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The Antwerp structure Plan.
A new planning language for the twenty-first century city

Giulia Fini, Nausica Pezzoni

The Antwerp structure plan devised by Bernardo Secchi and Paola Viganò provides an opportunity to observe how some urban planners and designers are trying to 'trigger' new transformative logics by disrupting planning language by means of a technical instrument. The plan has been developed following the request to define a new image for a city that for decades had been abandoned by a large part of its population and whose administration was short on strategies. The structure plan of Antwerp takes cognizance of the need for new conceptual categories from other disciplines to address the issues and the design of the contemporary city. From this standpoint, the Plan experiments with new design and planning solutions. The following pages describe the concepts and tools introduced by the authors in order to 'bend' the structure of the traditional urban plan, building new interpretative categories to read and transform the city which can be seen as a paradigmatic example of the contemporary city. The first task for the plan was therefore to deal with unexpected phenomena of transformation. Instead of forecast images, scenarios and strategies were used, introducing conceptual and operational cate- gories which corresponded to different levels of the project and to different stages of its realization. The city has been interpreted through seven images that are both interpretations of the existing conditions and projections into the future: these elements represent a guide for the transformation of the territory. In this structure there is room for possible transformation, indicated by the authors as a dimension of 'vagueness', that allows some elements to be left 'open': the plan is not completely defined in detail, to allow others to complete the projects later on the basis of a common frame given by the images. This setting allows us to see the city as an object that is not closed, since the images can be differently in- terpreted. Another too introduced by the plan consists in considering the Plan as a device capable of producing new knowledge. The residents were involved in some parts of the park's design, giving them the possibility to recognize themselves in the plan and, through this recognition, to take for themselves the territory that was changing.

Living together
The structural plan of Antwerp can be considered as a new device for living together in the contemporary city. Like many other european cities, Antwerp since the 1970s has been a place of intense migration flows. The Flemish inhabitants, faced with this very strong migration, had a two fold reaction: a substantial number left the city, choosing to live in the territories of the disper-

sion, whereas others followed a policy of separation, which led to the construction of urban areas demarcated both ethnically and socially. Disrupting this process of self-isolation was one of the main purposes of the plan. Through a multi-layered work (physical, spatial, social, symbolic) and a multi-scale project within an overall plan of opening and reclamation of the city by its inhabitants, the mechanisms of ex.

clusion and the consequent degradation were defused. The redevelopment of some strategic places which could trigger changes on a larger scale, the involvement of residents in some stages of the plan, the introduction of the 'images' as tools for sharing the transformation scenarios, are different levels in a synergistic process, a process that swept away the idea of Antwerp as a closed city in decline.

Images
In the structure plan, Antwerp was interpreted through seven images, whose definition is a selective process that involved important design choices. The images describe the city's problematic character along with collective representations of its future. The seven images defined in the plan are: Waterstad, Spoorstad, Havenstad, Villages and Metropolis, Ecostad, Poreuzestad and Antwerp in the Megas- tad.
The Waterstad, the city of water, takes shape through a re-reading of the water system and a new recognition of the Scheldt river as the region's structuring element. The Spoorstad and Havenstad, the city of the port and city of the tracks, are identified as essential for understanding the previous Belgian territorial planning policies. These images suggest the real dimension of an infrastructural storage, whose implications would otherwise not be immediately recognized. The two images of Villages and Metropolis and Antwerp in the Megastad explore Antwerp's contemporary condition: it is part of one of Europe's most populated regions where the urban diffusion phenomena are more developed. The Ecostad (ecological city) has to meet the demands of contemporary society related to environmental issues and ecological ways of life. The image of Antwerp as a porous city (Poreuzestad) works on the empty spaces of the city, at different levels of the urban fabric and the large empty industrial space.

