Living Landscapes - Landscapes for living
Paesaggi Abitati
Conference Proceedings
Florence, February-June 2012

Planum. The Journal of Urbanism, n. 27, vol.2/2013
www.planum.net | ISSN 1723-0993
Proceedings published in October 2013

'Innovation Economy' and Urban Renewal

Stefano Sabatino
DIAP Department – Architectural and Urban Design PhD Program
Politecnico di Milano, sabatino.stefano@gmail.com
3400774575

Several recent European experiences have highlight a trend of some cities in transforming their disused industrial heritage in order to create spaces and opportunities for new economic activities, using the already available knowledge and expertise as a starting point for a urban, economic and social regeneration.
If in the Eighties the re-use was an action which had an all-encompassing masterplan as its tool, today because of shortage, new emerging concepts of urban transformation are emerging, such as 'slow urbanism' or 'organic development'. Those two terms refer to a new approach of city development, which is no longer based on a totally defined project but on a whole of more flexible bottom up practices and step-by-step actions, in cooperation with several partners. Brainport Eindhoven is a paradigmatic model that used not only the physical industrial heritage but also the know-how that Philips has left behind, with the ambition to become the most creative and innovative region in Europe.

Finding new urban policy strategies

An awareness of the need of alternative principles, methods and tools in urban planning is increasing in Europe, where urban transformations no longer concern new expansions but rather the re-use of abandoned areas within the city, as it already happened in the Eighties. But today a critical review of the planning principles we have inherited in the last decades is necessary. As a matter of fact it is evident their unsuitability in giving effective answers and tools to the new social, economic and cultural challenges that cities have to face in this ticklish historical moment.

Nowadays, rather than wide transformations, a city needs that the ones who deal with it understand how launching regeneration actions within its borders through new relationships and interactions between politics, planning and design.

In urban transformation projects, updating and innovation are two fundamental elements from an architectural and urban quality point of view, but should be the main key words of efficient urban policy tools, as well.

Compared to the past, the matter of competencies needs to be revised. Managing the city and its physical transformations is no longer an issue concerning only politicians and public administrations, and several European experiences already show that the responsibility for reinventing the way we make cities lies with all the city's stakeholders, both public and private.

Moreover, planning times have now more flexible features in order to make development programmes more adaptable to changes in market conditions and to new needs. That is way concepts such as 'slow urbanism' and 'organic development' are emerging in the contemporary urban planning debate.

These two concepts refer to an alternative approach to that model of urban transformation which established itself in the last decades, within a global culture shaped by fast consumption.

Rudolf Kohoutek and Christa Kamleithner state that

> this rethinking is certainly connected with the failure of modern planning, but it is also an effect of two centuries of the disintegration of traditional architectural forms and the dissolution of the bond between buildings, residents and 'uses', in part through the real estate market, which thereby performed, quite accidentally, a task of «architectural criticism». (Haydn, Temel, 2006; p. 37)

'Slow urbanism' and 'organic development' are linked to other current matters such as 'recycle', 'sustainability' and 'smart city'. As a matter of fact, the recycle sets itself the target of optimizing the whole urban space, according to a city model which does not permit profligacy and which grows by transforming itself within its borders and restoring its available disused spaces. This kind of efficiency and functionality is also one of the main features of a sustainable and smart city, not merely from an energetic point of view, but in a wider sense, too. It seems that the topic of smart cities is exclusively related to the use of new technologies but actually a smart city is mainly made of enterprising and more conscious citizens who, through local initiatives, are becoming more and more powerful agents of city transformations.

As a matter of fact, in several European countries, the crisis led to a change in the citizens sense of belonging, in their ways to live the urban environment and it allowed the establishment of what Andreas Spiegl and Christian Teckert call «do-it-yourself mentality of the city's residents» (Haydn, Temel, 2006; p. 9).

Since residents are deeply integrated in the social fabric of their city, they can have an important role in finding strategies and ways of development of the specific social, economic and cultural city potentialities. That gives the opportunity to propose new uses of space and new economies in abandoned areas of the urban fabric and permits to make former isolated parts of a city accessible through experimental re-use projects that promote a new idea of life quality.

