



URBAN NETWORKS ON THE MOVE

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Is it still necessary and topical to consider the European city? It has been mocked and criticised by modernity for its limitations, lack of hygiene and functionality, and its hierarchy of space. In the 1960s the European city experienced its dissolution. Together with the arrival of automobiles en masse, the occupation of inner city areas by service centres and office blocks destroyed its civic spaces. Residential uses were moved to housing schemes on the outskirts or relocated to subsidised homes in suburbia. The reaction to modernity did not fail to appear. Reurbanisation was promoted in order to stop the demolition of cities. In the 1960s and 70s postmodernism rediscovered the European city.

What had been seen as disadvantageous in the past was being rediscovered as a paradigm of urbanism: it was rediscovered that small lots and living areas, functioning neutrally, could open up the city to change. The division of land into lots enables diversity in unity, combining various typologies and lifestyles. It allows for demolition or new development without automatically compromising the entire spatial structure. The same spatial constriction which was criticised by the modernists, was perceived as a density of communications and functions by the postmodernists; it acted as a stimulant to the changing economies of the service and information sectors and a knowledgebased society. In the action group culture of the 1980s, citizen commitment and public debate called for the sensitisation of the European city and its culture. It became more and more clear that the European city made it possible to integrate people from different social backgrounds and nationalities as equal partners and was able to socially integrate inequalities.

However, the return of the post-modern to the European city was not its only victory. Suburbanisation continued. It now developed peripheral spaces, with new images emerging that Tom Sieverts so succinctly described as 'cities between cities'. Socially homogeneous lower middle class areas began to emerge in the suburbs, while in the city a social polarisation set in with a simultaneous upsurge and decline in parts of the city. What appears problematic to us is that the postmodern criticism of the linear progressive thought

of the modernists went to the other extreme. The postmodernists felt it their duty to protect the traditional. All too often in the redevelopment of inner cities, the reconstruction of historical forms and design was at the forefront. Not only was it overlooked that the reconstruction of a historical building could not actually restore it, but historical forms were also taken out of their original context and placed into new contexts. In the age of globalisation the inner cities became places for tourists and centres of consumerism. In this alleged return to the traditional, reflection on the demands of the present were still missing. Living quarters became towns for singles or high income bracket groups of urban professionals in marketing, media, finance and IT. In contrast, infrastructures, services, cultural possibilities, areas for children and spaces for relaxation were unavailable to families. For them, living in the city meant a dissociation with the natural environment. The connection between redevelopment and contemporary urban planning and architecture was missing.

In parallel to the massive hollowing out of some cities and ongoing suburbanisation, there is now a clear urban renaissance and growing support for reurbanisation. Cities, however, are still at risk of losing their role as cultural and economic catalysts and as social integrators that alleviate inequality. There is no doubt that land values and intra-urban competition for centrality and accessibility still play a fundamental part in these processes. High subsidies that promote new developments, rather than densification of existing areas, do their best to significantly advance suburbanisation, endangering, if not destroying the characteristics of the European city. According to a survey carried out by Empirica in Hamburg some years ago, the majority of households who were interested in residential property preferred an inner city location to property in the countryside, which they viewed as the second best solution. Their views on country living did not deviate much from those of the urban planner: dreary locations, 'out in the sticks', boring urban developments, and 'terraced boxes on towelling plots'. The European city certainly has much more to offer.

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