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# Politics of planning

### Interdependency, feel and place

As a consequence of ongoing urbanization, the economic, cultural, social and ecological issues we are facing are increasingly also spatial issues. The confrontation of these issues has a maximum spatial impact on our cities and urban regions. Spatial, because cities are about people, progress and place. This is where the interdependency tackles the tactility of our cities.

While urbanization develops a compact world, every corner of the world is interconnected. People flock and merge in complex urban societies, developing an economic, cultural and social network that is more global than ever. In the near future, 75% of the world's population will live in urbanized areas, producing 90% of our GDP on not more than 3% of the world's surface. Interdependency therefore becomes a spatial classification. Beyond the virtual it cuts through this world of cities, these cities of the world.

### Perspectives and specificity of place

Challenges are great, enormous and seem far away from our daily world. They appear all-generic and often abstract. From climate change, food-dependency and production, segregation and religion, it all is not-in-my-back-yard for our western world.

In this sense the financial crises are different; they hit us hard in our bank accounts, our mortgages, our wallets. Then we do act, but not for the long run. We still aim for short-term benefits.

Combining the complex of crises with these immediate financial challenges we could empower short-term acting with a long-term perspective and make our acting a sustainable approach. This brings up another issue of complexity. We no longer really know the specifics of what is going on, what the *real* issues and challenges are. We forgot what the real nature of our places is. How we live and develop, what makes our landscapes and cities, and how our society functions. We misuse the complexity of the world to *not* know, or not even want to know, i.e. to shove this core responsibility form our plates.

But we can no longer escape. Our lack of feeling and knowledge, and our short-term and shortsighted approach, is making us not only financially bankrupt, but morally and socially as well. We are making ourselves victims of a narrow approach in time, place and scale. But short-term protectionism – only here and now, and only *us* – is never the path towards a new perspective. It is time to act!

### Politics' planning

Politics covers political, administrative and bureaucratic power. In every difference of appearance, goals and drives, politics has its main objective in the responsibility for the societal *whole*. It is about the right perspective for today, out of the sustainable time frame built up from yesterday towards the day after tomorrow. This political time frame consists of a perspective for the future, of scenarios and stories, combined with the real knowledge of our challenges, both the challenges we already face today and those we might expect. It should integrate the meaning of our history, what is man-made and therefore cultural, and what develops naturally.

And politics is of course about *acting* upon this perspective. About setting standards, rules and regulations, giving direction and finding the words, the organization and the funding to tell and live up to the story of tomorrow.

Politics has to address, sustainably and more frequently, this complex of crises. The politics of today is about becoming aware, asking for meaning and *wanting* to make explicit choices. The challenges are great, yet the room to manoeuvre toward solutions is small, also financially limited.

Rethinking finance and funding is crucial. We should consider new alliances and unorthodox measures. A new collectiveness must be built out of our former public-private partnerships. A reset of this institutionalized relation can be initiated by a limited set of standards. We have to put our trust in new alliances to develop. Such alliances must support a step by step build-up of a new collectiveness in finance and funding, new ways out of trial and error. Trust is difficult to accomplish in times of distrust, governmental interventions and hardships of market failure. But trust is absolutely necessary for a next and sustainable step.

Trust and acceptance for real interoperability within a larger whole go beyond any specific, limited responsibility. An interoperable approach is required for forging the connection of the physical tasks and agenda, the political acting and the inter-dynamics within a bigger whole. This whole is now a network of states and politics that in that sense can set the base for interconnectivity without adaptation, interdependency without assimilation but an interoperability out of trust and acceptance, through excellence.

### Design for politics

Next are focus and choices. This can only happen through a sharp confrontation between the challenges and the places. For this, design is crucial. It ensures the confrontation, the organization and identification. Sharpness in confrontation is necessary to choose; on the basis of focus it will catalyze development and dynamics.

This design approach confronts the main and specific challenges in the different and specific places. It sets off the alliance of the main actors: governments, developers, building industry, designers and scientists working together on this new planning and development task.