Some public administrations and authorities have caught those changes. They still have the political power to operate on the city but they no longer have financial resources to transform it with all-encompassing masterplans and so they are more and more interested to initiatives advanced by local actors and associations. As Klaus Ronneberger says:

« […] governing through the community is coming to play an increasingly important role. This form of power technology relies on communities assuming responsibility for themselves and is primarily employed with the aim of executing integration programmes in so-called problem districts. Local residents are being empowered and included in decision-making processes that affect their own lives, the goal being to encourage people affected by decisions to act for themselves.» (Haydn, Temel, 2006; p. 10)

In an historical juncture in which pressing socio-economic and ecological issues are so relevant, public authorities, policy makers, politicians, designers and citizens are reconsidering the future of cities by forming strategic alliances together, in order to develop new ways of producing collaboratively cities through action plans and pilot projects.
What Peter Arlt calls «tactical urban planning» (Arlt, 2006; p.44) is an approach which aims to the development of the place potentialities operating on the urban body through specific and gradual actions. Disused urban areas are the key points on which intervening with a sort of acupuncture able to give city back former inaccessible specialized enclaves, by re-activating those spaces and giving them a new meaning.
Since several abandoned industrial areas are within the urban fabric, close to the central city core, stakeholders have the great opportunity of re-thinking those spaces of enormous potentiality. In some cases this availability of wide spaces encouraged the establishment of new urban economies such as «start-ups and the network of so-called creative industries, which need special spaces and production conditions that the normal market offers only on an inadequate scale or at unaffordable prices». (Kohoutek, Kamleithner, 2006; p.30).

Reinventing the urban economy: the case of Brainport Region Eindhoven

As Andrea Branzi states: «Imagining new models of productive organization is an integral part of any design culture: a new modernity arises only from a new enterprise model» (Branzi, 2006; p. 50).
In this sense the case of Eindhoven and its former Philips district is one of the most virtuous urban regeneration models in relation to an inner industrial area.
At the beginning of the Nineties, the economy in the Eindhoven region was hit by a strong recession that led to the bankruptcy of the truck manufacturer DAF and to many lay-offs in Philips. As a consequence, in 1997 the company decided to move to Amsterdam, by leaving its 27 hectare district – named Strijp-S – in the north-west side of Eindhoven central core. (Figure 1)
The abandon from the giant electronic, which influenced the 90% of Eindhoven economy, should have led to a rapid decline of the city but this event was handled as an opportunity to re-think and re-invent the whole urban economy. As a matter of fact «disuse processes not necessarily coincide with the recession, but with the increase of a social economy self-producer of research and innovation» (Branzi, 2006; p. 38).
In 1998 Philips replaced its national research & development activities in a Southern area of Eindhoven, close to A2 highway, establishing the High Tech Campus, and finally it sold its original site to the municipality.
With the initiative of the twenty-one Eindhoven City Region municipalities, local actors and the national government, a cooperation was set up in order to put the regional economic structure back on its feet, getting funds by the European Union within the 'Stimulus Programme'.
The aim was to propose a new urban district in the Strijp-S in order to integrate at last this strategic area with the city centre, offering new forms of mixed use development.
As a matter of fact, although the former Philips Campus has begun part of Eindhoven urban landscape over the years, this part of the city has always been a sort of fortress, a technological enclave, inaccessible by the citizens insomuch as it was named 'forbidden city'. With that initiative the Strijp-S area should have left its barriers, becoming a district integrated to the urban fabric and open to welcome a various target of people from all over the world.
Initially, in 2001, the urban planner Riek Bakker was choosen in order to develop a masterplan for Strijp-S

