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## The project production process in Europe

Ariella Masboungi

Will the urban project be European? In order to move from intention to realisation, will it mean a game between project and design, between urban and socio-economic strategies and operations? If things stand like this then public authorities must make great efforts lasting lengthy periods of time. The 'urban project' (the proposed vision of the territory's future) is realised by using a multiplicity of 'urban projects' to achieve it. This strategic vision, with its flexible spatial translation, tries to establish relationships between places, between people, and between functions. The struggle against sectorial town planning, restrictive disciplinary boundaries, and the juxtaposition of separate fields of interest, brings about contradictory interests. The urban project opposes laissez-faire but demands ambition and audacity because everyone and everything opposes change, for there exists fear of the future and transformation, meaning obstacles, strong forces, and financial problems have to be overcome. A demanding alchemy, seldom succeeding. As the following experiences teach us, the urban project has polysemy and suffers from differing political systems and methods of government. Moreover, only a few cities manage to be good examples: the city-Government.

### City strategies

*Bilbao: culture as a stimulus.* The new town planning Mecca, illustrating the strength of an urban project founded on culture and architecture, possesses its own territorial strategic vision whose main objective is inventing a new model of development capable of

contending with economic and social crisis. The audacious gamble of the Guggenheim museum, designed by Frank O'Gehry, is only the visible upper third of the iceberg which is this urban project. It has been realised by grouping projects promoted by the public authority (Bilbao Ria 2000) and reinforcing them with suitable uses, methods, and collaborations that have risen to the challenge. *Genoa, encumbrances and events as stimuli.* As a confined site, Genoa demonstrates the benefits of an impossible situation and gambling on international exhibitions (Columbus celebrations in '92, the G8 summit in 2001, city of culture in 2004) to guarantee investment and exceptional publicity. Hindered by anarchic urban motorways, encumbered by a port and industries in crisis, but knowing how to create a magnificent waterfront by reconquering the Porto Antico, planned by Renzo Piano, who now hosts activities on an international scale. The dense fabric of the city has been regenerated thanks to reconfigured public spaces, revitalised historic buildings, and the creation of quality museums. The entire urban fabric is affected by urban renewal. The historic city's modernity being achieved without refusing contemporary contributions is here demonstrated by the restructuring of the port's quays by using culture, the university, and commercial leisure activities exemplified by the Ponte Parodi, the public opera by Ben Van Berkel, and the French investor Altea. *Emscher Park, ecology, memorial, and art as stimuli.* In the heart of the Ruhr, with mining discontinued and an iron and steel industry in crisis producing continuous job losses has meant that the urban project has had to re-evaluate the region's image and make it

attractive to high-tech industries. Its aims concentrated on benefiting from the ties between the territory's attractiveness in terms of landscape, ecology, culture, and art on the one hand, and on the other the development of new economic activities. The IBA international exhibition of architecture provided the opportunity to gather together a high level team who have managed to put suitable financing to good use in fulfilling relevant work of this type. The regeneration is based on durable development, abating soil and river pollution, renewing the vegetation cover, evaluating industrial archaeology for cultural and leisure activities, redesigning the landscape, strong action in contemporary art, and rediscovering geography and heritage. *Birmingham, partnership as a stimulus.* An old industrial city, marked by a hellish network of infrastructure creating a ring around its centre. It needs to rectify the urban reconstruction founded on the car, which uses an urban motorway system that converges on an internal ring road that then links up with a series of 'park and go' car parking lots on several levels. An ambitious urban planning project began in the 1980s with the aim of rectifying the ring and attempting to move away from an industrial economy in decline to a high level service economy. Business tourism, service industries, commerce, cultural and leisure facilities have been developed beyond the ring road but are connected to the centre by projects reconfiguring the barrier posed by this infrastructure. The canals have been improved by creating a promenade with leisure activities. A huge commercial centre completes the picture of renewal surrounding the ring road and the architecture found within it,

confirming Birmingham as a commercial centre. The dismantling of the ring road completes the urban reconquest, offering appropriate support to Birmingham's economic development as a business tourism destination. *Saint Nazaire, quality as a stimulus.* Innovation is essential in the post-war reconstruction of this small city and its fragile economy, badly treated by history, with a submarine base separating it from the sea. The urban project came into being through artistic action based on the submarines (the work of Yann Kersalé) paving the way for the City Port project designed by Manuel de Solà Morales which has replanned the base's internal and external spaces. The need for quality is present throughout the city in the new centrality, the residential, the commercial, and the short-lived events. This is a project made by men centred on an exceptional Mayor, a remarkable and talented public planning office mobilised by Penot which has reconfigured public spaces, with de Solà Morales and the Secchi-Viganò team reorganizing the more unusual ingredients in order to take the city back to the sea. *The Plaine Saint-Denis, infrastructure as a stimulus.* The Hippodamos project (M. Corajoud, Y. Lion, P. Robert and P. Riboulet) launched the new dynamic of this city on the outskirts of Paris, becoming an attractive place thanks to the construction of the Grand Stade de France and the effects it has induced. The project affects the urban space of a 700 hectare area packed with declining industries. The main objective of this project has been to connect this territory with and to its internal and external horizons: the views towards Butte Montmartre, the canals, and the basilica. Reconquering the land by

using the cover of the motorway has been made possible by the involving the State, which represents the power required to make this whole urban renewal operation credible.

Framework, structure, ability to give meaning, and strong reference points in the immense Paris Basin are the guiding principles behind this planning action. The project includes restructuring 'general warehouses' using private capital, the establishment of multimedia companies, as well as the numerous public and private projects.

### **Thinking of tomorrow's European city as the city-territory**

As yet the urban project is not established in the rural suburban zone. Urbanisation extends without planning for a multiplicity of reasons: a certain degree of permissiveness in the construction process, the diffusion of specific 'urban products' (commercial centres, sale multiplexes, and introverted land allocation), lack of coordination between the producers of various networks, the individuality of social behaviour, the logic of funding and financing, the devaluation of the historic centre, and scant attention paid by the public authorities to the quality of these areas. Nonetheless, some of the experiences matured in the last decade provide several indicators for the urban transformation project. By being rooted in the geography and history of the site without being subjected to consolidated urban models, the projects have a liberal interpretation of the existing themes and work on articulating heterogeneous fabric, connecting the elements by using differing spatial, landscaping, geographic and artistic logic.

### **The lessons**

The European cities

produced by European urban regeneration are often like supporting 'wall abutments', weighed down by terrible economic losses and social problems. Urban renewal is the lever for their economic and social regeneration. They confront the challenge of connecting the incoherence of society, space, the economy, and dare to risk making mistakes, accepting the world for what it is, including the market and new lifestyles, defending a European social model, without being nostalgic but by respecting identity and history. History cannot stop itself because it is still possible to create heritage. Moreover, it is a duty. The methods are similar. Construct a process squaring the circle between planning, project and action, then act by example to associate utopia and pragmatism, mobilise people capable of rising to the challenge, create ad hoc structures able to overcome the operational constraints of the administrative machine, governing the public-public partnership in order to attract the private partnership. Today, the city-territory needs to be considered, what efforts might be required to negate it because it exists and demands prefiguration and renewal. It is a huge building site composed of new demands expressed in these territories and consequently forms an immense challenge for town planners.