The same issue of JPER contains strong responses from Tridib Banerjee, FAICP, of the University of Southern California and Emily Talen, AICP, of Arizona State University. They note that Gunder conflates new urbanism with urban design and then accuses both of ignoring social equity and environmental protection—a lack of care that causes him to call for urban design to return to its 20th century position as a subfield of urban planning. Gunder is unfair, they say, both to new urbanism (as it has matured) and to urban design.

In a recent meta-analysis of the literature relating to D variables, Cervero and I describe the third D, design, this way: “Design includes street network characteristics within an area. Street networks vary from dense urban grids of highly interconnected, straight streets to sparse suburban networks of curving streets forming loops and lollipops. Measures include average block size, proportion of four-way intersections, and number of intersections per square mile. Design is also occasionally measured as sidewalk coverage . . . ; average building setback; average street width; or numbers of pedestrian crossings, street trees, or other physical variables that differentiate pedestrian-oriented environments from auto-oriented ones.”

So defined, design proves to be as important a determinant of travel choice as density, diversity, and other dimensions of physical form.

Some urban designers might object to this characterization as too limiting. But after reviewing classic writings in the urban design field by Edmond Bacon, Christopher Alexander, Kevin Lynch, and others, I will stand by it. The debate over urban design versus urban planning is a distinction with a difference, even if one that is often blurred.

Reid Ewing

Ewing is a professor of city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah and an associate editor of the Journal of the American Planning Association. He is the coauthor of “Travel and the Built Environment: A Meta-Analysis,” referred to above, which was published in the Summer 2010 issue of JAPA. It won the 2010 APA award for best JAPA article. Past columns are available at http://cmpwebearch.utah.edu/research_projects/research-you-can-use.