

FUTURE CITIES 2014

Reanimation Strategies for Tobačna Tovarna, Ljubljana

Architectural Workshop, Ljubljana 21.08.2014 – 02.09.2014

WORKSHOP BRIEF

Participating Universities:

Technische Universität Berlin

Univerza v Ljubljani

Università IUAV di Venezia

Technische Universität Graz

FRAMEWORK

Future Cities 2014 wishes to investigate potential of architectural projects as catalysts to envision sustainable urban futures in economically weak and shrinking cities.

By rethinking the connection between urban life, urban production and research by design, we investigate how to foster and support flexibility and assure sustainable urban development. In this context flexibility means to create a setting and conditions which act as catalysts for added value production and where research and innovation efforts address disempowerment of the city due to unused industrial estates and weak economic conditions. By doing so, we will investigate the impact and influence that architecture as a physical artefact has on the urban structure and how it can envision viable urban futures. Using the "research by design" method, we will develop and test possible architectural instruments in varying scales. More pertinently, we will investigate and give a suggestion how architecture can help to alleviate current deadlocked economic condition and contribute to society's demand for a sustainable urban transformation and change.

1.1. PROJECT AIM AND LOCATION

The workshop is focusing on possible architectural strategies for a re-development of an old tobacco factory in the heart of Ljubljana.

Walking through the Tobačna Tovarna area, one has the perception of a suspended place caused by an operative impasse. One encounters a project that did not succeed but survived in an illegitimate condition as a part of Ljubljana. Its irregular state has essentially become chronic and accepted. However, if on the one hand the area has proven to be a body resistant to the logic of planning, on the other hand it has begun to reach an unexpected right to stay where it is and some activities have been able to settle in it.

The "Tobačna Tovarna" is a unique and impressive site with colourful history and strong architectural identity. It is a mix of different conditions. Part of the site is a historic monument under protection. One building is home to myriad of SMEs, from architects and lawyers to driving schools and real estate agents. Another part hosts administrative office (public office) of Ljubljana. Yet another is a museum and other areas are derelict buildings that were used for making cigarettes and pipe tobacco. At the back of the site, there is a vast stagnating building site started as a new high-end speculative development called "Tobačna Mesto" (Tobačna City).

The "Tobačna Mesto" project was started in 2011 and first part of the project should have been finished this year. It was a classical investor-driven project, targeting mixed commercial use in the ground and first two floors combined with high standard flats in the upper floors of the towers. Together, 67.000 m² of prime speculative real-estate became a familiar story of an over-inflated real-estate market bubble. The development was halted due to lack of funding as a consequence of misplaced faith in perpetual economic rise. Today the site is in a state of indeterminacy due to political and economic deadlock. On one side, the developers have no capital left to finish the project, and on the other side, the banks are not willing to grant more credit. Current real-estate market seen and economic climate is unable to support classical neo-liberal investments. In addition, the site cannot be used as it is, nor can it be partially refurbished for temporary use, since the law does not permit use of unfinished building sites.

In terms of future development of Ljubljana, the site of Tobačna Mesto is of strategic importance for the city. Located on the border between the city centre and borough of Vič with predominantly housing programme, it represents a catalyst condition with potential to connect the immediate dwelling neighbourhoods as well as the Vič hinterland with the city centre, bringing in vitality and life.

1.2. WIDER SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The deadlock state of the Tobačna Mesto is not an endemic condition. In fact, numerous sites throughout Ljubljana have a similar problem. One such example is the housing and services project "Celovški Dvori" (Klagenfurt Mansions) ¹. The project is already finished, however the developer of Celovški Dvori is in bankruptcy proceedings. The creditor banks are trying to recover their investment capital which already resulted in halting a series of non-profit flat sales. Banks stopped the transactions as the economic return was too low due to dropping rates on the real-estate market. This represents a symptom of many European cities that still suffer the detriments of Euro crisis. Understanding this condition thoroughly and proposing strategies to solve this deadlock condition, is an important step for the future.

Perhaps one of the main lessons coming out of this deadlock condition is that classical neo-liberal investment strategies that are based solely on land capitalisation are limited in the flexibility of their programmes, user schemes and most importantly stakeholders, resulting in unsustainable developments in terms of long-term strategic planning. They are mainly based on the mechanism of perpetual growth of economy based on consumer culture (services, culture, tourism or innovation). Believing that unprecedented growth will continue indefinitely is illusionary; the Schumpeterian "creative destruction"

1. <http://www.celovskidvori.eu>

is an unsustainable approach for the city development in the long run. Whenever economy starts to dwindle, the cities themselves are its most severe hostages as so much of its operability is directly dependent upon perpetual growth. This is our starting point and the core problem to be addressed.

