Mc Mansions

The Middle Class Urbanism Interview with Thomas Sieverts

Adi, Audi, Aldi

Density, Zoning and Class in NYC

and more...

MIDDLE CLASS URBANISM
For the last few decades the middle class has been the driving force behind urban innovation. More than any other, this urban group has both the financial resources and the sheer power of numbers to effectively transform desire into urban reality. Many of the most obvious components of our cities—Row houses, apartment buildings and sports facilities, to name but a few—are in large measure a function of the existence of a broad middle class. The middle class symbolizes modest urban values, values that seem hopelessly anti-utopian and run counter to the megalomaniac concepts of cities proposed by great architects like LeCorbusier or Hilbersheimer. But in reality the middle class is comprised of some of the boldest urban utopists ever, individuals who have been realizing their utopias for decades. Much less dogmatic and more successful than any imagined utopia, with their power, influence and sheer numbers the middle class has shaped the urban landscapes we inhabit today.

But there is also something paradox about the middle-class when it comes to urbanism: On the one hand the common wisdom is that middle class households are integral to a balanced social structure in a city but at the same time their relation to urban environments seems to be ambivalent to say the least. Beth Lieberman’s analysis shows how middle class residents in low density neighborhoods in New York City epitomize that paradox. They fiercely resent any increase in density - in urbanization in their neighborhood. And at the same time the declared policy of the city to hold on to it’s middle class and not let it move out to New Jersey or Long Island, gives these homeowners a political clout and ultimately an influence over the zoning process that stands in no relationship to their numbers.

And although the term middle class very blurry it might be exactly the contradictory relation of middle class to cities that could lead to a definition of what is the middle-class. As Johannes Fiedler argues in his text ‘Dispersion’, in the absence of scarcity of some sort (e.g. economic, security) or top-down regulations, the default choice for living seem to be dispersed, low density environments. Or as Thomas Sieverts in our interview put it: ‘people seek the fringes’. It is almost a pioneer-like quality that parts of the middle class exhibit – the constant search for the new fringe, the new land. The relatively new phenomenon of exurbs is the US expression of that impulse. Places that are ever further removed from the population centers almost completely disconnected from any form of civic life. In Europe or Germany this strategy is not an option due to lack of available open space. Instead in Berlin, as documented in the article by Katherine Bourke and Gregor Harbusch, spaces in between old and new cities are the new frontier – the new fringe that the middle-class colonizes.

The complex and contradictory behavior of the middle class in an urban sense begs for an economic definition of middle class. Middle class, broadly defined, are those that have a significant amount of disposable income. This economic status affords them the choice between different styles of housing and one could argue it is part of what distinguishes a middle class lifestyle from those living under strict financial constraints or in poverty.

In most developed market-societies the choice of place is only confined by the resources available (government interventions usually are only feeble attempts to channel those forces and produce more unintended than intended effects). And so, while the presence and the economic stability of the middle class is a social and fiscal necessity for any city, at the same time, their economic equip affords them the option to turn their back on the city, settle in new areas and set up an own counter-reality to old civic forms and traditions. The middle class, one could argue, is thus also
in an almost physical/architectural sense a critical urban component: Unlike lower class households, middle class families have a choice of where they want to settle and, unlike the numerically smaller upper stratum of a society, they are a quantitatively significant entity. And the places they choose to settle are then subject to large-scale transformation. The peripheries of cities were radically changed with the emergence of a large, mobile middle class. The suburb, probably the most important urban invention of the 20th century is arguably a middle class creation. And for a long time the demise of cities, their dissolving in a sea of suburbs was seen as the inevitable conclusion.

However, the option of leaving the city is not always realized, and there is ample evidence that the classical suburb itself is already under siege, from the emergence of exurbs and to some extent also from the old cities itself. Nevertheless the competition is about middle-class residents and that competition between the cities and their periphery. No matter who will win in the end, the results will change the shape of our cities profoundly. Fernando Vegas describes how the reestablishing of the middle-class in central cities in Spain is connected to wide-ranging changes in the morphologies of those centuries old cities. In a similar sense William Alatriste’s photographs document the architectural dimension of a new immigrant group in Brooklyn establishing itself in the American way of life.

