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**HAS PLANNING FORGOTTEN ABOUT DESIGN
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HAS PLANNING FORGOTTEN ABOUT DESIGN?

Cities around the world are again looking at physical planning as a way of re-imagining their futures and a way of mobilising actions. The question the Urban Age must ask is what kind of city-physically, economically, and socially - will this generation of grand urban schemes leave in its wake? For whom are these cities of the future being planned and designed for, and what kind of urban society will they produce if in fact current aspirations become facts on the ground?

In our journey thus far, the Urban Age has discovered that bold visions for cities are again gaining prominence: New York City, Shanghai, London and the mayors of the European Mayors Conference, all projected images of the future of the city that were driving the politics and morphology of urban development. Images of an exciting new future for New York City's neglected waterfront, the Pudong in Shanghai, the Olympics in London or Barcelona's continued march to the sea, all hold powerful sway on our imagination of urban futures and on the practical politics of the distribution of resources and the disparate interests that will benefit from the mega-investments requisite to realizing these visions.

Important to the unique inquiry of the Urban Age into understanding the relationship between the physical and social development of the city, is how these visions of the 21st century city will be translated into the design of the city and how the city is actually built, lived in and experienced. We know from the past history of urban development, most conspicuously the experience of urban renewal, that grand schemes for urban change can produce violently anti-urban results. The destruction of the city in order to save the city often has had disastrous effects on the physical, economic and social life of the city that only now, 40 years later, are cities finally overcoming. Therefore while on the one hand we should celebrate that bold city planning, powerful urban visions and an appreciation of urban life are emerging from the slumber of the past decade and

regaining an important role in shaping the debate about the city, we must also step back and challenge our own assumptions, and those of the promulgators of the new urban visions. We must be cautious that the current generation of urban development does not uncritically succumb to the hubris and dogmatism latent in urban professionalism or the seemingly inexorable momentum generated by the politics of the moment. As we listen to the leaders and mayors of cities visited by the Urban Age expound visions of their cities and the latest innovations in urban practice, we begin to notice trends in what constitutes notions of the "good city" - what Bruce Katz has termed idea viruses - that pervade the latest thinking and practice of urban development. While learning the lessons and correcting the mistakes of the past generation of urban development is to be lauded, it must not be blindly followed as a dogmatic model implanted on each city. This is especially true of the exploding cities of the developing world where the majority of urbanization will occur. The Urban Age in Shanghai offered a cautionary note for all as some of the most deleterious trends from the history of the urbanization of North America and Europe appeared to be on the verge of repeating themselves with potentially tragic impacts on the environment.

So to answer the question of whether the planning and design of the city are inter-related or disconnected from one another, we must understand the political environment within which urban development operates. How much does a city control its destiny? How much influence can a city impose on its future? Urban development is a consequence not only of larger international economic forces, but of the way in which the "rules of game" have been set by national, regional and local governments. Cities are often struggling with limited political power, restricted to only parts of a metropolitan region and fragmented by multiple layers of different responsibilities, from the neighbourhood to the supra-national level. In the case of London, planning powers for the city-wide government - the Greater London Authority with the

Mayor of London – are likely to be expanded. It might well be a great opportunity to re-think the role of planning in a city that is often celebrated for its ‘unplanned beauty’ and ‘organized chaos’. In particular, it will offer a better understanding of how working on a variety of different physical scales will benefit from a better interdisciplinary knowledge of all professions involved.

As a new wave of urban visioning is occurring, the market is also returning to cities and producing a new wave of urban regeneration and investment not experienced in Western cities for over a decade. This forces us to ask not only the question of whether planning has forgotten design - which is more of a top-down question that assumes that planning profoundly shapes form - but more realistically whether design has forgotten about planning? Has planning by project forgotten about the city? In the rush to build, has politics forgotten about architecture and has architecture forgotten about politics in advancing a larger agenda for the city?

To put these questions in context it is useful to reflect on the key planning critique. Urban planning is often discredited and even condemned as a result of the many failures of city development in the last 50 years. This crisis of confidence and professionalism of planning is frequently articulated by challenging the power of planning: Should planners have something to say about the city, can government really plan and what exactly is the democratic legitimacy and credibility of planning? Planning suffered from a crisis of comprehensiveness; a technocratic, positivistic approach concentrating on the idea of a big scheme which, when implemented, could solve all key problems. Too often it simply led to the creation of new problems best illustrated by urban renewal with its tower block structures, sterile urban environments and elevated motorways. It also suffered from incrementalism, a sort of retreat from planning and a timidity towards a pro-active role leading to a negotiation based ‘management of anarchy’. This approach of un-coordinated small steps is confronted with enormous deficits to respond to conflicts of interests. Finally, planning was also challenged by the crisis of participation. Did it involve and engage people it had not listened to before in a meaningful way? Could we have more genuine community participation? Which participatory practices should be applied to not compromise a democratic decision making process? How could larger visions for the city be reconciled with democratic planning processes at smaller scales where parochial interests often prevail? Over the past two decades, partly to distract from the tiring debate on planning and partly to advance with a less politicized agenda, design giving priority to

aesthetics over social issues became increasingly relevant. Stylistic questions and discussion on form filled the void in the debate about planning. Urban regeneration and new urbanism coupled with a strong project based approach produced solutions that were copied in any location without going below the surface and asking whether the sort of redevelopments were the right site-specific answer. Ironically by doing so, design-based approaches positioned themselves close to the mistakes of comprehensive planning, namely by promoting dogmatic models.

