

## **WORKSHOP 1 "Re-imagining Production Spaces: Industrial Spaces in Historic Cities"**

### **THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL CITY AS A NET FOR THE INTEGRATION OF HISTORICAL INDUSTRIAL SPACES**

#### **Summary of text by Ignasi Solà Morales: "Present and Futures. City Architecture" Architect and City-Planner**

There is no doubt that architecture is an inseparable part of a city. That the city is only architecture is a much more problematic statement. Our working assumption is somewhat more modest than that put forward by Leon Battista Alberti: for him, the city was not much more than great architecture and every piece of architecture could be considered to be a small city.

In the contemporary world, architecture continues to have a place in the city. It is a part of it and gives expression to some of the spaces in which urban life is lived. Nevertheless, today more than ever, we are noticing that the city is much more than its buildings and architecture. The built-up environment, not to mention the more extensive interconnected environment, seems to be much more than what is set out in tridimensional systems attributed to architecture. Transport networks, roads, areas dedicated to freight logistics, protected natural spaces, virtual spaces for communication and entertainment: all of these are key components of urban life, and especially metropolitan life. All these aspects not only tend to be completely outside the architect's professional remit, but traditional tools of analysis and architectural projects are ill-equipped to tackle these situations and provide answers for them.

We are, of course, talking about cities that have changed radically compared with those of pre-industrial periods. They are also different from the capital city of the first industrial revolution and the metropolis (the Großstadt) which was theorised and planned from the early 20th century on the basis of the rationalisation of the city as a productive unit.

For Peter Hall, what characterises these processes in situations of uneven economic growth is firstly the slight distance between industrialisation and urban development. Secondly, what happens is that agglomerations with a population of over five million people no longer have a physical, centralised or concentrated structure, even though they are fully interconnected.

Motorways, airports, integrated transport systems, transport interchange stations; shopping centres, theme parks, enormous leisure spaces, tourist centres; self-built residential zones, mobile and alternative housing for people who do not fit the profile of the traditional family; renovations, heritage recovery based on ideological requirements and for mass consumption; parks, protected or obsolete pre-industrial spaces...

#### **Five concepts**

##### **1. The form of change: mutations**

A diffuse organicism has been the underlying model that has explained the transformations of cities. As organs grow in a living being, they adapt and change. The same happens in the city: its organs, its architecture, grow, adapt and are transformed in constant response to a natural

or social medium that pre-establishes the extent of these changes. From Renaissance thinking to the organicism of Frank Lloyd Wright or Raymond Unwin, the organic-evolutionary model has defined our understanding of the relationship between changes in the city and changes in architecture. For cities, the organic-evolutionary model explains the processes of changes because of the long duration and constant readjustment between form and function, between morphology and physiology - to use the biological concepts just mentioned.

## **2. The form of motion: flows**

To talk of motion, rather than movement, means we should focus on the act of moving, in its course over time, as opposed to the actual action, so that it becomes a generic and abstract concept.

Networks, grids, channels, staccato movement begin to be recurring notions in a project where every type of movement increasingly form the very substance of the project. It is only when motion is conceptualised as flow that we will finally accept the difference between space-time motion - used by the architectural avant-garde between the 1920s and 1940s and derived from Einsteinian physics - and the motion of flow which recently assumed a central role to explain contemporary architecture and cities.

However the content of this universal mobility is simply distributive flow. It would make no sense, on the one hand, to think of the form of the network or the channel and the content, on the other. Medium and message are inseparable because both are nothing more than two sides of a single distributive phenomenon for the non-stop movement of people, goods, services and information.

## **3. The form of the home: rooms**

In recent years, it has often been said that architectural culture has abandoned the problem of housing as a key issue. Compared with research and planning of the form and construction of housing which has been repeatedly analysed and tested in the formative years of the modern movement in architecture, our current situation is obviously far from considering concerns of this kind as a priority issue.

However, the human room, especially in cities, still seems to be the most important subject from a quantitative standpoint and this is the remit of architecture and architects.

## **4. The form of exchange: containers**

In the consumer society, production is intrinsically dependent on the forms of exchange. When users find goods, they need a setting for the act to take place in: the market. Note that we are talking about a market not just of supposedly essential goods to meet a person's living requirements; we are talking about a fast-moving mechanism for gratification, of squandering on which desire is focused.

When Lévi-Strauss studies the gift economy in primitive cultures, he does so because he needs to explain the mechanisms of material and symbolic exchange in this stage of our post-industrial capitalism.

Walter Benjamin viewed commercial spaces as modern society's new fetichistic ritual spaces: spaces where permanently expected gifts were dispensed through the encounter with the goods.

#### **5. The form of absence: terrain vague**

The last of the categories proposed makes reference to historical time. The cultural experience of the city consists of a human fabric in which the survival of the significance of places through time cannot be underrated.

In these conditions, we detect a growing interest, almost a passion, for those areas in the city which we generally refer to by the French term "terrain vague". The English term, brownfield or wasteland, does not do justice to the richness of the French phrase. This is because the two notions of "terrain" and "vague" contain ambiguity and multiple meanings. This is what makes the term particularly useful to designate the urban and architectural category through which to gain an insight into the places, regions or buildings having a dual condition. On the one hand, "vague" can mean vacant, empty, inactive, unproductive, and often obsolete. On the other hand "vague" can also mean unclear, undefined, vague, with no set limits, without a future horizon.

Our great cities are full of areas like this: areas abandoned by industry, railways, ports; areas abandoned because of violence, declining residential or commercial activity, deteriorating buildings; wasteland on river banks, landfill sites, quarries; underexploited areas that are inaccessible between motorways, on the sidelines of property transactions, closed in on themselves, with restricted access for hypothetical reasons of security and safety.

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. Briefly describe the current situation in your city based on the viewpoint set out in this article. Identify urban issues relating to mutations, flows, housing and containers in relation to urban brownfield sites.

2. What areas of experimentation and innovation might be appropriate for the problem of housing spaces in former industrial sites?



**B-TEAM  
BROWNFIELD POLICY IMPROVEMENT TASK FORCE**

**BROWNFIELD DAYS IN SEVILLE/SPAIN  
31 May, and 1, 2, 3 June 2011**

3. What role can urban brownfields play as permanently abandoned spaces in which different social, economic, creative or research-based activities can be generated, temporarily, randomly, on a rotating basis, without a definitive use.