Imagining Suburbia: Reconstructing the Image of Suburban Housing Estates

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In this paper, my aim is to discuss the status and image of large housing estates. Branding and image building have become a popular topic in housing studies. One of the reasons for this are the ongoing macro level global structural changes, especially the continuing urbanisation which has brought “the housing question” in focus again.

The current postindustrial housing question has a very different form than in the beginning of the industrial time as housing has changed from being a necessity more towards consumption. Housing is not anymore only about satisfying basic needs, but is seen to be more of an expression of style, identity, taste and self-realization. Housing has become a competitive factor in the global city competition. Thus housing is being branded and reimagined for new consumer groups and lifestyles. Housing images are of interest not only to scholars, but also to policy makers, city builders, construction companies and designers.

Many of the housing estates built mostly in 1960s and 1970s are not considered to be desirable living environments, yet a large number of urban population live in the estates. Is it possible to change the image of an unpopular housing estate and with what means? The cases discussed are suburban housing estates in the Helsinki Metropolitan Region and the Helsinki Neighbourhood Project 2012-2015 aiming at strengthening the image of suburban areas.

Keywords: bränd, image, housing estates, creativity, suburb

References:
http://lahioprojekti.hel.fi/summary
Suburban Renewal. Grounding Urban Design in a Theory of Urbanization

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The revival of urban design in the past 25 years has been supported by a discourse centered around compact city policies and the design of public space. This discursive kernel is being challenged as the agenda of urban renewal is shifting from the urban core to the (old) suburbs and the fringes of the metropolitan area. Within the context of ‘suburban renewal’, the discipline of urban design has to come to terms with ‘new urban questions’ that emerge within the contemporary context of a boundless process of urbanization (Merrifield 2014). A process that is increasingly taking shape through variable geometries and scales, changing the territorial frames within which it is governed. The context of ‘suburban renewal’ provides the right background to reconstruct the question of ‘collective consumption’ as part of a wholesale process of ecological retrofitting. This paper argues that today’s efforts of ‘suburban renewal’ contain fertile leads to build new matters of concern beyond the traditional focus on the city (Wachsmuth 2014) and ground urban design within a theory of urbanization (Brenner 2014).

In order to substantiate this argument, this paper will discuss the results of the urban design Laboratory Labo XX within which the city of Antwerp asked four urban design firms to devise strategies for the renewal of its suburban belt (Grafe 2014) as well as the design laboratory Glatt where students from various Swiss urban design programs developed design proposals for the Glatttal area between the center of Zurich and its Airport (Architects Group Krokodil 2013).

Keywords: Retrofitting the suburbs, Collective Consumption, Urbanization, Rescaling, Urban Renewal

References:
Christoph Grafe, et.al., Labo XX. Kiezen voor de 20ste-eeuwse gordel (Antwerpen: Stad Antwerpen, 2014)
Architects Group Krokodil, Glatt! From Suburb to City (Zurich: Park Books, 2013)

What do cities really need to (re)generate? Re-conceptualizing urban regeneration practices as “Grafts”.

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Extensive and complex dynamics are affecting urban contexts, radically altering the physical form, social relations and the use of space of the European city as we knew it. Often, both formal dis-
organization and fragmentary social relationships change the perception of the "urban", particularly in the peripheries.

The concept of "contemporary suburb" has different meanings; today it refers to different realities, including empty spaces, incomplete and/or unfinished places lacking identity. In my view, however, these "fuzzy" spaces can lead to a return to the City, or better to a renewed concept of the urban, based on the neighbourhood as a "minimum unit" of urbanity.

I will start here from two considerations: 1) the lack of urban quality and of those elements able to construct identity in the city formation process; 2) a diffuse sense of "rootlessness and alienation" which is perceived much often in the new peripheries. This is part of my PhD research, dedicated to understanding which are the most important design elements able to build new urbanity, quality and identity, in contexts increasingly more fragmented and inhomogeneous.

In this perspective, I proposed the concept of urban "grafts" - borrowed by agronomy - to re-conceptualize development in contemporary cities. "Urban grafts" include both tangible and intangible elements as source of compatible and sustainable (re)generation, able to integrate the new within a living organism, influencing the morphogenesis of the urban space, as well as the chances to improve social interactions.

**Keywords:** Urban Planning and Design, Contemporary Urbanism and Urban Regeneration, Peripheries, Neighbourhood, “Urban Grafts”

**References:**
Boeri S. (2011), L’Anticittà, Edizioni Laterza, Bari
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**ID:** 322

**There is more to it than meets the eye – Social effects of urban design in the context of rural decline**

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Based on two Danish cases, this paper investigates how urban design can contribute to positive social development in rural areas that are challenged by population decline. From 2006-12 the municipalities of Thisted and Bornholm conducted a strategic, collaborative planning process at municipal level, which aimed to enhance quality of life by strengthening place-based qualities and potential through local physical projects. Thisted involved the citizens from ideas development over location selection to implementation, while Bornholm only involved the citizens at the local level. Guided by actor-network theory we analyse the effects of interaction between human and
non-human actors through the planning process and in and around the resulting new public spaces. We find that collaboratively designed public spaces enabled new activities and uses, attracted new users and created new possibilities for social interaction. They also stimulated identification with the place, local pride and an increased sense of community, and contributed to place branding. In Thisted the process moreover created new local cooperation networks that initiated several follow-up projects. While the social effects of urban design in Bornholm are predominantly local and limited to the actual planning process, the overall social adaptiveness to rural decline has been increased in Thisted. We conclude that urban design – when conceived collaboratively – can contribute considerably to positive social development in declining rural areas. Early and comprehensive involvement appears to be crucial for strategic impact, for which reason we suggest that the study of urban design processes should be included in the evaluation of urban design quality.

**Keywords:** urban design quality, social development, rural decline, collaborative planning, actor-network theory

**References:**


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**Urban design for Urban equality: accessibility in the territories of marginality**

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The paper explores the self-led peri-urban development process of the former informal settlements in Rome, where a very poor public transportation system and incomplete infrastructures had contributed to increase urban marginality. It reflects upon the accessibility of those “fuzzy” urban spaces (built in an unplanned way), in which infrastructures have been (and continue to be) the mean to lead the peripheral urban growth and, at the same time, to fix its effects.

In a continuously changing context – that has recently seen the opening of a stretch of a new metro line (the “Metro C”) – thinking over the relationship between mobility and marginality, rather than about the infrastructural marginalization, seems a meaningful topic of discussion.

In fact, transportation is a “variable” usually used to describe the different urban forms, but mobility, conceived as a system of physical and social relations, as a natural promoter of openness and democracy, could be employed as an important parameter to define also the urban equality.
In this regard, it’s important to focus the attention on the suburbanization processes. By observing the peripheries of urban-regions where more and more often, by hook or by crook, people live, the paper argues about the tasks and role of urban design (and urban designers) in the process of convergence towards an “equitable city”. A complex path, which presents us with renewed issues to be deal with.

**Keywords:** Accessibility, Equity, Marginality, Mobility, Urban Decentralization