Spatial planning may no longer involve a trade-off of interests, nor should it amount to the allocation of program volumes. Instead, spatial planning must be about giving direction and shape in visions and stories, in laws and regulations, and through programs and projects all contributing to the wider perspective of a social, economic and cultural task. That is precisely what makes planning political, a planning that is socio-economically and culturally driven. A planning that connects with society's demand. And a planning that confronts and resolves the different challenges with the power of the places. It calls for design excellence to explicate and confront differences rather than finding generic solutions. Only then design and innovation become leading in the spatial development process.

### Toward network interoperability

So, politics' planning is about redefining our tasks in an integral approach. It is about rethinking our instruments, financial, legal, et cetera, with less yet more integrated rules and through smarter governance. About reinventing the alliance, the strong collaboration that enables a breakthrough and focus. It is about the repositioning of design and its political capacity. And it is about the exchange of knowledge, the collaboration through excellence, without assimilation but with adaptation, a real form of network interoperability.

### Combining *what* and *where*

More and more we live in an urbanized world. Is this urbanization leading us into fortune or despair? Do we really exploit this urbanization to the max? Do we know the potential? Can we make use of it knowing the huge challenges that face us?

The complexity of our challenges is rising while resources change. Increasing urbanization drives our economies. We must start with where we live, and how we live. In combining these *what* and *where* solutions can and will emerge.

The city magnifies our challenges, confronting climate change with segregation, quality with unemployment, mobility with innovation, and creativity with economic crisis. The city stands for all our challenges in one. It poses the ultimate confrontation between today's stories of tomorrow, the place where design and politics have to speak up. And the city is not just the site and the catalyst of confrontation. It is also the place where confrontation leads to growth, change and innovation, bringing new strength and power. The city makes our spatial challenges political.

Our cities are the places where this confrontation of challenges is maximal. Where confrontation involves the power of innovation and an effectively resolving ability. Done everywhere differently and through distinctive alliances. Different because specific. Large questions are given focus, strength and meaning through specific grounding, that is, in *real* streets, with and for *real* people. Global challenges always have a local significance, a personal meaning, vice versa. This productive confrontation of challenges and place is where the urban perspective begins.

### Metaphorical cities to define the *what*

So we have to customize our approach for a new planning era. What is the power of the city, or its vulnerability? How can we make cities sustainable and what is the interdependency with their surroundings? What does the local versus global city mean for the people that work, live and visit our cities?

Our situated goals, challenges and politics can be illustrated through *metaphoring* cities. Characteristic perspectives and the corresponding need for an integrated approach yield metaphors for five types of city. They are the vulnerable, the competitive, the sustainable, the inclusive and the network city.

In the *vulnerable city*, the challenges come from below. The people determine the agenda. Social issues direct the physical solutions. Questions on education, segregation and viability ask for a robust spatial restructuring that reinforces the strength of the neighborhoods to be developed by and with the people. The vulnerable city leads to a small-scale, bottom-up approach of social planning. It requires an entrepreneurial government that acts on the ground.

The *competitive city* combines economic strength, work and initiative of culture, education and a highly attractive business environment. This city has a highly developed mobility and public transport network on a regional scale. It is a city with world-class amenities for a competitive and international cultural climate. And with a highly differentiated housing supply at every scale and in every place. In the enterprising city there is distinctive and safe living, working and studying. It is a powerful and beautiful city of differences.

The core agenda of the *sustainable city* is climate change and the environment. It is about safety and quality, for example against water flooding and for high environmental quality. This city makes new energy and reduces its waste. In sustainable cities the gains for climate change innovation and results are the highest, through energy conservation in the built environment and the reduction of emissions.

Here, the local parties and collaborative alliances have the most innovative power. The sustainable city requires not just the building and rebuilding of the city, but also to redesign itself. That asks for a solid set of requirements out of a clear vision on sustainability. Sustainability means in this sense the remaking of our world and not fighting the former one. It is about new energy, renewing housing and neighborhoods and the reinvention of city-ness.

The *inclusive city*, or the city of solidarity, is not alone. It functions in networks, regional, continental and global. Not only in the major metropolitan networks but also in the more peripheral shrinking regions, we see that cities are important for their surrounding area, vice versa. Building this city of solidarity aims at the right intervention at the right place, in the central city and in the surrounding municipalities. It is all about understanding and grasping the differences. On the basis of solidarity, the inclusive city exploits and enhances these valuable differences. Such solidarity requires other *divide* and *profit models*, and unorthodox measures for funding, alliances and rules and regulations.

