

Making Politics

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ON POLITICS OF PLANNING

Perspectives and specificity of place

Challenges are great, enormous and far away from our daily world. They are all-generic and often abstract. From climate change, food-dependency and production, segregation and religion, it all is nimby for our western world. In that sense the financial crisis is different; it hits us hard in our bank accounts, in our mortgages, in our wallets. Thus we tend to act upon it differently. We tend to act but not for the long run. We still aim for the short-term benefits. If we could combine the complex of crises with this financial challenge we could empower short-term acting with a long-term perspective and make our acting a sustainable approach. This brings up another issue of complexity. We no longer really know the specifics of what is going on, what the real issues and challenges are. We forgot what the real nature of our places is. How we live and develop, what landscapes and cities exist of and how our society functions. We misuse the complexity of the world to not know or not even want to know, to shove this core responsibility of our tables. But we can no longer escape. Our lack of content, of knowledge and our short-term and shortsighted approach is making us morally, effectively and socially as well as financially bankrupt. We tend to a narrow approach in time, place and scale. Short-term - only here and now, and only 'us' - protectionism is not the path towards a new perspective. It is time to act!

Politics' planning

Politics covers the political, administrative and bureaucratic power. In every difference of appearance, goals and drives it has its main objective in the responsibility for the societal 'whole'. Politics is about formulating the right perspective for today, out of the sustainable time frame built up from yesterday, until the day after tomorrow. It is a time frame that consists of a far perspective, of scenarios and stories of the future, combined with the real knowledge of our challenges, the challenges we face today. Together with the meaning of our history, cultural manmade and natural developed. And it is about acting upon this perspective. About setting the standards, the base in 'rules and regulations' as well as giving direction and finding the words, the organization and the funding to tell and live up to the story of tomorrow.

Politics in this sense has to address this complex of crises more frequently and in a sustainable way. Politics of today is about becoming more sharply, asking again for content and wanting to make explicit choices. The challenges are great and the space for many solutions is small, also financially small.

Rethinking finance and funding in a different way is crucial, with new alliances and unorthodox measures. A new collectiveness must be built out of our former public-private-partnerships. A reset of this institutionalized relation can be initiated by setting a limited set of standards. Combined with giving room out of trust for new alliances to develop. Alliances for a step by step built up of a new collectiveness in finance and funding, new ways out of trial and error. Trust is necessary but hard to accomplish in these times of distrust, governmental interventions and the hardships of market failure. But trust is absolutely necessary for a next and sustainable step.

Next are focus and choices. This can only happen through a sharp confrontation between the challenges and the places. In this, design is crucial. It ensures the confrontation, the organization and identification. Sharpness in confrontation is necessary to choose; next to focus it will catalyze development and dynamics. This design approach confronts the main and specific challenges in the different and specific places. It sets off the alliance of the main actors; governments, developers, building industry, designers and scientists to work together on this new planning task.

Spatial planning is not anymore the trade-off of interests, nor the allocation of program volumes. Spatial planning is giving direction and shape in visions and stories, in laws and regulations, and through programs and projects to a social, economic and cultural task. That is what makes planning then again political. A planning that is socio-economic and cultural driven. A planning that is able to connect with the societal demand. And that confronts the different challenges with the power of the places. Design excellence for

explicating the differences rather than finding generic solutions. That is when design and innovation are leading in the spatial development process.

The 'what' and the 'where' combined.

More and more we live in an urbanized world. But is this urbanization leading us into fortune or despair? Do we really exploit this urbanization to the max? Do we know the potential? Can we make use of it knowing the huge challenges that face us?

The complexity of our challenges is rising and the resources change. At the same time urbanization grows and our economy changes moreover into an urban driven one. Society is up for a new revolt. Is it the age of urbanity or the age of the crises complexity? In other words, do we start of at what has to be done, what faces us or do we start where we live, how we live and where we can find our solutions? The latter is where the solutions emerge.

The city magnifies our challenges, confronting climate change with segregation, quality with unemployment, mobility with innovation, and creativity with economic crisis. The city stands for all our challenges in one, the ultimate confrontation between today's stories of tomorrow, the place where design and politics have to speak up. In other words, the city is not just the site and the catalyst of confrontation. It is also the place where confrontation leads to growth, change and innovation, bringing new strength and power. The city makes our spatial challenges political.

Our cities are the places where this confrontation of challenges is maximal. Where the power of confrontation involves the power of innovation and an effectively resolving ability. Done everywhere differently and with a diverse alliance in a distinctive way. Different because specific. Large generic questions get specific strength and meaning through funding them 'on the ground', in the streets, with the people. Global challenges always have a local significance, a personal meaning and vice versa. This confrontation of challenges and place is where the urban perspective begins.

But there is more to it than place. The new planning is about place, politics and people. What is needed to connect these differences within cities and through systems with a new approach, with politics to lead?