2. WORKSHOP AGENDA

In the times when economic interests of capital are unable to sustain development, we are looking for spatial practices supporting alternative development means that can break the economic standstill. The main goal of the workshop is to develop an understanding for alternative strategies in the context of cities in crisis. We investigate the agency of architectural projects as catalysts to envision such strategies and to support a sustainable urban future in economically weak conditions.

We are suggesting to tackle the design tasks by four thematic topics through which the question of the deadlock should be rethought:

1. Culture and Tourism
2. Knowledge and Innovation
3. Ecology and Nature
4. Technology and Smartness

These topics are already main drivers of today's projects of city renewal. However, they are usually employed for the benefit of the capital and intended to boost the cycle of economic growth. However, this workshop is look at them from a different angle – as contributions to sustainable local development. The aim of the topics is not to come up with the best solution (as that does not exist), but rather to test capacity and limits of an envisioned strategy (what it support, and what it does not support). The final outcome of your design strategy should therefore show positive and negative sides of employing one or mix of the topics above (for example, knowledge economy needs backing of big investors, local community lacks know-how to be effective managers, etc.). We will raise the question: How to shape a different urban landscape, built on abandoned urban substrate, capable of accommodating futures that today we are not able to define with precision? In this case, collapsed and abandoned development is not the end of a place, but its opportunity and advantage where fragments of initial ideas and designs are used to trigger new life.

Through this lens, we will be exploring two sets of questions:

1. Short-term Questions:

- How to bridge the stand-still and deadlock position that Tobačna Mesto (and Tobačna Tovarna in general) has found itself in?
- Are there alternative uses and strategies that can help to re-start such blighted areas?

- Can we imagine temporary strategies that are not based entirely on neo-liberal developer logic of mixed use + housing, or strategies that pump city full of "constructed culture" to utilize the site until the economic stand-still is over?

2. Long-term Questions:

- How to think about an alternative model of city development; a stable and sustainable development that is not so prone to the economic fluctuations in the first place?
- How can we envision an urban order that enables conditions where gradual transformation and sustainable change is built also on the economic and political empowerment of the citizens (as opposed to solely being in the domain of the investors and developers)?

1.1. WORKSHOP SCENARIOS

The workshop topics and questions will be explored through three separate scenarios, each corresponding to a different investment strategy. One student group (4 people) works on one scenario. Each scenario will be examined by at least three separate groups, giving us 9 or more final scenarios.

We suggest to distinguish mainly between the following three scenarios (which naturally are intertwined and overlapped):

1) **The first scenario is bottom-up** (decamping). The development of the area is totally left to the individual initiatives, cooperatives etc. The processes are not supported by public administrations or planned ex-ante. The area is designed as a platform ready to accommodate any informal initiative or, in an extreme view, ready to accept the total abandonment. No plans are predetermined. The strategy is to follow through the **PROCESSES** rather than the projects. One of the main goals is to set up a resilient strategy and long-term scenario until 2050.

2) **The second is an intermediate scenario**. This is a mainly public initiative (but can also accept private partnerships). It aims to develop a **PLAN** for a portion of the town, to connect the area to the center or, better, to extend the quality of Ljubljana's city center to the area, designing a tissue made by houses (e.g. social housing), streets, squares, parks, services, shops, schools, sports facilities, etc. It works on mixité. Ljubljana has the ability to metabolize the area transforming it in a piece of "normal city". Medium-term scenario (to 2030).

3) **The top-down scenario is mostly based on the private initiative**. The emphasis of this scenario is on the idea, that it is hard to lead a redevelopment of an area and investment plan on basis of local communities alone, but it is just as hard, to consider and implement a sustainable development without

including the local communities and civic public. Therefore this scenario is looking at possibilities to do a sustainable **STRATEGY** shared between investors and developers on one side (providing know-how in management and development) and local civic partners that are a long-term resource of the area. The first results should be implemented until 2020.