It is the *network city* that defines the interdependency most consistently. The network is more than the physical interdependency of work, living and recreation. It is more than the economic, social and cultural network or its integration. It is also the system of relations, the way the physical interdependency is stipulated through a connectivity that is based on mutual understanding, acceptance, excellence and collaboration. Network cities exist through each other, they grow and excel. There are no country borders to constrain the network. Social, economic and cultural factors base the connectivity of people, the transit of minds and the collaboration through ideas. The network is the city while the people, groups and businesses are its existence.

The differences in cities with different challenges and visions require each and every time a specific approach of politics' planning. Yet one challenge is crucial in all five cities. It is the remaking of the existing city. Restructuring, redevelopment, transformation, change, infill, building, compacting, degradation, regeneration, and more. Those are all concepts revolving around the existing city. The existing city develops in a vital way by always starting from itself, by reinventing itself time and time again. The redevelopment is the key growth and development factor for making the 'its' difference.

### Places to set the stage: *where*

And where do we find these cities? Where are our biggest challenges most manifest? Where do they lead up to this new politics of planning?

Sites and perspectives will lead through confrontation towards a new stage for planning politics, a politics of planning. It is the confrontation of challenges with urbanity.

Urbanity is all about confrontation. The city is where actors *meet*, where places are confronted with challenges, where rules and regulations face politics and design, and processes are countered with revolt. It is this specificness of our sites and cities that grounds the characteristics of the perspectives, directs the manifestation of our challenges and the urgency to act.

There are four different settings where this confrontation is most urgent, most viable and most tactile. These are new towns and new cities, and in addition the old and the to be planned. It is about making existing new towns into cities. It is about regeneration and reinvention.

The renewed and renewing city is about the restructuring, renovation and reinvention. Within the city build-up, its structure and history, a new city emerges. Now it is the re-city that is the future. This is not about density or big projects. It is the all-in-one scheme of any scale, any alliance, any approach, and any rules and regulations that come out of the to be built re-city.

The reinvention of project development is at stake. Traditionally, they were money- and time-driven developments of anything from building block, urban block to city and region. The new project approach is like an investment strategy for organizing people rather than program. It has to be bottom-up in a different sense. Not out of some particular initiative but out of city-ness in its irreducibly interdependent sense.

Cities are located on a differentiated scale in a framework of collective spaces, urban and non-urban. Cities are part of a bigger system, they function in a network of cities. This interdependency both invites and results in a different language, an interoperable communication and collaboration. A new role emerges for future developments, for agriculture, energy, food and new sources of production.

As such, there is more to it than place. The new planning is about place *and* politics and people. What is needed to connect these differences within cities and throughout our network? Where is a new approach, with politics to lead?

### Europe as network

Looking at Europe not as a collection of separate states, countries, but instead as a network of cities, metropolises and regions, don't be surprised to find Istanbul likely to be its leading city. Currently, the complexity of the European Union as a variety of state-bound political positions rather than a connected European tale makes it of course not only impossible to imagine but also hard to realize. But where Europe is at stake, we should adjust its story.

Europe is a viable, strong network of cultures, people and history. It exists through its relationships across borders and through time. An interdependency drives new developments, new connections, new economy, new cities even. Europe insists on an interoperable approach, an integrated strategy possibly at the social, economic, physical and communicative level.

Still, politics and religion limit Europe as such an economic, social and physical network both differentiated and all-in-one. But it is not only obstruction by politics. The physical condition of this network of cities lacks connectivity, too. There is no international public transportation system of high-speed rail at the European scale. Even any European policy program aiming at such an infrastructure is lacking. Yet to make Europe *work*, this tactile connectivity should be realized.

### Good government

What does it take to govern a country, a continent or the world? What does it take to govern a city? How can we *mayorize* our nations and what is the regional form of city politics? What process of planning and policymaking works where and why? Can we generate generic concepts at a national level, or is everything specific everywhere? What does this specificness mean on a larger scale? Is there a possibility, or necessity, for continental planning? What are the political assets of government across the levels or scales?

