



UIA

UIA XVI Congress Contributed Papers
Exposés présentés au seizième Congrès de l'UIA
Monografías contribuidas al XVI Congreso de la UIA
Доклады, представленные на XVI Конгресс МСА

DESIGNING THE POSTFORDIST CITY

NICOS KOMNINOS

Univ. of Thessaloniki, School of Architecture, Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning, Greece

In a very *schematic formulation*, the decade of the '70s did not only mark the end of the postwar developmental period in the capitalist industrial countries, but it also recorded the growth limits of the Fordist regime of accumulation and its corresponding urbanity.

What the terms "Fordist regime of accumulation" ascribe is a structured set of societal relations of production characterised by: a) the correspondence between the increase of the technical composition of capital and productivity in sector I (producing the means of production), and b) the correspondence between the increase of worker consumption and productivity in sector II (producing the goods of consumption) (Lipietz 1984). The very meaning of these relations is that individual and collective consumption are justified as important conditions for development, and that the continuous gains in productivity balance the slowing of profitability, caused by the extensive use of machinery in production. We must also note that the establishment of these relations - which sustained postwar development, Welfare State expenditures and mass consumption - is not automatic; external to the economy, political and ideological "regulators" are mobilised in order to achieve it.

Incorporated in the accumulation and developmental pattern is a specific spatial structure. It is characterised by geographical polarisation of production, exchange activities, labor force and communication networks, by important state expenditures and by the socialization of the general conditions of production. (This polarisation constitutes first of all a major condition for the continuous rise of productivity and mass consumption).

The urbanity that results is of an expanding city, based on industrial and tertiary concentration with high levels of individual and collective consumption. The labor reproduction facilities and the general conditions of production are produced and maintained mainly through state expenses. The state also assumes local regulation of the inherent contradictions of concentrated activities through urban planning agencies and local welfare policies. Finally, the formal patterns of the above urbanity follow a limited number of design models like "Ville Radieuse", "Brazilia", "Gar-

den City", "Industrial City", "Charter of Athens", etc, which combine mass production and consumption of the built environment, spatial segregation and functional cooperation of activities, abstract morphology and industrial construction technologies.

So, in industrial developed countries, the internal articulation and coincidence of postwar accumulation, of political and ideological regulations, of spatial configurations of social activities, of urban planning policies and urban design models have created a specific type of urbanity: the so-called "fordist city".

Today, this type of urbanity follows a process of radical transformation; its *constitutional instances* (spatiality of social activities, urban planning and urban design) are rapidly changing in order to meet new patterns of competitive accumulation and selective regulation.

What mainly characterises contemporary urban spatiality (the articulation of urban practices, spaces and forms) is industrial decline, diffusion of the productive system, deconcentration of tertiary activities, duality in incomes and social polarisation of housing, degradation of social equipment and urban networks. These phenomena underlies a severe overaccumulation crisis coupled with the crisis of the Welfare State and the dramatical reduction of its social expenditures. Manifestations of these trends abound. However, they have mainly affected the prime places of Fordist accumulation: metropolitan centers and growth poles of the traditional industry, where there are obvious environmental and fiscal crises (Bade 1983, Daniels 1977, Dennis 1978, Jones 1979, Ducreux 1981, Tabb 1978, Hill 1978, Komninos 1986). On the other hand, new spatialities are emerging, the so-called "silicon landscapes" - like high tech parks, technopoles, corridors and routes - corresponding to expanding industrial branches and to new forms of productive cooperation among industry, research and the state. So, what characterises the changing urban spatiality today is a lower and sometimes negative rate of urbanization, a new centrifugal industrial mobility, a spatial diffusion of production and transfer of growing activities into new places, a deterioration

of the physical and social metropolitan environment, a dualism in terms of employment, income, housing and social care, a "decollectivisation", finally, of collective consumption.

It is easy to realise that the above transformations are followed by intensification of social contradictions; we may refer to augmenting corporate competition, to new territorial conflicts so as to attract investment, to growing class restlessness caused by unemployment, and to multiple forms of segregation.