However, the planning critique that re-emphasises the importance of design is of great importance. It targets one of the key weaknesses of planning, namely the lack of understanding the three-dimensional urban space – the city space as experienced by people on a daily basis. Transport planning in particular where scientific models often inform decision making fails to integrate the qualitative dimension of city design next to indicators such as passengers per hour, level of service and numeric traffic flow data. Regarding the internalisation of the user’s perspective, design, being based on human imagination, is clearly more advanced than planning relying on scientific methods.

Another perspective criticising planning for setting a fixed framework for design is more problematic. Frequently, zoning, floor ratios, density and building height standards as well as design codes are under attack and branded as design-unaware. Quantitative standards are generally seen as an inflexible means likely to reduce the quality of architecture and building designs. On the other hand, architects would object to the idea that planners get involved in the details of their design projects. Asking planning to engage with design to a higher degree is simply a way of saying that society should take design seriously and to value good architecture. Planners work for the government and architects do not want government to regulate them. Therefore the critique of design-unawareness will either have to offer applicable qualitative planning mechanisms that are more likely to generate good design or runs the risk to simply demanding more laissez-faire of market-driven urban development. Design as a part of planning is another approach. And as Gerald Frug pointed out it needs to recognise that it is controversial as well as political. Architects and designers will need to get involved in politics as much as politicians need to get involved in architecture.

This leads to what is probably the most important issue when talking about planning and design – that is the question of physical scale. Traditional design disciplines such as urban design, architecture and

interior design are mainly working on neighbourhood, building or even smaller scales, always incorporating the three-dimensional. At the same time, typical planning disciplines such as regional and urban planning as well as transport planning are working on the regional to the neighbourhood scale mainly two-dimensionally. Although it is this division which gives urban professions a clear identity it is at the same time one of the biggest risks for future urban developments.

Today, any urban design project is being affected by a multiplicity of scales that are not really recognised in most discussions. The current trend towards a project and site fixation is often characterized by enormous naivety with regards to the overall city, suggesting the question above that planning by project might have forgotten about cities. Taking just a site specific project to find a solution of all the problems of a city is irresponsible. Most projects offer very short-term solutions that often contradict a more sustainable strategic target.

However, next to the project focus, current developments suggest another trend. The urban age emphasises the fact that cities with their populations and governments are more than ever before eager to play a bigger role in deciding on their own future. Planning and bold visions are back again – not as an egocentric exercise of urban elites but as a democratic process enhanced by devolution. London already has its London Plan and even in New York, where plans for a West Side Stadium appeared at odds from a larger vision for the city, the debate is advancing. As the New York example shows, the moderation between the strategic and project layer becomes key and no single urban profession is equipped to take a lead on this. More likely it will have to be guided by an interdisciplinary team where each team member is working on a multiplicity of scales and has a deep understanding of each. This will continue to be a difficult task. Disciplinary boundaries have always led to the separation of an overall strategy into separate subtasks where only one professional field dominates. Further enhanced by different vocabularies, priorities and timescales as well as by different dominating personalities and characters, real multidisciplinary work is as much of a challenge as a solution.

Here, exploring commonalities helps to build bridges. Both, design and planning disciplines struggle with being too deterministic. The challenge of architecture to only suggest behaviour and planning to respond quickly to the latest developments – to not only offer a frozen image – have much in common. But both will also have to determine future use and behaviour.

Large projects such as railway lines, airports but also concert halls, museums and housing projects will continue to demand a commitment to a specific use. Developing the tools to be as precise as possible about judging what this commitment should include – sometimes even decades in advance – will continue to be a dimension. But the real decisions will always have to be the result of a democratic process and the tension of big city building and democracy can for example be solved by educating and empowering mayors with the knowledge, courage and mechanisms enabling them to really influence urban form.

To conclude, when thinking about how planning could integrate design to a larger extent, there are two different categories of integration that need to be looked at. The first is what was discussed as a design-awareness for the micro-scales of planning. This includes design on the level of streets, public space as well as buildings. The second category is about a design component on the macro-level. It contains the process of giving form to the entire city or 'Gestaltung' on the scale of the city. This has been a prevailing approach for *cities by design*, Washington D.C. being just one example. Here, the key question becomes whether even for existing urban structures with strong tensions between the new and the existing city, design again needs to be integrated within the strategic layer of planning the city. Are there design questions related to finding the right corridor for new or re-developed transport infrastructure, the distribution of housing units over the fabric of the city region or the allocation of open green space? This would clearly underline that design is not only architecture. Architecture is a part of design and many other disciplines dealing with shaping the city need to be more aware that they are part of design as well. Planning is re-emerging to shape the city; it now needs to acknowledge that design is required to be successful in giving form to the city.

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