At the same time there are signs that at least in the US, middle class lifestyle is increasingly coming under pressure. Foreclosure rates in suburban America and bankruptcy filings are at record highs, saving rates are at a record low. It seems that the safe haven of the middle class home is becoming a financial risk for more and more homeowners. With mortgages often barely affordable with two incomes in a family – the slightest disruption, a lost job, a sick family member etc. can mean the abrupt end of the dream.

But while the classic suburb in the Western World might be experiencing its own first crisis this model for middle class living seems to be just taking off in other places. Angie Waller reports from China how places from Long Island to Orange County become role models for the burgeoning middle class in urban China.

Although the middle class is difficult to define and it’s consequences for urban regions are sometimes contradictory, we think that the existence of the middle class as a social and urban phenomenon cannot be dismissed and is worth careful inquiry as well as wild speculation. Our second issue of Monu is a contribution in that spirit and the bandwidth and extraordinary quality of texts, projects and graphics we received for this issue proof the point.

We would like to thank all authors for their contributions, William Alatriste for copyediting some of the English translations and the Center for Urban Architectural Studies at the University of Kassel for its generous support.

The Editors
Thomas Soehl
Bernd Upmeyer

Title photograph:
In the summer of this year the symbol for the German middle class consumer culture filed for bankruptcy. Karstadt/Quelle a brand that operated one of the most popular chains of large multi-department stores and Germany’s most successful shopping catalogue had been an architectural institution in German city centers as well as a printed one in rural and suburban living rooms.
Call for submissions for Monu 3.0

Political Urbanism - the relations of urban form and typology to ideology, power and politics

For our third issue of Monu we invite articles, projects, photographs, artwork, research projects and wild speculations that are engaged in the field power/politics and urban form/typology on any level. Interested contributors should contact the editors ASAP at editors@monu.org. The deadline for contributions will be the end of April 2005.

The red state – blue state phenomenon became commonplace even in Europe in the last years: Democrats have the upper hand in the coastal states and republicans in the rest of the country. But not only the US have a particular map when it comes to politics – traditionally the two most southern states of Germany have also been the most conservative ones. In Bavaria the conservative party had a hold on executive and legislative for almost 60 years now and achieved that state and the party are virtually synonymous in perception; the political party as a brand for an entire state.

New urban typologies such as shopping malls, office parks and gated communities or new urbanism towns create their own political microclimate. Classical democratic principles as invented in the polis and developed in democratic cities and regions over centuries seem to be suspended in these environments. In a mall you buy your right to existence with your identity as a consumer and the security guards are enforcing house rules that have been drawn up in corporate boardrooms. The inhabitants of gated communities or other post-modern residential typologies together with the purchase contract generally also sign away part of their civil liberties. Given that these and similar kinds of typologies are becoming more and more parts of our urban environment what are the larger consequences of these perforations of the democratic process and the civic space?
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Dispersion

By Johannes Fiedler

Our cultural imprint conditions us in such a way that we expect a city to have a certain level of functional and architectural density. Urbanization in a market economy no longer fulfills this expectation. Density nowadays only happens in conditions of scarcity, under threat, or by decree.

