenged, and reworked across contexts.

In an effort to broaden the perspective globally, the special issue brings together contributions from diverse geographies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, and Türkiye. It also purposefully avoids privileging a single model of urban design education, instead juxtaposing a range of program types and degree structures—such as Master of Urban Design (MUD), Master of Science in Urban Design (MSc UD) Master of Urban Development and Design (MUDD), Master of Urban Design and Digital Environments (MUDDE), and Master of Science in Urban Design and International Planning (UDIP). Contributions include experiences from urban design education embedded within undergraduate architecture programs, specialized master's programs housed within planning departments, and stand-alone programs located in schools of design, as well as programs shaped by distinct historical trajectories, some evolving from concurrent and joint degrees to others established from the outset as specialized degrees.

The special issue is organized into three sections. The first section brings together Viewpoints, that engage critically and discursively with one or more pedagogical dimensions, foregrounding key debates, emerging questions, and conceptual provocations shaping urban design education. The second section comprises Research Articles that present empirically grounded and analytically rigorous investigations into institutional formations, curricular structures, and studio pedagogies across different contexts. The third section features a book review of *Urban Design Education: Designing a Pedagogy for an Evolving Field* by Hesam Kamalipour and Nastaran Peimani (2025), a timely contribution that resonates with the themes addressed throughout the special issue.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the reviewers whose careful and generous engagement has been instrumental in shaping the quality and coherence of this special issue: Açalya Alpan, Banu Aksel Gürün, Beyza Karadeniz, Binali Tercan, Cansu Canaran, Hatice Karaca, Mazyar Abaee, Nevter Zafer Cömert, Nihan Oya Memlük Çobanoğlu, Şebnem Hoşkara, Yiğit Acar, and Zeynep Eraydın. We also extend our appreciation to Editor-in-Chief Mehmet Topçu and the editorial team for their support in bringing this special issue to fruition.

Together, these contributions invite continued reflection on how urban design pedagogies can remain critical, adaptive, and responsive to the challenges. We hope this special issue serves not as a conclusion, but as an opening for further dialogue on the trajectories, tensions, and possibilities of urban design education.

Overview of Contributions

The collection of papers in the present issue opens with five viewpoints that offer the authors' original perspectives and insights, without necessarily being grounded in systematic empirical research. In this context, the first short contribution is by Peter Bosselmann, who has been a key figure in the long-established tradition of urban design education at the University of California, Berkeley since the mid-1970s. In his article, drawing on the long-standing experience of the Master of Urban Design program at UC Berkeley, **Bosselmann (2025)** shows how collaboration among architecture, planning, and landscape architecture is essential for understanding cities as complex socio-environmental systems. He argues that effective pedagogy combines design studios with systematic observation, measurement, and (social and environmental) policy awareness, enabling students to test assumptions about urban form rather than rely on unexamined dogma. Overall, it presents urban design as a 'social art' whose educational strength lies in pluralism, collaboration, and reflective engagement with real urban change.

Subsequently, we have another author who has a long teaching career in urban design in the North American context. In his viewpoint, **Graves (2025)** discusses how urban design is introduced at the undergraduate level within architectural education. Focusing on a long-running studio pedagogy developed at Kent State University, the author argues for the centrality of the teaching principles of Colin Rowe (such as figure–ground analysis, typology, collage, and contextualist thinking) in helping students understand site, urban form, and spatial relationships. Through a carefully sequenced set of studio exercises, the paper demonstrates how students progressively move from analysis to design, integrating historical precedent, morphology, and contextual urban space-making. Overall, the article claims that while tools and technologies evolve, Rowe-inspired analytical foundations remain a relevant and adaptable basis for (undergraduate) urban design education.

In the following viewpoint, **Martins (2025)** suggests a critical view of the implications of AI for urban design education. Here, the author argues that AI represents not just a new tool but a transformative force reshaping pedagogy, assessment, and professional practice. At this point, Martins (2025) discusses both the opportunities AI offers (i.e., enhanced design exploration and data-driven analyses) and the significant risks it poses to assessment validity, skill development, and ethical responsibility. Drawing on literature, practitioner interviews, and critical reflection, the author argues that urban design education must engage with AI in a cautious yet proactive manner rather than through denial or uncritical adoption. Eventually, the paper positions urban design education at a crossroads, where the field has to encounter some kind of uncertainties, whether AI strengthens or undermines the discipline's intellectual and ethical foundations.

