

Space of Production

The reversal of Henri Lefèbrve’s famous title conveniently summarizes an ability that could lie in a truly transformative use of the term “mixture” in an urban context. If we want to shift the role of the western world from being a main burden to the global system toward exemplifying responsible urban practices we must try to redefine our conception of land use, planning, environment, energy supply, water, and transportation in a radical way. One approach to this task lies in the attempt to rethink the “productive capacity” of each square meter of urban ground.

When resources become scarce, available means have to be used at their best and smartly combined. They have to be used in ways that “added value” can be generated in standard procedures. While this approach has widely been explored with respect to energy production and consumption patterns, the broader question is, what insights can be gained if we analyze the capacity of the urban ground as a whole to “produce” something. The possibilities of any given site to make a contribution are manifold. An easily tangible idea is to allow energy supply and ecologically relevant habitats on shared ground. Another more abstract conception would be to combine new models of urban manufacturing and social innovation.

After Hurricane *Sandy*, to give only one example, a large international competition (*Rebuild By Design*) has offered potential approaches. The vision put forward by many proposals was to link the necessary reconstruction of large areas of the New York coastline to a thorough redefinition of design influence. All municipalities involved were encouraged to not only rebuild damaged infrastructures in their former shape and performance but to use the respective ground for more complex solutions. All winning schemes mutually address the requirements of storm water protection and more resilient and livable public spaces. They strive to make multiply coded patterns visible and describe options to utilize them for a common benefit. Flood zones are double-used as playgrounds; elevated rooftop agriculture contributes to a comprehensive (flood) water storage and management system; and infrastructural elements like bridges perform as water retention tanks. Traditional mixture patterns are deliberately supplemented with far-sighted options to suggest concurrent usages that have not been realized in the past.

While the setting of the competition has been a result of the specific spatial and socio-political context of the U.S. and its implementation remains unclear, the protagonists' mind-set can inspire to rethink design problems worldwide. The discussion on the chances and threats of densification in advancing urbanization processes has largely focused on the question of building masses and volumes. Much is to be gained from a renaissance of attention to the surface. This is true for an intensified research into advanced possibilities of coincidental and mixed use of urban layers—independent from their position in the three-dimensionality of any urban physical context. It is equally true, though, for the attempt to define a future balance between settlement and landscape. An integrated, intertwined model that understands both realms as parts of an intrinsic and inseparable whole and that can embrace innumerable conditions of blending, overlapping and sequencing can and should substitute a definition that insists on forcefully isolating both realms. Strong support for the resilience of physical and social environments would be guaranteed.

Keywords

Rebuild by Design, Resilience