SCENARIO 1: DECAMPING TOBAČNA (BOTTOM UP SCENARIO)

One last question must now be asked: during a crisis period, [what if] the demolition of cities replace[s] the major public works of traditional politics?²

More than in a perspective of ideal reconstruction of the place, the Decamping Tobačna Scenario reflects a compensation of a “common good” that needs to be given back to the community, around which a new consensus can be built. In other words, the decamping of this area requires public participation.

This perspective comes with an idea of planning based on three main issues. First, all rights acquired by individuals will be taken in consideration as a condition structured in various activities which must be seen today not as an obstacle but as a resource. We would like to encourage you to put more emphasis on the civic and grassroots initiatives and what they can do in this scenario. Can they find opportunities through decamping in order to level the political playing field of participation? How can a “hands-on” participation look like that is practiced in “do-it-yourself-architecture” (refer to experimental project “Grundbau und Siedler”, Hamburg Germany³) or the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena’s projects which suggested half-finished buildings to be completed by the residents themselves⁴. In addition consider similar participatory frameworks outside of classical “housing” strategies.

Second, considering the presence of environmental and architectural qualities which have not yet been erased and on which it would be appropriate to focus the building efforts. And Third envisioning a process that can guide the abandoning and the decommissioning and further, translating this process into a new urban plan.

This concept is a projected hypothesis fostered by James Corner starting from the dismantling process that followed the post-Fordist conversion of Detroit. Using the term “landscraping” he refers to a project that manages the void not only as a result of the abandonment, but as the construction of a space intentionally conceived and prepared to accommodate futures - today - undetermined.

This is the hypothesis of a project which proceeds by removing, which tolerates wide margins of uncertainty, unpredictability and improvisation.

² Paul Virilio, *The Overexposed City*, in Zone 1-2, Urzone, New York, 1986

³ <http://www.iba-hamburg.de/projekte/bauausstellung-in-der-bauausstellung/smart-price-houses/grundbau-und-siedler/projekt/grundbau-und-siedler.html>

⁴ refer to “Quinta Monroy” project by Alejandro Aravena, online <http://www.elementalchile.cl/proyecto/quinta-monroy/>, last accessed on 18th of August 2014

Thus, instead of “scaping” the land into a formal composition of meaning and presence, I am suggesting the possibilities for “scraping” the land of its various residues: symbolic, political and material. The scraped ground then becomes an empty field of absence that accommodates multiple interpretations and possibilities⁵.

Soon after the interruption of the redevelopment process of the site, the area is starting to decline. The vision of a not so distant future is an accidental and unexpected collapse caused by this state of abandonment – a scene of untimely ruins, debris – of an unrealized future.

Is it possible to supervise the spontaneous decay of the area and its attack by nature? Could this be a desirable future for an area which original perspective is used up? How will the area look like in 2050?

The Decamping Tobačna Scenario explores the possibilities of a designed and controlled collapse. It opens to a reflection on the re-significance of “debris” and “wastes” produced by the failure of a way of interpreting the construction of the city. In this case, the dismantling is not the terminal scene of a used-up socio-economic condition, but is the precondition for a different project for the city that is able to include and process these “wastes” and “ruins”.

Decamping Tobačna is a scenario based on the idea that most vacant portions of the area can reinvented through landscape strategies. The assumption is that in this context of indeterminate status, landscape is the only medium capable of dealing with void spaces and indeterminate futures. For this site, what is demanded is a strategy of planning and designing of the incursion of opportunistic natural environmental system planned as strategies for social and ecological arrangements.

We suggest to shape the scenario through a gradual process that can be summed up in four main actions (which do not necessarily define a timeline).

To dislocate

To encourage the abandonment of the area and the spontaneous dislocation of the existing functions. To select areas and buildings to be used as "improvisation zones" that have the task to tolerate the urban market fluctuations.

To erase

⁵ James Corner, Landscaping, in: Stalking Detroit, cit.

To facilitate the releasing of the area, the dismantling of spoiled buildings, of concrete bases, of pillars and of the building site, using aggressive vegetation too.

To absorb

To promote ecological restoration of the area through tree planting and spontaneous vegetation control.

To infiltrate

To encourage the infiltration of new activities, different and flexible settlement models, such as the establishment of self-sustaining communities, do-it-yourself-architecture, experimental agriculture, clean energy production, perhaps restocking of birds and animals, etc.