Implementation
One of the most innovative elements of the structure plan is the restructure of Antwerp's administration. The mayor and the city were able to direct the transformation process by modifying their technical equipment and staff to implement the Plan. Instead of each aspect of the Plan being delegated to the respective sectoral officers, the administration has been reorganized to target the implementation of the strategic projects. A working group specifically responsible for such projects supports the work on 'general policies' that constitutes the connective tissue which links the strategic projects themsel-

ves. Each project leader has to monitor the implementation of a project in all its dimensions as a referent of a complex design to be implemented with all its various components. Consequently, the administration assumes an active role by becoming, a promoter of the project, as well as maintaining an overall view of the transformations on its own territory, following the gradual implementation of the various parts of the plan.

Knowledge
The topic of 'knowledge' about the city has been approached from two different directions. The first was direct to increase the territory's knowledge by the authors of the Plan, the second was centred on the capacity of the project to produce new knowledge and, therefore, this strategy was aimed at increasing awareness of the inhabitants. This double approach to the cognitive aspect of the plan was developed through two different work strategies. The acquisition and deepening of knowledge on the local environmental context were achieved through a 'return of experience as a primary source of knowledge'. This approach has led the planners to the choice to live in the city so as to be able to grasp the specificities and the problems of living in it. The work on the capacity of the project to produce new knowledge was carried out through participation processes, such as meetings, seminars, opportunities for discussion, leisure events with the inhabitants related to strategic projects, such as allowing citizens to recognize themselves in the projects and, in a process of progressive recognition and appropriation, to acquire and produce further knowledge.

Territory
The structure plan works within the municipal boundaries of Antwerp but it also offers projects and
guidelines on a larger scale, through images, strategic spaces and the definition of general policies elaborated for the city and its region. The image of the Megastad specifically deals with a territorially enlarged dimension in which the city is located. Today there are at least four dimensions to be consid- ered in understanding the city's spatial relationships with the surrounding territories. It is part of a wider river region (the Delta region); the Northwest metropolitan area (Nwma); the Flemish Diamond and finally the Belgian Flanders region. The Megastad image also suggests a number of 'active policies' regarding international connections, the major metropolitan infrastructures, the presence of facilities beyond a local scale (secondary schools, hospitals, universities, cultural and recreational functions).

Porosity
Antwerp is described as a 'porous city' an image used to interpret the dynamics and transformations that are taking place in the urban fabric. It is interesting to underline the different levels on which the porosity is recognized. On the one hand, it is a condition referable to the large industrial areas. It is caused by the slow but inexorable

port activities' shift toward the areas in the north of the dock. On the other, porosity refers to minute changes within individual lots previously abandoned. The strategic re- flection used by Secchi and Viganò reflects on 'a new possibility of the urban tissue to be interpreted' despite the abandonment process. At different levels the porosity expresses the ability to absorb changes and different practices, individual and collective, acknowledging the role of the individual transformations in the space and asking how the current fragmented changes can be reinterpreted in a new collective project.

Antwerp, 'where it is possible to live together'. An interview with Bernardo Secchi and Paola Viganò

Giulia Fini, Nausica Pezzoni

G. F., N.P.: In the structure plan, Antwerp is described by seven images related to physical spaces and the practices of living, strategic projects and the general policies for the city. How was the generative process for the definition of the different images developed?

B. S.: It was a 'double system' of images. Some allow us to understand the city and its problematic character, whereas others show how people would like their future city to be. This knowledge strategy has required a long work of involvement of the citizens. We have tried to isolate some images and some of these belong to a present condition. The image of Antwerp as a 'city of water' shows us how much water was present and has been hidden in Antwerp and how this has led to a series of latent problems. It is a way to reveal a condition not totally present in the consciousness of citizens and administrators. Other images are projections into the future. They are meant to be a guide for the collective imagination and for future urban projects. For example, it could be emphasized that Antwerp could be an ecological city or that it is located in a region that has the highest density of public transport in the world. These legacies allow us to think about the mobility issue and focus on the density of the existing public transport. The seven images of Antwerp are therefore both interpretations of the existing conditions and projects for the future.

G. F., N. P.: The Antwerp structure plan has strong emphasis on the central parts of the city. At the same time it deals with a territorial dimension through strategies and elements on a broader scale. What is the specific territorial condition of this territory?

