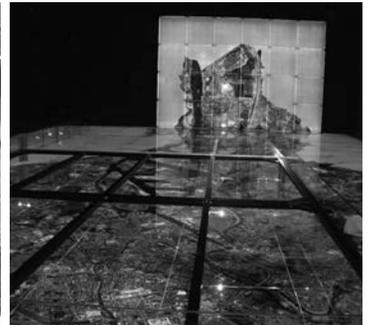

Guest Editor: Aleksandra Stupar

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CITY VS INNOVATION



Aspirat primo fortuna labori
(Fortune smiles upon our first effort)
 Virgil

The complex and polyvalent nature of cities has always represented a highly stimulating environment for innovation. Considered as unique nodes of human communication, exchange and practice, cities have directly or indirectly instigated, supported, influenced and transmitted new ideas and processes, shaping the present and directing our future on various levels and scales. Perceived as a process or its result, the notion of innovation could easily be recognized in different areas of urban existence which describe contemporary city as a postmodern, hybrid, intransitive and creative place, with preferred buzz environment and noticeable virtual and cyborg elements¹. Additionally, the increasing challenges caused by the global competition, social inequality and climate changes have imposed a new set of demands and development imperatives. Some of them have already been included in the recent flows of architectural and planning practice, but the ultimate aim represents a continuous upgrading of urban potentials through the innovation of environment and the environment of innovation.

The quest for the new modes of efficiency, attractiveness and knowledge has become one of the most important concerns related to contemporary cities and their future. Jane Jacobs depicted future cities (i.e. our cities) as ‘more intricate, comprehensive, and diversified’; completely opposite from monotonous and utopian models which do not correspond to the dynamic social and economic structures and processes². Therefore, our strategies, actions and regulations should be flexible and quickly updated in order to respond to the fast rhythm of urban(ized) life and its accumulated pressures, challenges, complexities and (re)fragmentation.

Being ‘innovative’ has also become a preferred label for competing cities in global arena and this catchy title has been related to different urban phenomena, spatial typologies, various strategies, (in)formal processes, movements and activities, as well as to the latest technologies and their amalgamation with urban hardware and software. Their material and virtual expressions could sometimes be additionally specified by their ‘smart’, ‘intelligent’ or ‘digital’ preferences³.

Innovative districts, cities and regions, scanned through the prism of agglomeration theory, new industrial geographies and modern evolutionary theory⁴, have thoroughly been analyzed, evaluated and ranked. One of the most interesting examples represents the Innovation Cities™ Program & Index, developed by 2thinknow®, which provides selection and ranking of cities according to basic factors of health, wealth, population and geography. The selected cities are evaluated through 162 indicators and scores are graded into five bands which classify each city as Nexus, Hub, Node, Influencer or Upstart (2thinknow Innovation Cities™ Program: www.innovation-cities.com).

Cities and innovation have also been addressed by several international projects and initiatives. For example, during 1993-1996, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions launched a project on urban innovations entitled “Innovations for the Improvement of the Urban Environment”. All EC countries were included and the overview presented 75 projects selected targeting all layers and scales of urban life, the efficiency of cities, the relationship between technology and sustainability as well as an integral approach to the problems detected. Innovation and the city were also part of the research conducted in 2007 by NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, UK), which analyzed the development of innovation(s) in Coventry, Dortmund, Dundee, London and Reading/Thames Valley⁵. Recently, the Fireball Project (2010-2012) investigated a possible role of smart cities which are considered as innovative ecosystems sustained by the future internet. Finally, the importance of innovativeness in/for sustainable urban future was also recognized by the World Bank Group and included into Rio+20 brief⁶.

3 According to Hubbard, cities are polysemous entities but similar characteristics could be related to all innovative processes and outcomes which shape and/or influence our urban reality⁷. Therefore, the articles in this issue highlight different aspects of the relationship between the city and innovation(s) shedding new light on multiplying urban currents and undercurrents. They all affect our everyday existence and are reflected in architecture, society, culture and technology.

The essential link between architecture, innovation and technology – nowadays transposed to another mode of perception, is presented in the article written by Anastasios Tellios. Offering a completely new set of

possibilities embedded in digital techniques and tools, the latest technology shapes new urban horizons which are open to multilevel experiments. The new architectural forms freely derive their logic from organic and inorganic systems and structures, they adjust to our ever-changing needs and multiple social demands, but most of these extremely innovative and wannabe innovative proposals are still in the domain of paper architecture. The author therefore focuses his attention on the shift of existing paradigm, suggesting the holistic approach, based on the elements of so-called 'emerging architecture' and its synergy with bio-sciences. Proposing the denunciation of a digital puritanism, Tellios also underlines the importance of new personal style(s) which have become an ethical and creative must in the contemporary world of endless quoting, paraphrasing and copying. Finally, the works of the young researchers and students presented demonstrate the innovative potential of the analyzed approach and its methodology, opening immense possibilities for architectural expression - based on science, technology and natural phenomena.

One of the recent trends in urban development is analyzed by Panu Lehtovuori and Sampo Ruoppila who emphasize the role of temporary uses in contemporary urban processes and transformations. The interesting examples of this practice could be found in numerous cities – their central areas, under-used, abandoned or gradually forgotten urban fragments which need additional stimuli in order to revive their lost urban rhythm and vibrancy. The current socio-economic context has obviously influenced a flow of temporary formal and informal innovative solutions, but only some of them have a genuine potential for further development of activated places. Beside the basic typology of identified spaces which provides an appropriate setting for these interventions, the authors also propose different approaches which public authorities could use in order to include temporary solutions into a broader perspective of urban development. Obviously, in an ever-changing world, whose speed increases further, the innovativeness of our (re)actions and their constant flexibility could be the only guarantee for the improved urban future, able to respond and be adjusted to accumulated threats.