Then, **Porta and Rofé (2025)** argues that amid the current historical transition, the future of urban design should be approached through a reconsideration of foundational assumptions. Drawing on the notion of deep sustainability and "radical" approaches to urban design—particularly Christoper Alexander's critique of mechanistic approaches and his call for an authentically sustained morphogenetic process—the paper revisits his Schumacher Lecture as a basis for responsible urban design pedagogy. It further advances this agenda by connecting Alexander's legacy to recent developments in urban morphometrics and urban evo-devo demonstrating how the integration of urban morphology and design can support an evolutionary, evidence-based pedagogical framework.

The first section of the issue (the viewpoints) is finalized with an updated discussion on the relationship between urban design academia and practice. At this point, **El Khafif and Larco (2025)** examine the evolving relationship between the two domains, drawing on interviews with practitioners conducted by the *Urban Design Academic Council* (UDAC) in the USA. The authors argue that while graduate programs provide strong technical and design foundations, gaps persist in strategic thinking, narrative communication, systems thinking, and real-world preparedness. More interestingly, practitioners emphasize emerging priorities such as climate resilience, equity, and adaptive reuse, which are considered academic research topics in many contexts. The paper contends that closer collaboration between academia and practice, especially through joint research, practitioner-led teaching, is essential to address these gaps while preparing graduates for complex professional realities.

Then, with the first research paper involved in the issue, **Shafiei and Chenaf (2025)** discussed the use of technology in contemporary urban design education. They basically argue that technology functions not merely as a toolset but as a pedagogical infrastructure that organizes inquiry, shapes design workflows, and guides modes of representation. Through a case study of the Master of Urban Design and Digital Environments (MUDDE) program in Dubai, UAE, the authors show how VR, AR, and AI are embedded within the curriculum as an integrated operating system rather than discrete skills. They argue that this integration shifts pedagogy from technical skill acquisition toward thematic interplay, where digital technologies actively structure how students think, design, and communicate urban futures. Empirical analysis of studios and workshops demonstrates that computational tools foster iterative reasoning, embodied spatial understanding, and collaborative knowledge production. Overall, the paper positions technology as an epistemic driver that extends the operational ground of urban design education.

In their article, **Black and Kerr (2025)** present the urban design studio at the University of Manchester, the UK, as the core pedagogical setting for applied urban design education, analysing how staff intentions and student experiences interact in practice. It argues that a studio-led approach is essential for translating theory into practice, developing technical competence, critical thinking, and professional qualification through hands-on, collaborative learning. Drawing on multi-year evaluations of staff and student feedback, the authors identify both the benefits of studio culture (i.e., collaboration, creativity, mentorship, and identity) and its risks (i.e., imbalanced power dynamics, stress, and inconsistent feedback). The paper emphasises the responsibility of educators to actively design and manage studio culture. Overall, it positions the urban design studio as a dynamic, evolving educational framework that must be continuously reflected upon and adapted to bridge education and professional practice through strong engagement and communication.

Thereafter, **Tümtürk et al. (2025)** document and critically reflect on a well-established graduate urban design program in Australia. Reflecting on their own pedagogical experience in the Master of Urban Design Program at the Melbourne School of Design (MSD), the authors argue for a "grounded projection" pedagogy that systematically integrates evidence-based understanding of the field through rigorous spatial analysis with speculative and future-oriented design thinking. The authors argue that confronting ecological crises, social inequities, and technological change requires urban design education to move beyond isolated studios toward a coherent, program-wide pedagogical structure. They demonstrate how a sequential studio framework, progressing from rule-based morphological analysis, to socially and politically engaged design, and finally to long-term ecological and technological futures, systematically builds students' both analytical and imaginative

capacities. Central to the argument is the claim that analytical rigour does not constrain creativity but enables credible speculation. Overall, the paper presents the program as a transferable model for rethinking urban design pedagogy in response to planetary-scale challenges.