P. V.: Antwerp is part of a huge mega city region which passes from Lille to Brussels and Rotterdam. We think it is a new kind of metropolis, different from Paris and New York, inside which there are cities and towns, each with its own long history. The awareness of belonging to a larger context (a transnational framework, perhaps the framework of the metropolis of the twenty-first century) is not immediate. The image of the 'megacity' was difficult not so much to communicate (because everyone knows that Antwerp is a metropolis, a 'world city' since the sixteenth century) as to present it as a vision for the future.

G. F., N. P.: Speaking about the different strategies, you have emphasized that a renovatio urbis ap- proach was adopted in the plan, the comprehensive planning format being abandoned. This approach seems to be similar to that of Biagio Rossetti for the Erculea expansion in Ferrara, described by Bruno Zevi. How did you use the concept of renovatio urbis in the plan?

B. S.: The setting of the plan goes beyond the renovatio urbis approach you mention. The idea of proceeding with singular transformations did not seem to be convincing. The role of images was in fact to create a frame within which the renovatio urbis would be possible. The lack of a unified vision, that was very strong in Antwerp, could not be addressed only by the idea of singular transformations, although they are important. It was necessary to build connections, relations between the various parties and between the different themes.
The images were used as a guide whereby strategic projects are or will be developed. The projects are not only strongly connected to a single image, but cut cross other images, too. This procedure was es- sential in a city in decline such as Antwerp, which needed to be completely rethought and to regain confidence in its ability to regenerate itself. From this perspective Antwerp is one of the cities of the renovatio urbis of the sixteenth century.

G. F., N. P.: Do you think this approach could be an effective tool to deal with the complexity of the contemporary city?

B. S.: In the last decades Europe expected to improve urban conditions through a series of architectural projects in order to enhance some city areas. We have now reached a state of saturation in the cities, with a series of projects that have no coherence between themselves. We think that time is over: after having learned many things from these specific projects, now we must ask ourselves what vision these projects build and have built for the city. I think we can interpret what is happening in Paris, New York and Amsterdam as an attempt to go beyond the renovatio urbis approach (if we see it as an approach only based on specific interventions). We used this term for an intellectual debt with Manfredo Tafuri. Renovatio urbis means in the historical texts a 'total reflection' on the city, to which intellectuals, writ- ers, poets, lawyers and architects contributed.

G. F., N. P.: The characteristic feature of 'porosity' is one of the key concepts through which Antwerp has been interpreted. It is a concept that runs on different scales and allows the issues arising from different populations 'living together' inside the city to be treated. What are the peculiarities of Antwerp as a porous city? Where does the porosity come from and how has this spatial character developed in the contemporary city?

B. S.: The porosity has three different origins in Antwerp. The first is the bombings: during the last days of the Second world war Antwerp was fiercely bombed, because the germans imagined that the allied landing would take place in a direct line to Berlin. There are still many areas and buildings demolished by bombs that have not been rebuilt. The second factor is that in Antwerp chocolate and tobacco were produced within the urban blocks by a system of small and medium-sized enterprises. There were also other important industries, such as publishing

and diamond, cutting and their related working areas, but chocolate and tobacco in particular produce smells and were slowly expelled from the city. The third factor is that the urban population began to move outside the city, choosing a detached house in the countryside or in the periurban areas, and following a strong belgian tradition of 'living in the green'. As in other european cities, the children of couples who moved during the 1950s have begun a gradual return to the city, occupying the vacant production space and building beautiful homes inside the blocks. It is actually quite a small phenomenon, but it is certainly an important indicator of change.

G. F., N. P.: Can we interpret the project of the Spoornoord park as a project where changes on two scales (that of the individual strategic project and that of the entire urban system) have worked better together?

P.V.: Yes, this work on two different scales has been very useful and is of great charm. The Spoornoord project started slightly earlier than the structure plan. This was one of the most important public spaces in the city. In Antwerp the deterioration of public spaces was widespread, although the town had tried to access european funding for regeneration projects through the Urban programmes. What emerged was that 'living together' did not work and that this urban dimension was highly problematic for the city. In fact, the first projects which followed the Urban programmes were soon vandalized. The new park project was significant because Spoornoord was the hardest part of the city and had to respond to both metropolitan and urban ambitions. Therefore we adopted the slogan 'villages and metropoles' because the idea, promoted by the municipality, was that it would represent the new park of the twenty-first century.

