

THE ACADEMY OF URBANISM

MANIFESTO

The Academy of Urbanism brings together a group of thinkers and practitioners involved in the social, cultural, economic, political and physical development of our villages, towns and cities, across Great Britain and Ireland. The Academy has been formed to extend urban discourse beyond built environment professionals, and to create an autonomous, politically independent and self-funded learned voice. We aim to advance the understanding and practice of urbanism by promoting a culture of scholarship through evidence-based inquiry, providing an inclusive forum for dialogue across all disciplines, sharing knowledge with the community and our peers and nurturing, recognising and rewarding excellence in achievement.

Principles

Urban settlements must perform at their fullest potential to advance the quality of human habitation and ensure the survival and recovery of the natural environment, at both a global and local scale. The practice of good urbanism can establish a high quality of living, nurture a healthy and creative way of life, support economic, social, political and cultural activity and deliver robust, distinctive and attractive physical environments.

The Academy of Urbanism asserts the following principles:

1. Successful urbanism is the result of a collective vision, realised through creative and enduring relationships between the community, government, developers and professionals involved in its design, delivery, governance and maintenance.
2. The culture or cultures of the people and the ecology of the place must be expressed at a human scale and through both physical and social structures.
3. The identity, diversity and full potential of the community must be supported spiritually, physically and visually to sustain a sense of collective ownership, belonging and civic pride.
4. Vibrant streets and spaces, defined by their surrounding buildings and with their own distinct character, should form a coherent interconnected network of places that support social interaction and display a hierarchy of private, commercial and civil functions.
5. There must be a permeable street network with pedestrian priority that gives maximum freedom of movement and a good choice of means of transport.
6. Essential activities must be within walking distance and there should be a concentration of activity around meeting places.
7. Places must provide a diversity of functions, tenure, facilities and services; have a mix of building designs and types; and include a variety of appropriately scaled districts and neighbourhoods.
8. The social, cultural and economic needs of all inhabitants must be capable of being met without detriment to the quality of the lives of others.
9. Security should be achieved by organising the urban environment in ways that encourage people to act in a civil and responsible manner.
10. The pedestrian environment should be closely associated with active frontages at street level and there should be an appropriate intensity of use in all areas at all times.
11. The design of spaces and buildings should be influenced by their context and seek to enhance local character and heritage whilst simultaneously responding to current-day needs, changes in society and cultural diversity.
12. The public realm and civil institutions must be supported and protected by sound and inclusive processes that respond to the local community and changing economic and social conditions.
13. Decision-making for the ongoing development and management of the urban fabric must engage stakeholders and the local community through public participation.
14. Diverse, accessible, affordable and active villages, towns and cities will encourage successful commercial activity, promote prosperity and support the well being of their inhabitants.
15. New and existing places must respect, enhance and respond to their local topography, geology and climate and connect to the natural environment within and around them.
16. Urban parks and other landscaped areas should provide space for recreation, encourage biodiversity and help support a balanced environment.
17. New urban forms should be capable of adaptation over time to meet changing needs and to promote the continued use of existing resources, including the built environment.
18. The built environment must seek to minimise the use of carbon-based products, energy and non-renewable resources.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

2008

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Where did it come from?

The Academy was launched in February 2006 and is a high level, cross-sector group of individuals and organisations that champions, through discourse, research, education and awards, the cause of good quality urbanism, throughout Great Britain and Ireland. The Academy seeks to promote and disseminate lessons about good urbanism and to work in partnership with other agencies and organisations that can assist in delivering best practice on the ground. The concept grew from a core group of multi-disciplinary participants, brought together originally through the RIBA's Urbanism and Planning Group, with the intention of creating an Academy of one hundred people, to be renewed and updated over time.

What does it do?

Through its members, the Academy promotes scholarship through evidence-based inquiry, fosters an inclusive environment for cross-disciplinary discourse, provides educational events focused on good urbanism, and validates good places and practice through The Urbanism Awards.

Who is involved?

The membership of the Academy is drawn from a diverse range of professional, developer, academic and community backgrounds. Members are both enthusiasts and credible practitioners in their relevant fields, able both to help judge and disseminate lessons in good quality urbanism. The culture of the organisation emanates from its members, who are united in a committed obligation to share and disseminate their knowledge for the benefit of communities, villages, town and cities.

How does it work?

Individuals become members by invitation and pay an annual fee to belong to the Academy. In support of the Academy's Education Programme members agree to initiate, or participate in, at least one 'badged' activity or event per year, promoting the practice and understanding of good urbanism. The Academy also publishes its own annual anthology, 'Learning from Place', drawing on its Awards programme as source material.

How does it fit with other bodies?

The Academy aims to fill a distinct role and not duplicate or contradict the primary roles of other bodies and organisations. It has links to other bodies, professions and the philosophical aspirations of others, and is supported by named representatives from a number of affiliated organisations.

These currently include CABE, English Partnerships, Architecture and Design Scotland, the Design Commission for Wales, RIBA, RIAI, the Housing Corporation, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Yorkshire Forward, the Urban Design Group and the Urban Forum, Ireland.

The Academy is therefore not a completely stand-alone entity. It is a member-based, but numerically restricted network. It is therefore different from the professions (RIBA, RIAI, RIAS, RTPI, RICS, etc) who may share some of the same objectives, but who have a wider remit, are 'open' and based upon technical entry levels and professional competencies.

The Academy is also different from both CABE and the Academy for Sustainable Communities, as well as Architecture and Design Scotland and the Design Commission for Wales, in that it is not a government created and funded body, but an independent network of key individuals and representatives. Because of its cross-sectoral high-level voluntary network, the Academy is able to cut across professional and other boundaries, making connections between research, policy and the rhetorical aspects of advocacy and design, development, investment and implementation.

The diagram gives an indication of the Academy's potential 'fit' with respect to the roles and organisational character of others. For conceptual purposes, the closest previous model is that of the former Urban Villages Forum, whose contribution to the development and theory of best practice in urbanism is acknowledged.

Role	Advise	Lobby	Educate & Train	Recognise (Awards)
Type				
Government body (eg NDPB)	CABE			
Open Body	ASC			
Closed Membership (join)	Professions			
Closed Membership (invited)	Academy of Urbanism			
Network of organisations	UDAL			