SCENARIO 2: PUBLIC-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

Public-public partnership (PPP) refers to alliances between several public organizations in the context of service provision. Partners can include municipal authorities, government bodies, non-profit organizations, municipal housing companies, universities, and so on. Often PPPs involve governments contracting corporations to design, build, finance, maintain and operate public projects like schools, hospitals, social housing.

Times of crisis require the courage to do things different, first and foremost to review ones trust in the positive impact of purely market based instruments and to reconsider seemingly successful strategies. Speculating on new public-public partnerships (PPP) for areas like the Tobačna may sound pointless in countries experiencing severe economic difficulties, at first glance. Yet if one follows this approach it becomes clear that a PPP which provides housing and supportive facilities is more than a luxury utopian community solution, on the contrary it opens up potential for a promising win-win situation where truly sustainable long-term development is possible.

The interrelation between economic development and housing has been researched and explained in various reports⁶. Findings prove that next to labour, housing asset and land ownership are one of the leading forces when it comes to sustainable urban development strategies. The provision of inexpensive housing coupled with changes in ownership and household structures in order to strengthen supportive networks is an important component of a broader strategy – this is true especially when the municipality is short on capital (cash).

6. See for example: Confronting Crisis. A Comparative Study of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability in Four Poor Urban Communities. in: Environmentally Sustainable Development Studies and Monographs Series No. 8. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED406485> - 15.8.204

Thus for the Tobačna area the first P could be a placeholder for reconsidering established housing typologies and strategies and for investing public money in innovative social housing schemes. Here the focus is not on providing spaces for the poor, it is about devising new housing types and organizational strategies.

Best practices in municipal government suggest loosening regulations (including building and planning regulations) in order to promote the attractiveness of certain locations. In Berlin, there is currently a heated debate on the selling regulations of public land. Usually, the land was given away to the highest bidder, but in times of gentrification and need of social housing, this system is highly questioned and criticised by the public. Now, alternative bidding processes are discussed for the first time, giving the more integrated and sensitive projects a chance (see Kater Holzlig project⁷).

A less strict interpretation of local regulations will not only help to promote new housing typologies but also open the field for all sorts of innovative approaches towards service provisioning. In particular the energy-supply and production⁸ will be a worthwhile focus area to look into. Energy plants and housing are not mutually exclusive, as some of the IBA Hamburg (2006-2013) projects demonstrate⁹. No question, these are flagship projects to showcase the utilization of innovative technologies for urban climate protection. Still by introducing a "Special Interest Zone" ¹⁰ (as outlined above offering attractive planning opportunities) for the Research and Development segment further public-partners for the Tobačna area could be attracted.

Concluding the PPP scenario can be outlined with the following main actions:

To rebuy

The city makes use of the unfortunate financial situation of the developers and takes the opportunity to negotiate a repurchase of the abandoned site cheaply.

To rethink

To rethink the current city management (marketing) and to recognize the potential of the site as „Special Interest Zone“. Special interest means it becomes a test-field for inexpensive housing supply and for alternative housing typologies and strategies – extending existing and creating new supportive networks for local inhabitants.

7. "Kater Holzlig area plans alternative riverside district", article of "Berliner Morgenpost" from 5th April 2012, last accessed on 18th August 2014 at <http://www.morgenpost.de/lifestyle/clubbing/article106157102/Club-Kater-Holzlig-plant-alternativen-Spreeufer-Kiez.html>

8. See: 100% Renewable: Energy Autonomy in Action.

9. See: the bioreactor façade at the "BIQ house" or the "Integrated Energy Network"

10. offers specific framework conditions - or even in the context of university start ups

To experiment

To experiment with and test of future-oriented „green technologies“ and alternative business models. By loosening legal restrictions, new urban technologies and new investment systems (e.g. public crowd funding platform such as “citizeninvestors.com”¹¹) could be implemented. By creating learning environments, progressive stakeholder networks will be attracted and new project development procedures can be evaluated and up-scaled to other sites and places.

To connect

The city encourages the University of Ljubljana to become part of a possible redevelopment of the site by facilitating the use as test-field for new technologies in an urban context.

SCENARIO 3: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

The contemporary city represents an arena for commitment, where our civic attitudes and ethics are most visible and tested. If we examine the neo-liberal city it seems our only commitment is to speculative developments and consumer culture in form of shopping malls, good food and “fair trade” coffee. However, the city, in order to be sustainable and ethical, needs a richer variety and understanding of its cultural metabolism that should not be boiled down to economic figures, scientific reasoning and plastered over with aesthetically pleasing "design".