As soon as it reaches a certain magnitude, a collection of buildings is labeled a city. As a matter of fact, city is connected with density. But it seems as if the conditions of mature consumer societies have suspended this criterion. What you see is a thinning. Settlements gush out into the plains, cover the hills in ever more finely woven nets, collect into broad bands in the valleys. At the same time people are leaving the central cities. Among the many explanations for dispersion there exists a rational one which posits a direct relation between economic wealth and consumption of space: the sum of housing space + commercial space + leisure space + traffic space. Prosperous societies produce an ever increasing amount of urban fabric for a nearly constant population, resulting in a higher amount of built matter per inhabitant (persons/sq ft; person / cubic ft.)
and, since the available time of the individual can not be increased, this creates a reduction in the intensity of the use of the built matter. Not only does this built matter constantly increase in quantity: it also spreads out disproportionately over larger areas. The reason for this is the availability of the automobile, which allows users to cover greater distances over the same time, while the time increments people are willing to spend traveling between places remain constant. In addition to this, the possibilities of telecommunication enable new exchanges between places and functions (proximity). However when it comes to settlement trends, the possibilities achieved through technological progress are not used for a gain in time, but for expansion in space.

The consumer’s expanded radius of action also makes it possible to profit from territorial differences in economic terms (different real estate prices, costs of living and earning potentials) and in cultural terms (social structures, quality of the environment and design). The incentive for expanding is obvious. Left behind are those who do not take part in this optimization process. They have to suffer the negative consequences – especially those of vehicular traffic. The consumer has the choice: does he prefer to be perpetrator or victim? It is understandable that under the present conditions most people decide to be perpetrators.

From time to time however, even in a liberal market economy factors emerge that speak in favor of density. This suggests that urbanization under free market conditions would eventually lead to the development of density. However, if one looks at examples of recent commercial urban development, it becomes clear that the market does not support tendendencies
towards density. In demand are certain typologies (office tower, office park, single family house, golf club) and typologies have specific densities. If a developer tries to build a more dense single family home, a more compact golf course or an unpacked urban entertainment center, he will have problems in marketing and sales. Density is first and foremost a question of typology.

Furthermore, the question arises: “in what locations are these typologies realized?” These decisions are only superficially determined by real estate costs, since in reality the prices reflect the typology that is accepted by the market in a given location (and what is legally possible). The desire for returns of course always has the tendency to realize higher densities in areas of low density to the point at which the context of low density is destroyed – which quickly happens. To address this, even the least regulated societies have developed regulatory mechanisms. If it is not a zoning plan, then it is a deed-contract or the neighbourhood protest. At the end of the day the consumer doesn’t like density.

Houston, an oft-quoted example for commercialized urbanization, has a very low density --in an architectural sense as well as in functional terms. Houston is the Suburban Metropolis par excellence. Houston shows, under almost abstract conditions—meaning in the absence of any cultural predefinition of the territory in a free market society—nothing but a suburban cityscape with few concentration points developed. “This is the city consumer capital really wants to make”. But not everywhere is the development context as abstract, nor is this dimension of consumer capital available. And this is why in real urbanization, concentrations of density happen from time to time. The cause in every case is some sort of scarcity. An example is scarcity due to the lack of security. The condominios verticais
(high rise apartments) in São Paulo are part of this phenomenon, as are the Cluster Settlements in South Africa—both compact and gated developments for a high-end market. The condominiós verticais as well as the clusters in Johannesburg are Gated Communities in a compact typology, and in both cases entry control and controllability of the development are persuasive arguing points in marketing. Also determined by security but not regulated by the market are examples of compactness in crisis regions. The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of the West-Bank and in Gaza are also Gated Communities; however, they have a military function and are therefore constructed along fortress-like principles. On the other side of the fence are Palestinian refugee camps. They owe their compactness to the fact that they are administered by the UN—and also because their labyrinth-like layouts provide relative security. The compactness of Arab cities in Palestinian areas is a product of scarce access to land which is specified in the Oslo treaty of 1963, which despite the failing of the Oslo Processes still determines the factual division of territories.

The other confinement which leads to compactness is poverty. The impulse for increased density generally comes from the location, meaning the proximity to economically attractive areas, and from the limited availability of those areas that could be occupied by informal means. The bizarre compactness of such settlements also has to do with the lack of external regulations, or rather with the laws of self regulation that are far more elastic in informal contexts than they are in the formal world.

