Urban design in the age of the anthropocene: Facing demographic shifts, climate change and finite resources

Author(s):
Christiaanse, Kees; Wagner, Michael

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Open territories

The mentioned global trends of the past decades, presenting the challenges for the future, are studied and well known. Rather than showcasing blatant utopias, it is more necessary than ever to develop concrete design approaches for the transformation of the urbanized landscape into regenerative territories, maintaining a high quality of life. Closing resource and energy cycles is the order of the day. But certain self-sufficient eco-cities, local energy networks or closed loop recycling management systems run the risk of excluding the non-involved or non-paying others. Responsible design for future open territories should therefore exemplify their potential to accommodate socially democratic collectivities based on individual freedom, the division of labour, specialization and plurality. A ubiquitous understanding of today’s territory Everything shaped by humans is culture; this includes the territory. Cultured landscapes emerge through a medium dense form of interaction of humans with nature. Their regional differences are due to natural conditions and increase with growing technological development. With this holistic concept of the ‘Kulturlandschaft’ we envisage to consider for the future as well as non-built areas as ONE continuous culturally shaped landscape.

The challenge in the future is to design and develop sustainable concepts based on the implementation of renewable energies for these territories in order to provide enough living space, employment and a high quality of life for the entire population. Architects, planners and urban designers play an important role. The building stock in Europe is accountable for a major portion of the energy consumption. Anchored in local supply systems energy solutions with construction being the most resource consuming human activity. Its orientation towards regional principles is therefore not just a marketing strategy but rather a social necessity in the long run. Additionally, spatial and strategic design is a powerful tool to test and negotiate future developments with the various players involved.

The Swiss condition

Due to its topography, a wide area of Switzerland is not habitable. And while the population is still growing (although all forecasts for the developed world point to a stagnation in middle terms), high pressure persists on the arable fields of the lowlands and the bigger valleys. The so-called ‘Mittelstrasse’, that comprises a vast hilly zone between the Lake Geneva and Lake Constance, as well as the big valleys that stretch far up into the Alps are excellent examples of the medium dense urban territories mentioned above. The few larger cities like Zurich, Geneva or Basel are considered to be the Mittelland and have developed into a large polycentric urban network over time. The majority of Swiss economical, agricultural and cultural value is generated here: The headquarters of big companies, the few larger cities like Zurich, Geneva or Basel are the Mittelland and have developed into a large polycentric urban network over time. The majority of Swiss economical, agricultural and cultural value is generated here: The headquarters of big companies, the few larger cities like Zurich, Geneva or Basel are good examples of the medium dense urban territories mentioned above. The few larger cities like Zurich, Geneva or Basel are good examples of the medium dense urban territories mentioned above. The few larger cities like Zurich, Geneva or Basel are good examples of the medium dense urban territories mentioned above.

The pre-fix in their own lifespan, whereas beforehand these rather took centuries to allow the coexistence of a broad variety of activities. This legal framework and licence agreements have been developed and negotiated over the centuries to allow the coexistence of a broad variety of activities. This legal framework and licence agreements have been developed and negotiated over the centuries to allow the coexistence of a broad variety of activities. This legal framework and licence agreements have been developed and negotiated over the centuries to allow the coexistence of a broad variety of activities. This legal framework and licence agreements have been developed and negotiated over the centuries to allow the coexistence of a broad variety of activities.

Implementation robust long-term strategies

To steer and orchestrate upcoming tasks such as infrastructure renewal, settlement densification and self-sufficient energy and resource supply, long-term strategies are needed. Therefore, an integrated system of the municipalities enjoy large autonomy with respect to spatial planning. Taking this liberty makes the landscape an integral component of the urban territory. For that purpose, contemporary permanent utilisation of land is indispensable and should be facilitated in the long run. Sensing all involved actors for the handling and advancement of the spatial qualities of new productive landscapes is an essential ingredient for the development of a sustainable future.

Responding to specific local conditions

A broad variety of different landscape typologies can be found in Switzerland’s ‘Kulturlandschaft’. This diversity, together with the prospering economy, is one of the main reasons why the country is so attractive for many visitors and immigrants. But its success is also at risk to become its own adversary. How can one bring these opposing trends in quality management is an intriguing challenge under such conditions. Universal solutions hardly result in outstanding solutions, whereas fragmented makeshifts risk unfair treatments of different areas. Involving important local stakeholders, specific regional approaches should be fostered that allow adapted answers to local conditions without losing superior perspectives. The cultivation of diversity renders the environment to be more resilient and attractive.

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