These changes in urban spatiality and the rising new urban contradictions (within a quite different social context), both make welfare urban planning, as well as the functionalist urban design of the fordist city, irrelevant. A new planning and design direction becomes necessary in order to meet a double challenge; to regulate the conflicts raised by the transformation of spatiality outside the context of the Welfare State, and to formulate the metamorphosis of an ever changing spatiality into a new type of urbanity; a planning and design direction integrating the postfordist spatiality, regulation framework and urban form concepts.

It seems that a major priority in the field of urban planning is the question of replacing a process of local regulation based on welfare theories, agencies and policies: Not just to create a new institutional framework, as happened in many cases, for orienting urban policies away from contemporary social needs (see i.e. Camagni 1981, Breheymy et al 1984, Elliot 1984, Hart 1984), but to institutionalise new types of local regulation compatible with today's policies and ideas. In other words, the question is not of a "resurrection" of the Welfare State in its general or local forms, but of the invention of new "welfare" institutions fitting into the different societal structures of intervention. We will try to express this more clearly.

The reversal of the Welfare State and "the strange death of strategic planning" were followed by neoliberal selective policies (free enterprise zones, public budget cuts, enterprise support policies, short term intervention, etc) which only reduce public expenses toward general conditions of production and collective consumption. Due to this reduction, but also to a more competitive urban spatiality, urban problems are intensified. The new local policies seem incapable of managing urbanization and local socio-economic development.

On the contrary, a new type of local regulation can be achieved by combining institutional decentralization and local entrepreneurial-developmental initiatives. Decentralization and geographical differentiation of planning structures are necessary to confront the complex territorial mosaic of development, decline or re-

structuring. Different spatialities, social conflicts and needs have to be managed through different planning institutions and policies. Local developmental initiatives can counter-balance the reduction of central state finance, and reestablish local funds in their previous levels. The more efficient and profitable community enterprises are, the more welfare in character local regulation and planning becomes. It is like socializing the profits of effective community enterprises; or transferring some of the reproductive functions of the state to the local level, without integrating local authorities into state structures. The latter is a very important condition in order to arrive at efficient, competitive and profitable community enterprises.

Additional complications exist at the level of urban design due to conflicting procedures producing and regulating the physical space of the city. This is caused by an increasing divergence among "the trends of the coincidence", design movements and design necessities.

As "trends of the coincidence" we characterise the contemporary forms of spatial organization and land exploitation due to the restructuring of urban spatiality. For example, low density land development, housing and industrial reconstruction, spatial multifunctionality, and free space redesign are replacing previous ways of spatial organisation-development, because they are more compatible with the processes of deindustrialization, productive deconcentration, slowing of urbanization and fiscal crisis. In general, small scale intervention and design are trends of the coincidence, rather than innovative movements. (Big is not ugly and small is beautiful; but today, small is possible and big is improbable).

On the other hand, contemporary design movements are characterised by a strong romantic mood, an eclectic use of forms of the past, and a desire to regenerate the preindustrial European city. The eclectic reference to history is realised through two different paths; either by exactly coping previous space patterns and forms, or by their transformation, simplification and metaphoric use. Even more important is the rejection of the massive production of "artcrafts", coupled with the negation of Bauhaus standardisation and rationalisation (Cornu 1980, Frampton 1981, Portoghesi 1981).

Most of the metafunctionalist design theorists recognize that the negation of the past prevails more than the creation of new design models. Portoghesi (1981) recalls Mondrian "aujourd'hui nous pouvons te dire ceci seulement, ce que nous ne sommes pas, ce que nous ne voulons pas"; for Isozaki (1980), "all the things the architects of the modern architecture period attempted to achieve have been achieved; and we need do

nothing but select the ones we want... the use of pure forms, displacement and articulation of such forms, overscaling, oppositional use of materials, interiors with maze-like qualities, and accumulated quotations from the architecture of the past are all formal methods for the generation of new, independent semantic structures".

So, with respect to trends and design concepts there is nothing more than continuity and simple negation of the past. It is as if all design creativity is oriented and absorbed in the decomposition of the post-war principles of city building. And this is a new "habitus", in the sense that the act of negation is not produced by a positive design philosophy, but just by a rejection.