G. F., N. P.: One of the most innovative factors of the Antwerp structure plan is that the administration has restructured its function according to the strategic projects. How was the plan implemented?

B.S.: Looking at the structural reorganization process undertaken by the Antwerp municipality, each of the project leaders monitor the implementation of a strategic plan in all its aspects. The property developer therefore has to deal only with an officer, an architect or an urban planner, who leads the whole project and has the role of coordinating the work of both the promoter and the technicians responsible for different sectors. Each project has a referent with a complex design that is to be implemented in all its parts. What the administration did was to place side by side the previous technical officers with a new group dedicated to the implementation of the strategic projects.

G. F., N. P.: The structure plan addresses some strategic projects, but it also addresses issues related to the ordinary transformation administration, building maintenance, a common code for the public spaces and facilities. How has the city Council managed the general guideli-

nes for the transformation of the city?

P. V.: The administration has not only formed a working group on the strategic projects, but a group on general guidelines, which constitute 'general policy' and are defined as policies that may affect the whole urban territory. A smaller group of about twelve people deals with the green connections, studies the spaces that are not included in the list of the main strategic projects and notes changes to building regulations. It covers all the aspects that are not specific but are related to the city as a whole and represent the 'connective' tissue on which the development of the strategic projects relies.

G. F., N. P.: What innovations has the porosity concept brought into the thinking on the urban condi- tion of the twenty-first century? Is this concept is a way to interpret the rupture and the discontinuity transforming them into an urban design element?

B.S.: Our projects have been read as 'peacemaking' projects that seek to eliminate the conflict and violence that are deeply-rooted in the contemporary city. We certainly reject a didactic interpretation of violence and conflict (the one that is taught in the schools of architecture in the United States or South America): an interpretation revealed through forms such as the diagonal, the broken or the acute angle, the tensions and conflicts.

P.V.: Through the concept of porosity the conflict is dealt with from the inside. The porosity is the acceptance that there is a breaking-point and that with this break we can do something else. We can work by including the dynamics of spaces in a new urban project and transforming them into something else, always remembering that we are in a dynamic process that continues to change. The porosity and the changes introduced will be reconsidered in the future: this is part of the idea that the city is never finished and that there is always room for subsequent modification.

1996-2011: the odissey of ex areas Falck at Sesto San Giovanni

Federico Savini

Rittel and Webber discussed how 'the problems of governmental planning, and especially those of social or policy planning, are defined; and they rely upon elusive political judgment'. They define these problems as wicked. The reconversion of the Falck industrial brownfield, in the municipality of Sesto San Giovanni, north Milan, is one of such a kind of problems. The site is a former industrial site of 1.5 millions of square meters for whose redevelopment is necessary to find either a feasible and agreed-on planning solution. From 1996, the Falck site has been at the very centre of two general land use plans, the object of design of three famous architects and property of four different corporations.

For its redevelopment a standard planning solution doesn't exist. The specific type of large scale development project taking place depends on the cultural, political and societal conditions in which the planning process takes place. This article proposes a critical overview on the 20-years long planning process of the area in order to detect the critical aspects of governance in land redevelopment.