Good government

What does it take to govern a country, a continent or the world? What does it take to govern a city? How can we 'mayorize' our nations and what is the regional form of city politics? What process of planning and policymaking works where and why? Can we generate generic concepts on a national level or is everything specific everywhere? What does this specificness mean on a bigger scale? Is there a possibility or necessity for continental planning? What are the political assets of government differentiated through the different levels? Bureaucrats must start to re-define bureaucracy. Together we will have to develop an adaptive set of 'rules and regulations'. And start to set up a political performance program for mayors and national leaders. Good government needs the development of a national policy scheme or framework that combines the confrontation between challenges, places and actors. If planning is more than a mere shuffle of program on the map of the world, then this leads to a shift in its legal and policy framework. Good government will define and execute the changing conditions for the connected political process. Together we must redefine government and accept its presence as well as its absence.

Design connects

When design professionals no longer know why they are designing, when policymakers are driven forward by their own momentum rather than by challenges, targets and objectives, when process gains the upper hand and the challenges (despite their clarity) are not embraced, then the content loses out. Then today's issues, procedures, and reactivity become our guiding principles. But the challenges we face are too great, too manifest, and too pressing for us to let that happen. Giving meaning to these challenges and their development in our cities is the objective of 'political' planning and is achieved through 'political' design. Design confronts the conflicts and innovates through this confrontation. Design connects large complex challenges with local specificness and meaning. Design personifies, politicizes, identifies and 'lands' in the streets. Design is about politics, people and place making. Design organizes, confronts the players and not only addresses the factors but also the actors. Design identifies and designates the responsibility. Therefore design can break through and connect.



But for that design and the designers have to rediscover the power and quality to address and proclaim the large and small but essential challenges of today and tomorrow. And no longer only give answers and solutions as if they were service providers. Designers must again begin with questioning through proclamation. That is when design becomes political again.

Alliances of power

By definition an alliance is formed by parties with common interests who are making everyone focus on implementing the common. They initially tend to minimize their differences in the alliance.

The form of an alliance is a strong form of collaboration. It is a common driven collaboration where a narrow focus can lead to a successful development. Entrepreneurial attitude amongst partners including the governmental ones, is essential. Alliances start of where challenges emerge and are confronted with direct interests of people (organized and non-organized). How can we catalyze alliances more? Fire them up in their fragile beginnings? Good government must identify them as high potent collaborations and participate, facilitate and give them a stage to act on. How does this adaptive-ness of collaboration work together with a less flexible form of finance, corporate institutions and the complexity of societal systems?

Planning Agenda

Cities lead and to face the crises complexity we have to better understand what cities want, what alliances need and in what way planning works. To get to this innovative, this adaptive and specific approach might be an ever-adaptive way. It calls for a new planning agenda for *good government*. A planning approach that sets the way for a government that acts in more than just the organizational form of bureaucracy. Good government as political and societal adaptive, entrepreneurial and responsible actor. Not top down nor bottom up but - almost schizophrenic - adaptive. Out of trust and openness. This will not only be a complex transition for government as a political and bureaucratic institution, but also for everyone that has to deal with government in any which way. We are used to our current bureaucracy, depend upon it even and its change will take time and will ask for patience, collaboration and adaptation. But there is no time to waste. We can't wait for a step-by-step approach. We need a new urban government through test and design, starting right now in every place specifically different. Based upon a national defined urban agenda that emphasizes specificness and adaptation. An urban agenda in terms of 'urbanity first' for mayor challenges, complex changes and effective alliances.

This urban agenda asks for a planning approach in terms of an inter-dependant and adaptive set of:

- Visions and perspectives for the short, middle and long term;
- An organizational perspective in an alliance-wise way (network and horizontal and vertical alliances);
- A new perspective on 'rules and regulations' (adaptively changing in place and scale);
- Unorthodox organization of investments and new means of 'money making';
- A main and leading focus determined in programs and projects;
- Re-use for development (houses, neighborhoods, cities);
- Reflection in position;
- Knowledge upfront through a design and politics approach (in research, projects and policy-making)

Planning on urbanity is politics of planning. To lead in the breakthrough of our ever-bigger challenges, the widening disparities and specificness, politics has to act.

Knowing that any form of development is an adaptive form. Where the alliance of partners will drive the development more than the physical conditions or the objectives. Any alliance that works and that is urban based and objective driven is qualified for breaking through and developing solutions.

Politics has to act but dare to want not to lead. It is not about being first, but about changing positions for everyone, everywhere on any given moment. Politics has to develop this stage of changing perspectives and positions for the alliances to succeed on. But this stage is never neutral. It is colored through politics and visions. It sets the agenda for now and tomorrow. Politics of stage is developing a future for everyone. It is this adaptive politics that leads in making alliances develop a sustainable urbanity.