However, in these research programmes there are seeds of a new approach, based on the discovery-revaluation of form. Some authors claim that, while in a previous period, in modernism, the supremacy of space and form was destroyed by constructive thought and the principles of utility and functional logic, today, form is becoming the major issue of the synthesis. However, this is not the point. What is really changing is the very concept of space and form; their substance which is independent from scale, function, materials and use. For example, in shapes and volumes constituting urban space, purism is replaced by a classical geometry; perspective takes the place of cubist multiple views; differentiation as a way of producing form replaces repetition; the unity of internal and external space becomes discontinuity; from abstract organization we proceed to iconic representation, etc. And although these changes are not coherent, they lead to a different-new urban image.

Realization of this urban image presupposes a differentiation of synthesis and of production techniques. In synthesis, structuralist and abstract procedures have to be replaced by a pictorial combination of forms. Here the main issue is iconic information, its management and use. In construction, the gap is bigger. Taylorist ways of organization of work must give way to flexible, multifunctional construction technologies. We may remind that the same problem was presented in industry where the passage from large scale production to product differentiation demanded a shift from Taylorism to the multifunctional atelier.

In this way, a new culture about shapes, forms and spaces is developing, based on the most advanced synthesis techniques, production concepts and small scale production goods. It is an innovation of forms that can be considered as a major one, capable of supporting a new era of design movements; a step from "negatio" to "compositio".

The importance we attribute to these particular trends of contemporary urban design research programmes can be justified by their correspondence to the forces that sustain the overall transformation of contemporary urbanity: the new production techniques, the flexible multifunctional organization of work, the spread of information-based practices, the selectivity of interventions, and the questioning of the culture of modernism and immediate rationality.

After the crisis of the Fordist regime of accumulation, and its technological, political and ideological bases, the corresponding urbanity and space models are also involved in specific differentiation procedures; the definition of new solutions, design models, planning policies, institutions, and general equilibrium conditions which should become compatible with the social practices and spatialities of post-Fordism. Nevertheless, the trends mentioned in spatiality, urban planning and design of the post-Fordist city may be just short-term ones, a mediation to something quite different. Although the possibility of their reversal is not very probable, the definitive image of post-Fordist urbanity will be a function of individual and collective efforts for innovation.

REFERENCES

- Bade, F.J. (1983), "Locational behaviour and the mobility of firms in West Germany", *Urban Studies*, No 20.
- Brehemy, M., P. Hall (1984), "The strange death of strategic planning and the victory of the know-nothing school", *Built Environment*, vol. 10, No 1.
- Camagni, R., R. Cappellin (1981), "European regional growth and policy issues for the 1980s", *Built Environment*, vol. 7, No 3-4.
- Cornu, M. (1980), "Architecture 1980-doctrines et incertitudes", *Les Cahiers de la Recherche Architecturale*, Paris.
- Daniels, P.W. (1977), "Office location in the British conurbations. Trends and strategies", *Urban Studies*, vol. 14.
- Dennis, R. (1978), "The decline of manufacturing employment in Greater London: 1966-74", *Urban Studies*, vol. 15.
- Ducieux, M. (1981), "Les mutations de la banlieu", *Actes du Colloque Banlieu*, Montreuil, France.
- Elliot, B., D. McCrone (1984), "Austerity and the politics of resistance" in *Cities in Recession*, I. Szelenyi (ed.), London, Sage.
- Frampton, K. (1981), "Du néo-productivisme au post-modernisme", *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, No 213.
- Hart, D. (1984), "A policy bibliography of the Greater London Council: planning and transport", *Built Environment*, vol. 10, No 2.
- Isozaki, A. (1980), "Kamioka town hall", *Architectural Design*, No 5/6.
- Komninos, N. (1986), *Theory of Urbanity*, Thessaloniki, Synchrona Themata.
- Lipietz, A. (1984), "Accumulation, crises et sorties de crise", *CEPREMAP*, Paris.
- Portoghesi, P. (1981), *Au-delà de l'Architecture Moderne*, Paris, ed. L'Esquerre.
- Tabb, W. (1978), "The New York fiscal crisis", New York, Oxford Univ. Press.