but his proposal was rejected because it was little preservative towards existing buildings. Two years later Landscape architect Adriaan Geuze and his office West 8 – charged for an alternative plan – proposed a project that combines re-used existing pavilions with new buildings.
According to Geuze's guidelines, the final plan is now being developed by public housing company Trudo which aims to maintain the industrial atmosphere of the complex, mixing creative industry with other functions such as gastronomy, bars, culture spaces, sport facilities and housing. [Fig. 2]
In spite of the use of a masterplan this urban transformation is set up through a step-by-step development based on a gradual re-use plan, divided in four phases, which started in the 2006 and will be completed in 2020.
The most interesting feature is that this urban regeneration has been carried out through a far-seeing strategy which preserved and re-used not only the existing physical heritage but also the immaterial one rooted in that region, made by knowledge and competence. The know-how which Philips left here during its activity was the basis for the revitalization of Eindhoven as a place dedicated to the creative industry, specially to Design.
This particular climate received a further stimulus when, in 2003, Philips decided to strengthen the High Tech Campus making it an international location for technological innovation through the opening to other companies.
Moreover education plays a key role in the city: the University of Technology, a large number of colleges and also the only Design Academy in the Netherlands are located here and attract both students and visiting lecturers from all over the world. So, high level of innovation and education are the two columns on which the Eindhoven municipality has found its change and its second life after Philips industrial era.
The progressive re-use of Strijp-S buildings not only changes the destiny of a urban area given back to the city, but becomes part of an overall strategic plan aiming to promote a new image of Eindhoven as a hub of technology and innovation.
After the first building renovations, Strijp-S has already changed its image and it is becoming a lively district populated by creative people such as designers, artists, musicians and theatre makers.
But the purpose is not to have a new specialized enclave where people simply work and, as a matter of facts, in some cases it is possible to find a combination of working and living spaces.
Many activities have already occupied some spaces in the 'Klokgebouw' (Clock building), one of the most emblematic buildings of the complex, and several creative firms have rented a studio there, at an advantageous price [Fig. 3]. Among leisure spaces, a urban skate park, sports facilities such as climbing hall and concert stage were already located in the area and many cultural events take place here, such as the Dutch Design Week and Flux-S.
High Tech Campus, University of Technology, Strijp-S and Design Academy are the four strongholds on which the most part of Eindhoven economy is founded today: Design and High Technology are the two fields that have always been part of the DNA of this city – specially owing to Philips presence – and that are re-developed and adapted now to different kind of market economies.
The synergy between University of Technology and High Tech Campus and the one between Design Academy and the micro-enterprises and start-ups in Strijp-S establishes a virtuous cycle in which young people, after the education years, are boosted to root themselves in the city, investing their own future in research or in entrepreneurial activities.
An economy based on local shared knowledge is the real secret of the Eindhoven renaissance and the result of a strategy which has led to a physical, economic and social metamorphosis of the city.
Since in 1997 the Design Academy moved into the 'Witte Dame' (White Lady) building – a former Philips lamp factory in the city centre – the ongoing re-use of Philips pavillions in Strijp-S as spaces for micro-enterprises is the last urban operation oriented to establish the Brainport Eindhoven Region, a top technology district which strives for becoming one of the smartest region in the world.
Actually, Brainport is more than just a region; it is part of a network of organizations that extends beyond

the region's borders. Here the knowledge industry was recovered and put to use in a new innovation environment, investing on key sectors such as High Tech Systems & Materials, Food, Medical Technology and Design.
Its success is the result of a powerful collaboration between companies, knowledge institutes and public authorities which together make the region's economy strong, contributing to citizens' welfare and bringing international prestige to the whole city.
The interests of the different actors focused on a strategic shared vision and it is working thanks to a multi-temporal adaptable design process and to well-chosen decisions about the location of the new urban regeneration elements.
By avoiding the densification of a single area and, consequently, the establishment of another exclusive smart incubator closed towards the city life, the idea was putting the new strongholds in different places of the city.
While the High Tech Campus was born as an high-specialized district and it was located in a suburban area – well served by the road infrastructural system – the replacement of the Design Accademy in the 'Witte Dame' started the Philips heritage re-use process in the real city core. The Strijp-S re-use was conceived in order to take the maximum advantage of its central position and, when it is completed in 2020, it will give Eindhoven a further lively urban centrality.
Thus, the Eindhoven Brainport is a unique case in which what Andrea Branzi calls «innovation economy» (Branzi, 2006; p.38) fits perfectly with a urban renewal in the same way in which enterprise fits with social fabric, by constituting the fundamental ingredients of an experimentation which is producing a new strong identity of what we can define a 'urban scale creative incubator'.

Figure 1 | The Strijp-S area and its surroundings in the north-west of Eindhoven

Figure 2 | Strijp-S area in 2020: the scenario of the mixed use development

Figure 3 | The 'Klokgebouw' has already been renovated and occupied by several young creative firms

References

Arlt P., (2006) *Urban Planning and Interim Use*, in Haydn F., Temel R., Temporary Urban Spaces, Basel-Boston-Berlin, Birkhauser.

AA.VV (2012) *Making City: Catalogue Of The International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam*, Edited by George Brugmans and Jan Willem Petersen. Published by IABR

Branzi A., (2006) *Modernità debole e diffusa. Il mondo del progetto all'inizio del XXI secolo*, Milano, Skira

Haydn F., Temel R. (eds), (2006) *Temporary Urban Spaces*, Basel-Boston-Berlin, Birkhauser.

Kohoutek R., Kamleithner C., (2006) *Temporary Uses, Deregulation and Urbanity*, in Haydn F., Temel R., Temporary Urban Spaces, Basel-Boston-Berlin, Birkhauser.

Russo M., (1998) *Aree dismesse: forma e risorsa della città esistente*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane

Ciorra P., Marini S., (2011) *Re-cycle: strategie per l'architettura, la città e il pianeta*, Milano, Electa