On the other hand – it is hard to envision contemporary city, with all of its complexity; commercial, economic and cultural variety; to be entirely independent from global economic flows and ”global culture”. It would be illusionary to believe that a complex contemporary city can be organized solely through grassroots or civic initiatives. For one, they are not knowledgeable or wealthy enough to provide for all the aspects of re-development efforts in blighted areas like, for example, the Tobačna area.

Therefore, we must seek the middle ground where sustainable development is defined as a co-existence between the capitalistic development for the good of the economy and local initiative for the good of the community. One of such ways is to try and find synergies between the capital investments and local resources (people, know-how, etc.) that represent a resource of the location for the prospective investors.

11. Citizen Investor Platform, online on <http://www.citizeninvestor.com/>, last accessed on Aug. 18th, 2014

...concept-based companies are said to put together teams of talented young people around specific projects [...] the leading firms are international hierarchies, also dependent on project teams scattered around the world, linked up virtually and through placements. [...] Soho [in London] without its role in this wider economic space makes no sense. [...] What seems to matter instead, is the combination of the global corporate reach of some firms and the economy of time that local proximity provides to highly mobile project teams. Stripped of the power of its international hierarchies, Soho would deliver limited economic returns. (Amin and Thrift 2002: 66)

If we want architecture or urbanism to play a significant role in questions of the city, they need to re-acquire their political role (which they historically possessed) in addition to technologically driven understandings of processes, flows and networks. If the plurality that we call a city is made on the basis of political conflicts, it is just as important to recognise that the parties within these acts of reconciliation need to be varied and should have, at least to some extent, a levelled playing field. Public private partnership should take this into account and attribute certain political and civic powers to local players.

The question of local communities is a delicate one. The argument for engagement of the local community could sound like a hopelessly idealistic attempt to rekindle social justice and is more often than not portrayed as illusionary. Yet understanding the need for long-term development coupled with the capacity of the local community to provide continuity of “responsible owners” (as opposed to commercial investors who leave if there is no economic return) is a strong argument for the necessity of engaged and educated local political body. At the same time, it also must be realized that any type of local engagement cannot claim global emancipation. As soon as the city becomes economically interesting, economically and politically better positioned players will assert their claims. Only through land ownership or by acquiring knowledge and experience will local communities retain their political power.

A good example of public-private partnership is Shinola (research online the connection between Bedrock hedge Fund + Shinola + College for Creative Studies in Detroit + educating of local community for watch making in Shinola + Fossil Inc. know-how). Contemporary public-private partnerships need long-term partners from both ends that are committed to the project. They need three important components. First is the know-how and knowledge from investors and hedge funds (Bedrock and Fossil), second is a city density for “creative environment” to foster long-term local knowledge (College for Creative Studies) and third is a dedicated local community willing to be re-educated and invest effort into the project. Finding a global player such as Fossil and Bedrock that will invest in Ljubljana is daunting; however we will be looking for similar possibilities of public-private partnerships with local investors that can work on the scale of Ljubljana.

The above strategy reveals cities as intricate nodes within the global metabolism. Their predominant importance is in their density of services, human resources, know-how and institutions that are required by companies like Bedrock and Fossil. On the other hand, the local community is given a genuine possibility to shape the future of the area.

Concluding the Public-Private-Partnership scenario can be outlined with the following main actions:

To identify

To identify needs and demands given by local stakeholders but also by global economic systems. To identify local knowledge, know-how and advantages. Tobačna City would then seek its niche role as product or services provider for a globally connected urban world.

To balance

To balance out forces of the capital and sustainable long-term development of the area by finding a suitable strategy for political and economic participation of different players through the way public-private partnership is set-up. Establishing the correct balance between the participation and the top-down decision taking will guarantee the long-term commitment on one side and economic viability on the other. This scenario requires transparency and communication strategies to become a successful model.

To commit

To reach the commitment of all stakeholders involved on a similar level, it will be useful to study conditions and operating systems of individual stakeholders well. The participating stakeholders should be concrete and diverse with varying interests and values in order to create a robust strategy that can accommodate change. The commitment of developers needs to also be understood as a commitment to fostering local knowledge and know-how as a competitive resource and comparative advantage of the area.

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