Bureaucrats must start to redefine bureaucracy. Together we will have to develop an adaptive set of rules and regulations. And to start setting up a political performance program for mayors and national leaders. Good government should rest on a national policy scheme or framework to facilitate the confrontation between challenges, places and actors. If planning is to be more than a mere shuffling of program on the map of the world, we must shift our legal and policy framework at its foundations. Good government will define and execute the changing conditions for the connected political process. Together we must redefine government and accept its renewed presence as well as its catalyzing absence when compared with our traditional bureaucracy.

## Design connects

When design professionals no longer know why they are designing, when policymakers are driven by their own media-oriented momentum rather than by *real* challenges, targets and objectives, when managing processes gains the upper hand and the challenges (despite their clarity) are not embraced, content loses out. Then, only today's issues, procedures, and reactivity have become guiding principles.

But the challenges we face are too great, too manifest, and too pressing. Giving meaning to these challenges and their development in our cities is the objective of *political* planning and is achieved through political *design*. Design confronts the conflicts. It helps to innovate through this confrontation. Design connects large, complex challenges with local specificness and meaning. Design personifies, politicizes, identifies and acts in the streets. Design is about politics, people and place making. Design organizes, confronts the players. Beyond the factors, design essentially addresses the actors. Design identifies and designates the responsibility. Therefore, design can break through to connect networks.

For design to recognize and generate interdependency, designers have to rediscover the power and quality to address and proclaim the large in the small but always essential challenges of today and tomorrow. They must stop only giving answers and so-called solutions as if they were narrow service providers. Designers must again begin with questioning through proclamation. That is when design becomes political again.

## Alliances of power

By definition an alliance is formed when parties with common interests are making everyone focus on implementing the common. They initially tend to minimize their differences in the alliance.

An alliance entails strong collaboration where a narrow focus can lead to a successful development. Entrepreneurial attitude amongst partners including government organizations is essential. Alliances start where challenges emerge and facilitate to support direct interests of people (organized and non-organized). How can we catalyze these alliances and fire them up in their fragile beginnings? Good government must identify them as highly powerful collaborations. Government should participate, facilitate and give them a stage to act on. Among practical obstacles to this adaptation of collaboration are currently less flexible arrangements of budgeting, corporate institutions and the complexity of societal systems. These are all aspects of infrastructure, too, in need of change, of adaptation for the urban network.

## The urban agenda

For cities to productively face the crises complexity we must shift our understanding of what cities want, what alliances need, how interoperability is effective and in what makes planning work. It calls for an innovative, ever-adaptive approach, merging recognition of specificness with increasing scale of interoperability. It involves a new planning agenda for good government. We must aim for a planning approach enabling government to act (far) beyond just the organizational form of bureaucracy: good government as a politically and socially adaptive force, an entrepreneurial and responsible actor. It is not either top-down or bottom-up, but adaptive and dynamics in an almost schizophrenic sense. Good government operates from trust and openness, aiming at connecting.

The transition will not only be a complex one for government as a political and bureaucratic institution, but also for everyone dealing with government in whatever capacity. We are used to

our current bureaucracy, even depend upon it. Its change will take time and therefore patience for collaboration and adaptation to develop. But there is no time to waste. We can't really wait for a step-by-step approach. We need a new urban government through test and design, starting right now in every place that is both specifically different and needs to be interconnected at the scale of the wider network. We may start with a nationally scoped urban agenda emphasizing specificity and adaptation, i.e. an urban agenda in terms of *urbanity first* for major challenges, complex changes and effective alliances.

Essentially, planning urbanity is politics of planning. Politics has to act in order to lead the breakthrough and address our ever-larger challenges with their widening disparities for interdependent specificity. As a politics of development it is adaptive. Alliances drive development more than the physical conditions do, or some fixed objectives. Any urban-based, reality-driven alliance may be qualified for developing break-through solutions.

While politics has to act, it must consider *not* to lead. For good government is not about being in charge operationally, but about facilitating trusted positions for everyone, everywhere, at any moment. Politics has to develop to this stage of changing perspectives for alliances to succeed. But this stage is never neutral. As politics, it is charged with visions and all the interests thereby invested. It sets the agenda for now and tomorrow. Politics of stage should develop a future for everyone. It is this adaptive politics that leads in making alliances develop a sustainable urbanity.

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