In the fourth article within the volume, **Lawton and Judd (2025)** examine the 26-year experience of the Master of Urban Design and Development (MUDD) Program at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), which functioned as a role model to many emerging programs worldwide. Here, the authors present the interdisciplinary model of the program integrating urban design with real estate, public policy, and development practice. The authors argue that contemporary urban challenges require designers who can operate across institutional, economic, and regulatory frameworks, not solely within formal or spatial domains. Through the structure of the MUDD curriculum and studios, the paper shows how design is positioned as a strategic mediator between public and private interests. The authors argue that exposing students to negotiation, feasibility, and implementation strengthens design agency. Overall, the article presents MUDD as a pedagogical response to the growing complexity of urban development. In this context, the authors also highlight the need for pedagogical training for instructors to internalize and operationalize the interdisciplinary model of urban design education effectively.

Finally, **Yavuz Özgür and Çalışkan (2025)** critically examine the transformation of urban design pedagogies through a diachronic reading of the history of the METU Master of Urban Design (MUD) studios in Türkiye between 1996 and 2025. The authors argue that urban design pedagogy cannot be understood as a fixed typology but is historically constituted through the dynamic interplay of institutional frameworks, urban agendas, studio coordinators' agency, and pedagogical intentions. Building on the distinction between *pragmatic*, *normative*, and *exploratory* pedagogies, the authors show how METU MUD studios have continuously shifted among these orientations in response to real-world demands, crises, and evolving theoretical frameworks. The study demonstrates that studio education operates as an adaptive system rather than a stable model, capable of smooth transformation rather than pedagogical stuck. Overall, the paper positions urban design education as a reflective and context-sensitive field, shaped as much by external conditions as by internal pedagogical choices.

Emerging Insights and Key Takeaways

Beyond a Unified Trajectory: Multiple Pathways of Institutionalization

Urban design does not settle easily on a certain institutional basis. The writings in this special issue collectively reflect that its institutional identity appears as something formed, undone, and re-formed through higher education systems, disciplinary arrangements, pedagogical positions, and professional expectations. Not one pathway, but many.

Tracing the trajectory of one of the long-established programs in urban design, Bosselmann (2025) demonstrates that its institutionalization was never a purely academic undertaking but unfolded in broader urban and socio-political agendas and movements. Its formation responded to rising concerns about public space, governance, and environmental responsibility among citizens. Urban design's academic identity cannot be separated from its claim to relevance in addressing urban problems. Therefore, institutionalization appears not as a moment of disciplinary closure, but as an ongoing process continually shaped by external pressures, societal demands, and the shifting role assigned to planning and design practitioners in the city.

At another level, Lawton and Judd (2025) show how the legitimacy of the field is assembled through the academic community and related ideologies surrounding the program. Through the case of UNSW, they reflect on how the transdisciplinary organization of the program was realized through carefully curated bodies of knowledge based on spatial political economy, urban design theory and paradigms, and the conception of urban design as a public policy. Entry requirements, curriculum structure, credit systems, and studio sequencing have become instruments through which these frameworks have been firmly embedded, decisively anchoring urban design as a coherent educational project.

Elsewhere, there are examples where the legitimacy of the field is built immersed in other disciplines[1] mainly through regulating bodies, but co-dependent on the agency of the instructors. Graves' (2025) account situates urban design firmly within architecture, particularly at an undergraduate level, through the NAAB accreditation. However, regulation does not exhaust pedagogy. The article foregrounds the instructional agency, recalling long-

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[1] Black (2019, p. 19) addresses urban design as a hidden specialism when it is immersed in architecture or planning degree pathways. For an account of integrating urban design as a foundation course in the Built Environment Faculty, as a course in undergraduate urban planning programs, or in postgraduate architecture program please see: Urban Design Quarterly, Issue 47, pp. 18-29 and Issue 64, pp. 18-21.

standing pedagogical traditions in which urban design sensibilities are shaped less by formal guidelines than by how design is taught, framed, and practiced.