Lisiunia Romanienko reveals another perspective of creative temporary uses focusing on peripheral urban spaces activated by mobile living/squatting. It could also be perceived as a unique and innovative model for ecological and egalitarian housing, especially in post-communist countries. The presented case study of Poland's oldest eco anarchist collective –

the Wagonburg EcoSquat in Wroclaw - provides valuable information about structure, potentials and limitations of these mobile communities, describing them as (re)established 'traditional enclaves of geographically unrestricted, demographically-diverse, nonhierarchical, noncompetitive concentrations of uncommodified cultural production'. Emphasizing their experimental approach to sustainable mobile living, the author underlines different elements of their innovative lifestyle, as well as the characteristics of the basic mobile dwelling unit created from the retrofitted train wagon. Romanienko also suggests that in spite of serious challenges they constantly face, the model of caravan collectives and their networks could be used as a possible solution for increasing urban problems caused by uneven development and natural disasters. Obviously, eco-living could be stimulated in different ways – sometimes far away from the mainstream actions and officially proclaimed strategies.

Harald Rohrer and Philipp Späth further elaborate a comprehensive and multifocal image of contemporary cities and system innovations, especially those related to the problems caused by climate changes. The analyzed cases of Graz and Freiburg, cities which have attracted international attention since the mid-1980s due to the achievements of their environmental policies, actually represent an ambiguous reality of energy transition. The authors also evaluate the role and real impact of several innovative elements which should facilitate energy transition in a sustainable mode – from experimentation, learning, development of long-term visions and new perceptions/discourses, to an efficient interrelation of all governmental levels, external pressures to existing energy regimes and a continuous momentum for transitions. Underlining the fact that even the most successful cases sometimes fail to fulfill all ambitions of anticipated strategies and programs, Rohrer and Späth suggest that the innovativeness of applied solutions could still be used for further dissemination on different levels and scales. In some cases it could be included into radical solutions or simply adjusted/adapted to ongoing processes which shape and influence our cities.

The article of Vladimir Mihajlov is focused on contemporary neoliberal context of architectural and urban design, tackling the issue of deterioration of public and residential urban space. He notices changes caused by deregulation of architecture and proposes a different approach to spatial standards which have been forgotten and ignored by contemporary practice. Confronting the neo-liberal and neo-Marxist discourse, the

author argues that even unlimited creativity and uncontrolled ambitions of powerful investors demand guidelines and stronger mechanisms for implementation. In that way it would be possible to ensure a higher quality of the environment, especially in periods of transition and crisis. Furthermore, he highlights the importance of political and ideological background which is reflected in urban space and (in)directly defines rules of spatial regulation. Evidently, the post-industrial era has created new life styles and needs which are expressed in diversified forms without any standardization. Therefore, the real innovation could be found in a process which should synchronize the imposed architectural/urban uniqueness with the regulation of its performances - whenever a common good and environmental benefit should be achieved.

The innovation could be introduced in completely unexpected ways into urban space. In his article Giacomo Bottà analysis the relationship between space and popular music, associating the environment of industrial cities, their hardcore-punk scene and the socio-economic background generated by deindustrialization during the early 1980s. The cultural innovations which occurred in this period were mostly related to the process of reuse and recycling of already available technologies and practices, but they definitely represented significant individual and/or collective reactions to actual social and spatial conditions. Furthermore, the innovativeness of this(ese) musical scene(s) and its(their) urban/spatial framework were also embedded in different practices. They were considered as ‘communitarian, democratic, no-profit, ecological and sustainable’, simultaneously opposing the traditional values and principles of capitalism and global music industry. Focusing on the examples of Tampere (Finland), Turin (Italy) and Ruhr urban conurbation (Germany), Bottà traces the origins of alternative musical expression which became a significant cultural ‘carrier’ and part of urban imagery during the times of economic downturn. Nowadays, it is quite common to use popular musical heritage as a tourist attractor of former industrial centers. However, the local urban authenticity is currently subordinated to the rules of marketing and city branding, leaving no breathing space for some oppositional and innovative elements introduced by the new flows of musical expression.

The variety of topics, approaches and examples which describe, analyze or challenge sensitive balance between cities and innovation(s) has certainly revealed a genuine nature of contemporary urban world. The whirl of flows, influences, paradigms and concepts instigate various reactions, creativity and inventions, but the quality and outcome of proposed solutions have to be evaluated properly. Innovations in/for the city are an inseparable part

of the urban evolution and only through necessary iterations they could gain their actual urban significance. However, in some cases the success of the solutions proposed has become a paragon which ensures their further global applicability.

Let us try something new?

 NOTES

- 1 Phil Hubbard. *City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 2 Jane Jacobs. *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1970), 250-251.
- 3 Nicos Komninos. *Intelligent Cities* (London and New York: Spon Press, 2002).
- 4 James Simmie, ed. *Innovative Cities* (London and New York: Spon Press, 2001).
- 5 Glenn Athey, Catherine Glossop, Ben Harrison, Max Nathan and Chris Webber. *Innovation and the City*, Research Report (London: NESTA, 2007), http://www.centreforcities.org/assets/files/innovation_and_the_city_report_NESTA.pdf [June 5, 2012]
- 6 World Bank Group. Sustainable Cities and Innovation, Rio+20 Brief – a Framework for Action for Sustainable Development, April 2012
- 7 Phil. Hubbard. *City*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

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