1994-1999: urban planning to face economic restructuring

The genesis of the Falck project must be found in the socio-economic restructuring that impacted in the north of Milan during the 80s. During those years a well integrated networks of national, regional and local actors, as well as trade unions and private business, ensures quick and responsive actions towards crisis management. Both national and Eu funds are allocated to favor the implementation of planning decisions to generate new work places. The Framework agreement of 1994 between the regional and local government opens up a urban policy approach entirely focused on the labor issue. The Falck project is fully inscribed in this policy context, aiming at maintaining and bolstering the economic charac- ter of Sesto San Giovanni. The general Masterplan of 1994 confirm the productive character of the site, but it is rejected by the Regional government. A second land use Plan, approved in 2000, defines the Falck site as a strategic transformation site and fixes general guidelines for the development by the private landowners. In particular it sets out a building index of 0.5 sqm/sqm of floor's space, the impossibility to split the territory in different projects, and a general functional mix with a major productive component. Moreover, the municipality prescribes the transfer of a 650 hectars green areas out of calculation of betterment fees. Between 1998 and 2000, the planning process is rather open, with a devel- opment agency that promotes conceptual research and international bids for designers. Nonetheless, these initiatives remains strongly detached to the objectives of land rent maximization by the landow- nership.

2000-2005: the tug of war of negotiated urban planning

In 2000, Giuseppe Pasini, a local real estate market agent buys the Falck area. With the purchase the Falck project planning process comes back to traditional planning procecures: the public government fixes general directives within the municipal land use plan which the landowner must comply with in order to have the Masterplan approved. A first proposal is immediately rejected because of the excessive amount of residential space to be built. A second plan is designed by a commission of planning experts from Milan and architect Mario Botta. Although the commission decides to proceed by small steps, with general strategic lines fixed at the beginning, also this plan is not approved by the municipality. The key issues of discussions are: the economic feasibility of the project, including the green space excluded from betterment fee counting, the costly refurbishment of old industrial buildings and the soil remediation costs. This period is characterized by a highly enclosed planning process, with a frequent contact between the landowner's advisors and the municipality. There is no involvement by local civic society not by upper levels of government.

2005-2010: the project parallel to the plan

In 2005 a new development company acquires the land. In the same year a new regional law substitu- tes the Prg as general planning tool with the Pgt, a new planning document to be drawn. The project is given to the Renzo Piano building workshop and other strategic documents are produced to guide the framing of the intervention. A new working group is composed by the development company, the architect and the municipality to define the Falck Masterplan accordingly to the ongoing design of the general municipal Plan. The result is a new Masterplan that complies with new prescriptions: the Pgt introduces more volumetric incentives for high quality public facilities, a better energetic plan in the area, the redevelopment of the train station and the reuse of industrial buildings for 'public utility'. In this was the Falck development building potentials increases up to 1.1 ml of sqm. This plan is also rejected by the municipality, still much focused on the industrial past of its land. Strong critiques also come from the local civic society that suffers the new development which will attract new social classes and increase housing prices.

2011 to the masterplan approval: new capitals and the phasing issue

At the end of 2010 a new company acquires the land. The new company is a multiple capital corpora- tion, with italian and international partners. It keeps the Renzo Piano Masterplan but it generally chan- ges few issues, related to the marketability of the new luxury houses to be built and to the main urban structure. Moreover, the issue of time phases becomes central in the negotiations with

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the municipality. The latter fears opportunistic behaviors of the land developer, which will presumably start to built houses and never complete the public services. The phasing will reflect the political priorities of the city. After a phase '0' targeting the main infrastructures, the first phase regards either the redevelopment of the station and of a first adjacent sector and the development of the southern productive districts. A first agreement on a general Masterplan for the site is signed on september 2011.

Conclusions

The definition of a new future of 150 hectares of polluted land in the urban periphery is a political problem, not only technical. To be solved it needs a good management of a multi-staklholder planning process. First, there are the public interests that ambitiously claim for high profile public functions, infrastructuration and new productive space. It regards with nostalgia to its industrial past. Second, there are the private interests, which are mostly focused on residential development and on ensuring the economic feasibility of the project, with large costs of soil remediation. Lastly, there are the civic interest, represented by the local groups which fear the radical change of the social milieu of their city, with new luxury apartments and functions. The planning process for such a complex endeavor has however been highly closed and fragmented, so to impede the definition of alternative planning propositions to address these interests. Many public actors have been absent, starting from the Region and the Province, with respective competences on infrastructures and green spaces. And most of all, Milan municipality, whose metropolitan future depends on that of the brownfields located along its fringe, which is full of economic, social and cultural opportunities.