The Relevance of 'Pedagogies' in Urban Design to Practice

While the legitimacy of the field and its education, through interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and immersed models, continues to be widely discussed within academic spheres, El Khafif and Larco (2025) turn their attention to professional practice. Their research makes one point particularly clear: the organization of the field in education is fragmented, so too are the professional realities and hiring landscape. While specialized degrees are welcomed, professional practice continues to prioritize portfolios, demonstrated competencies, and hybrid skill sets. Recruiters often extend beyond urban design credentials to expand the potential recruitment pool.

Practice-based surveys are vital in foregrounding the delivery aspect of education in terms of practice-readiness and applied competence. Two such surveys,[2] conducted in the UK, point to a significant shift in employability. Three decades ago, postgraduate specialist education in urban design was reported as a key qualification criterion for both private and public employers (Lloyd-Jones, 1997). Two decades later, however, a marked decline in in-house urban design capacity within the public sector was identified (Giordano, 2019). One could argue that urban design positions, especially in consultancy, are often treated as more dispensable in times of financial constraint, based on the assumption that their responsibilities can be absorbed by in-house architects or planners.[3] Loew (2009) also implies this tendency for the in-house urban design training positions that have been put into practice both in the public and private sectors (p. 25). Whether this trend signals a move toward urban design becoming a discretionary, if not ultimately obsolete, credential in the future remains a striking question.

This is also consequential: so long as urban design remains unrecognized as a distinct profession, such practices are likely to persist. In this context, the relevance of multiplicities in urban design pedagogy within higher education programs to increasingly internationalized practice and globalized job market becomes an ever more critical question for the field's *raison d'etre*. This underscores the significance of scrutinizing urban design pedagogies in tandem with a systematic, global assessment of the type of work, employment, and qualification and training preferences across different job markets globally

Studio Education and the Making of Urban Design as an Applied Discipline and a Specialized Profession

Across the contributions, studio education emerges as a central setting in which urban design is rendered applied, actionable, and professionally oriented.

Studio-based Education Model

Black (2025) shows different educational models are shaped not only by departmentalization[4], but also by how the studio is positioned within the core curriculum. He reveals through the UK context that theory-based and immersive specialist pathways, particularly those aligned with architectural education, coexist with more "bespoke" studio-oriented configurations that place tailored design inquiry at the center of learning. These arrangements are not neutral. They determine how professional identities begin to take shape.

Backbone of Disciplinary Foundations

It is within the studio that the epistemological, methodological, and cognitive foundations of urban design are most clearly established, and at times, transformed. Tümtürk et al. (2025) make this point explicit by proposing an integrative studio model that draws on analytical and speculative pedagogies. They articulate this process with utmost clarity by framing studio education as a staged formation of disciplinary thinking. Epistemologically, their model anchors urban design knowledge in a grounded understanding of urban form, regulation, and spatial systems. Methodologically, this grounding is progressively mobilized through structured design operations moving from rule-based reasoning to projective inquiry. Cognitively, the sequence cultivates a shift in how students think: from mastering analytical tools to extending design imagination across longer

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[2] It should be acknowledged that these findings may be sensitive to geographical contexts, as El Khafif and Larco's (2025) research is situated in the United States, whereas Lloyd-Jones' (1997) study was conducted in the UK.

[3] This observation was raised during the Q&A session of the *Intertwinia in Design Education Conference 2025* by a UK-based participant, following the presentation of a paper on the shifting academic organization of urban design education in Türkiye by one of the co-editors.

[4] For an account of academic identity formation through departmentalization profiles of urban design education, please see: Carmona, M. (2016). Urban design, a call for inter-disciplinarity. *Journal of Urban Design*, *21*(5), 548–550. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1220160

temporal horizons. Studio education thus becomes the backbone through which the disciplinary foundations of urban design are claimed and practiced.

Shafiei and Chenaf (2025) adopt a similar foundational perspective, while shifting the focus to the transformative role of technology in reshaping these foundations. They frame technology not as an auxiliary tool but as a "conceptual operating system." They show how the adoption of computational and immersive technologies reorganizes epistemic inquiry itself, shifting studio objectives from problem-solving toward knowledge production, and from confirmation toward sustained questioning. Methodologically, design workflows are reconfigured: the pace of work accelerates, hierarchies flatten, and non-linear and iterative exploration replace sequential procedures. In terms of cognitive and communicative dimensions, technology introduces new modes of reasoning and representation: design thinking moves away from producing singular solutions toward learning how systems behave, as evaluation focuses less on outcomes and more on the performance of the processes that generate them. They reflect on how digitally immersive environments further translate complex spatial data into embodied experience, expanding how designers think, communicate, and reason through space. In this formulation, technologically assisted studio education transforms disciplinary foundations by recalibrating how knowledge is produced, methods are enacted, and urban futures are conceived within the studio.

Although not explicitly grounded in studio education, Porta and Rofé (2025) locate the disciplinary foundations of urban design in urban form, morphology, and its scientific analysis through urban morphometrics. By affirming urban form as an evolutionary system, they call for a paradigm shift in urban design education. Beyond its analytical capacity, urban morphometrics is also argued to signal a deeper disciplinary transformation, as the development of new instruments opens the possibility of a scalable numerical taxonomy of urban form and, ultimately, a science of urban form evolution.

Looking ahead, these contributions point toward the need for a more explicit—and critical—engagement with how educational practices conceptualize the built environment, often as the outcome of discrete design interventions rather than as the emergent result of complex, self-organizing systems. Pursuing this line of inquiry offers a promising direction for future research and experimentation within urban design education.

Core Competencies and Professional Readiness

It is inherent across the contributions that studio education function as a central locus for developing core competencies and professional readiness in urban design. As staff and student bodies become increasingly international, and as practice itself grows more collaborative, and technologically mediated at the international context, the studio emerges as an ever more vital setting for learning how to operate across contexts, engage with multiple actors, and communicate expertise through design outputs. The topics in this section address

- the internationalization of practice and studio environments,

- partnerships with industry and stakeholders,

- the role of studio outputs in demonstrating competence,

- and the changing scope of program's learning outcomes.

What has become increasingly urgent is the call to foreground learning outcomes that extend beyond technical proficiency, emphasizing ethical responsibility and critical judgment as integral to professional formation.

Considering **internationalization practices,** Lawton and Judd (2025) foreground this shift through the case, where internationalization is embedded directly within curricular content, most notably through the International Design Studio. It also materializes through the physical reconfiguration of the studio environment. Overseas university campuses and short-term, intensive workshops are claimed to challenge familiar modes of learning and working. These settings compress decision-making, intensify collaboration, and expose students to alternative professional cultures. They reinforce studio education as a site to cultivate the capacity to operate across contexts to translate, adapt, and localize urban design knowledge and skills in diverse cultural, institutional, and spatial settings. Lawton and Judd (2025) demonstrate that tracking international operability lends itself to evaluation as a learning outcome through alumni tracking and feedback. Together, these approaches raise two broader questions: one concerns urban design as a globalized profession in 'culturally diverse international market' (Butina Watson, 1997), and the other addresses often overlooked circulation of

urban design thought (Kossak, 2019)—whose values and concepts travel, how they travel, under what conditions they take root, and how they transform cities and urban spaces.

Several contributions position **industry and stakeholders within studio education,** at times assuming a leading or hosting role. Lawton and Judd (2025) note that, particularly through the International Design Studio, the involvement of industry professionals and visiting scholars keeps curricula responsive to evolving conditions and frames urban design as a component of urban development processes. Similarly, Tümtürk et al. (2025) report that industry partners are considered as an active component of studio sequencing—Urban Design Studio B, to expose students to real-world urban challenges, social and political processes, and stakeholder negotiation. However, they note that such engagements also surface enduring tensions between the methodological and learning expectations of industry with that of educational programs.

Other contributions foreground more collaborative and carefully mediated forms of engagement. Black and Kerr (2025) acknowledge the pedagogical value of hands-on studio work while noting critiques of its isolation from real-world complexity. Live projects, though promising as an increasingly globalized studio mode (Butina Watson, 2016), are shown to be difficult to sustain due to problems in consistency of commitment, alignment with educational frameworks, and engagement of students. At MUD-Lab, they addressed these through optional, extracurricular "live" projects that run alongside the core curriculum. The collaboration with a local planning authority illustrates how such arrangements can expose students to real policy impacts without compromising coherence, precisely because participation is voluntary and structured around academic timelines.

Our research similarly demonstrates that stakeholder partnership, rather than industry alone, is one of the constitutive conditions of studio education, extending across multiple scales and domains—from academy-sectoral stakeholders and academy-local government collaborations to engagements with cultural institutions and think tanks (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025). As echoed across the contributions, findings show that the interpretive agency of studio coordinators is key to shaping the pedagogical orientation and studio direction. Partnerships, for instance, produced pragmatic, outcome and implementation-driven studios in the earlier period, yet were later reframed as exploratory without real-world implications. Collaboration, therefore, does not automatically yield a pragmatic mode of education, it can equally be mobilized in support of exploratory design inquiry.

Perspectives from practice also necessitate the scrutiny of the significance of these arrangements from the other end of the pipeline. Interviews reported by El Khafif and Larco (2025) suggest that, in addition to enhancing students' capacity to navigate complex realities, practitioners also point to the benefits of shared resource infrastructures such as project archives and annotated case studies; immersive professional experiences including externships, shadow ships; and funding opportunities in travel-based learning, including site visits and international exchanges. Furthermore, they inform that these forms of engagement not only support professional readiness but also shape hiring practices, where informal networks and academic recommendations continue to play a significant role.

Altogether, the contributions suggest that industry and stakeholder partnerships are most effective not when they replicate practice, but when they are designed as reciprocal, pedagogically aligned, and institutionally supported forms of engagement.

Across the contributions, **studio outputs** emerge as a primary means. They are seen as instrumental in rendering competence, professional readiness, and disciplinary identity visible. Communication and visualization, across analogue and digital, individual and collective, static and immersive formats, are positioned as core capacities of urban design education. At the University of New South Wales, for instance, this emphasis is formalized through the introduction of communication-focused coursework aimed at strengthening graphic quality and representational clarity (Lawton & Judd, 2025).

At the University of Melbourne, Urban Design Studio A foregrounds multiplicity in design communication, dedicating the final weeks to the production of portfolios, posters, research booklets, short video narratives, digital and physical models, animations, and immersive VR experiences, culminating in a public exhibition that addresses diverse audiences from community stakeholders to policymakers (Tümtürk et al., 2025). Similarly, MUD-Lab frames dual-purpose in-studio outputs, serving both academic assessment and future employment, placing particular emphasis on portfolio development, supported through model-making workshops and structured portfolio feedback (Black & Kerr, 2025).

From the perspective of practice, portfolios remain the dominant evaluation tool in hiring, valued for their ability to demonstrate individual contribution, conceptual clarity, and graphic competence, especially in projects

dealing with public space and streetscapes (El Khafif & Larco, 2025). These accounts underscore studio outputs as a critical interface between pedagogy and profession, where learning is translated into legible, mobile, and professionally consequential forms.

Collectively, the articles emphasize that **learning outcomes** in urban design education are consistently framed as extending well beyond technical proficiency. What is foregrounded instead is *the cultivation of critical judgment, ethical responsibility, and an awareness of the value-laden nature* of design practice. Bosselmann (2025) articulates this position by suggesting that a measure of success in urban design education lies in reducing adherence to dogma, as much as possible within a practice shaped by competing ideologies. Critical thinking, in this sense, emerges not as an abstract skill but as a disciplinary disposition: the capacity to navigate complexity, contradiction, and uncertainty without retreating into rigid positions.

Within this broader framing, *technology* becomes a crucial—yet contested—dimension of learning outcomes rather than an end in itself. Digital capacity building appears across the contributions not as an optional enhancement, but as an increasingly unavoidable condition of contemporary urban design practice. From the perspective of practitioners, El Khafif and Larco (2025) report that digital tools, ranging from big data analytics to artificial intelligence and advanced computational methods, are reshaping how urban problems are analyzed, visualized, and negotiated. These tools expand the scope of design decision-making while also intensifying expectations of technical fluency, positioning digital competence as a part of professional credibility rather than a specialist add-on.

Shafiei and Chenaf (2025) elaborate on how this transformation is being absorbed into studio pedagogy. They frame technology as a formative force within the curriculum itself, as discussed in greater detail above. Digital tools are shown to enable new forms of interdisciplinary exchange, translating complex spatial data into legible and immersive representations that can circulate across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. In this sense, technology operates less as a discrete skill set and more as a shared language through which urban design engages with multiple actors. Whether these technologies amount to a genuine theoretical shift to experiential learning or "a change of standpoint"—one that reconciles the internal, lived experience of the user with the creative, external standpoint of the designer, as Owen (1993) and Stewart (1993) called for nearly three decades ago—remains an open and compelling question.

At the same time, the embrace of digital tools is not without tension. Several contributions caution against treating digital tools as neutral or purely instrumental additions to the learning environments. Martins (2025) introduces a critical perspective on the growing presence of AI in urban design education, cautioning against unreflective adoption, raising questions about authorship, judgment, and responsibility, and calling for critical AI literacy. Tümtürk et al. (2025) likewise underscore that the rapid evolution of digital tools demands continuous adaptation, ensuring that students develop a critical awareness of how technology actively shapes urban knowledge and urban futures, rather than merely serving them.

Shafiei and Chenaf (2025) similarly warn against technological determinism, both in design workflows and in modes of representation. Accelerated digital iteration, they argue, risks reducing design to optimization, privileging what is computationally efficient over what is substantially relevant and contextually meaningful. In response, they recalibrate studio pedagogy by reintroducing moments of reflection through slowing down workflows, punctuating speed with critique, and framing representation as an argument rather than an image. Immersive and visually persuasive tools are thus treated as sites of ethical and epistemic questioning, where students learn to articulate not only what their simulations reveal, but also what they are likely to obscure.

Together, these accounts resist a simple framing of technology as either a friend or foe. Instead, they position digital tools as pedagogical terrain, one that demands careful calibration, critical reflection, and an explicit alignment with the ethical and educational objectives of urban design.

Another learning outcome foregrounded across the issue is a shift in *the mode of inquiry* itself. Studio education increasingly moves beyond a narrow problem-solving orientation toward forms of knowledge production that integrate normative concerns, such as ecology, socio-political engagement, and climate responsibility, with speculative modes of design thinking and representation. This shift echoed from the perspective of practice. As El Khafif and Larco (2025) inform, professional competence today extends beyond technical capacity to include storytelling, argumentation, and the ability to construct and communicate design propositions through research, narrative, and collaborative reasoning. Their findings also point to persistent gaps: graduates often display limited narrative capacity, uneven conceptual rigor, and underdeveloped systems thinking, particularly in relation to ecological, social, and infrastructural interdependencies. Their insight

underscores speculative thinking not as an abstraction detached from practice, but as a critical learning outcome essential to contemporary urban design professionalism.

As both our research and Tümtürk et al. (2025) suggest, studio education can be deliberately structured around this shift. While less prevalent than pragmatic and normative models, exploratory pedagogy gains particular relevance under conditions of uncertainty, where urban societies and decision-makers increasingly rely on speculative, forward-looking design perspectives. Our findings show that such tendencies emerged as studios move away from problem-solving towards envisioning alternative urban futures (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025). In this mode, studios functioned less as simulations of professional practice and more as spaces of critical reflection and experimentation. Advanced Urban Design Studio C offers a parallel articulation of this logic, extending design inquiry across centennial horizons to foreground ecological futures and planetary conditions (Tümtürk et al., 2025). This way, they argue that the studio cultivates both systematic analytical rigor and imaginative capacity, preparing students for professional practice defined by long-term thinking, collaboration, and uncertainty.

A further learning outcome lies in strengthening students' collaboration and negotiation capacities, while simultaneously fostering individual mastery, through positioning the thesis itself as a studio-based mode of inquiry. Within that scope, Tümtürk et al. (2025) point to alternative modes of urban design research as the Urban Design Thesis operates as a capstone studio that integrates academic research methods with design-led inquiry. In doing so, it challenges the conventional view of the thesis as the outcome of isolated scholarship, instead of foregrounding collaboration, negotiation, and collective critique alongside individual skill-building. This approach resonates with Moudon's (2016) call to reconceptualize advanced urban design research as a pedagogical process embedded in a collective, interdisciplinary setting—albeit articulated as a "scientific model" and proposed at the doctoral level. These examples suggest that studio sequencing can be framed not merely as preparation for research, but as a primary site of research in urban design.

Collectively, the contributing authors within the current issue frame studio education as the central locus for developing both core competencies and professional readiness in urban design through engagement with real-world actors, international contexts, diverse modes of communication, emerging technologies, and shifting modes of inquiry.

Culture of Care

Black's (2025) discussion also situates studio education within a longer historical trajectory, but the primary premise lies elsewhere: in foregrounding studio culture, and more specifically, studio as a culture of care. He shows how such a culture does not emerge theoretically, but is actively produced through feedback- and assessment-based adaptations of studio education, reshaping how students engage with design, with others, and with themselves. Its significance lies in reflecting student narratives and agency, recognizing that how students negotiate expectations with supervisors is equally consequential (Kök Ayaz et al., 2025). Furthermore, this focus is particularly momentous at a time when calls for change in architecture and design education have become increasingly urgent, often exposing how educational environments normalize overwork, self-erasure, and endurance under the guise of rigor (Harriss, 2025). This signals a deeper continuity: the risk of rehearsing and normalizing the very extractive conditions that graduates would encounter in professional practice. Against this backdrop, foregrounding care in studio education could be seen as an attempt to unsettle this assumption. A culture of care, then, could be seen not only as a pedagogical adjustment but as a structural intervention–one capable of reshaping both studio education and the professional environments.

Urban Design Education in Transition: Directions and Drivers

Several contributions reveal urban design education has evolved through cycles of formation, consolidation, and in some cases, retreat, shaped by institutional arrangements, disciplinary reframing, and pedagogical priorities. Bosselmann's (2025) account traces this trajectory from early disciplinary separation to the establishment of the College of Environmental Design and the creation of joint and concurrent degree programs that positioned urban design as an interdisciplinary endeavor. The later formation of the Master of Urban Design sought to reconcile design, planning, and landscape architecture within a shared framework, only to face renewed pressure stemming from administrative complexity, financial constraints, and broader disciplinary retreat. Lawton and Judd (2025) describe a comparable recalibration at UNSW, where the Master of Urban Design and Development program was absorbed into a generalized planning master's degree. Read together, these accounts reveal retreat as an emerging symptom of institutional responses to uncertainty and shifting professional identities.

At the same time, studio education emerges as a more adaptive site of evolution. As demonstrated by Black and Kerr (2025), studios transform through internal dynamics—feedback loops, shifting studio cultures, and pedagogical orientations—while our research (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025) shows how both internal agency and external constitutive conditions—urban and national agenda, academy-stakeholder partnerships, global thematic influences, emergency and crises—shape pedagogies over time. Building on this, the study underscores that urban design pedagogy is neither fixed nor inherently resistant to change but evolves. Distinct modes of studio teaching emerge through the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

In Lieu of Conclusion

The contributions to this special issue reaffirm urban design education as a field defined less by stable models than by ongoing negotiation—between disciplines, institutions, pedagogical orientations, and shifting urban agendas. Rather than converging toward a singular trajectory, urban design pedagogies emerge through multiple, context-sensitive configurations shaped by historical legacies, curricular structures, studio cultures, and the interpretive agency of educators. Instead of offering definitive models, the papers collectively surface new questions about how pedagogies form, how studios operate as sites of disciplinary foundation and professionalization, and how educational practices respond to shifting urban, technological, and socio-political conditions. In this sense, the special issue positions urban design pedagogies as open, generative, and contingent, unfolding prior to their possible consolidation.

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