And finally there is the area of increasing density by regulation, which holds that building production is tightly regulated for structural and ecological reasons. Density by regulation produces accumulations that can be easily
recognized as not being caused by a necessity for proximity but by external reasoning (like the density around the development corridors of the ecological model-city Curitiba in the South of Brazil). However it is in the logic of such enterprises that this accumulation — especially the initial critical mass of investors — has to be lured with substantial subsidies (infrastructure, or tax-subsidies). Those of the contemporary scenarios of density that are actually working owe their existence to a generous public advance investment, for example in the form of a subway line or other high capacity transportation systems (Curitiba, Euralille, London-Docklands...). In fact it is only efficient public transportation systems that can preserve existing density and can produce new density. If this does not work, subsidized housing has to enter the equation. In other words: you pay people to fulfill the volumes that have been predetermined by planning. To the topic of regulation one has to add the concept of subsidies. Production and preservation of density is expensive. It requires massive public investments, while the costs of sprawling development — upkeep of large scale infrastructure, social and ecological costs — only arise on the long run and even then are spread on to many payers.

Cities no longer emerge just for the love of density. If you want density you have to make it. They are organized by the UN and are not restricted by the usual building code. The Beach Camp north of Gaza center has developed like all other camps out of a tent colony. Since 1946 a bizarre concrete city has developed. Recognized as not being caused by a necessity for proximity but by external reasoning (like the density around the development corridors of the ecological model-city Curitiba in the South of Brazil). However it is in the logic of such enterprises that this accumulation — especially the initial critical mass of investors — has to be lured with substantial subsidies (infrastructure, or tax-subsidies). Those of the contemporary scenarios of density that are actually working owe their existence to a generous public advance investment, for example in the form of a subway line or other high capacity transportation systems (Curitiba, Euralille, London-Docklands...). In fact it is only efficient public transportation systems that can preserve existing density and can produce new density. If this does not work, subsidized housing has to enter the equation. In other words: you pay people to fulfill the volumes that have been predetermined by planning. To the topic of regulation one has to add the concept of subsidies. Production and preservation of density is expensive. It requires massive public investments, while the costs of sprawling development — upkeep of large scale infrastructure, social and ecological costs — only arise on the long run and even then are spread on to many payers.

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(Translated from german by Thomas Soehl)

(1) Houston: 1.316 people/km2, Vienna: 3.874 people/km2, Singapore: 5.847 people/km2
(2) LERUP, 2000
(3) BARNA, 1992: about Houston

Bilder:
Less is More: Density, Zoning, and Class in New York City

By Beth Lieberman

You might not think that Modernism’s egalitarian “less is more” ethos would complement middle class urban sensibilities. Yet, taken at face value, there simply isn’t a more succinct description of the philosophy informing the evolving shape of New York City’s middle class neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island.

These neighborhoods—Throgs Neck and Riverdale in the Bronx, Bayside in Queens, Bay Ridge in Brooklyn, and nearly every neighborhood in Staten Island—are experiencing what Mayor Bloomberg and the New York City Department of City Planning refer to as “overdevelopment.” This term has become a default technical designation for any new multi-family development in neighborhoods primarily distinguished by detached single family homes. The response to this so-called overdevelopment—the City’s quick designation of scarce resources to regulate it and the amount of local press coverage—is unparalleled.

The movement to curb overdevelopment is the result of a successful lobbying effort to preserve abstract notions about urban and suburban neighborhood aesthetics. But in this case the activists are not architects or urban planners or urbanists in any way. Rather, they are the overwhelmingly white, middle class Republican residents of these overdeveloped neighborhoods. This is a striking blend of demographics in a city that prides itself on multi-ethnicity, economic co-mingling (particularly on the subway), and liberalism. In effect, this unique minority movement has dictated the direction of growth in a disproportionately large section of the City, and nearly every neighborhood with these problems receives immediate sympathy and action from this Department of City Planning.

So what happened here? Since when did residents of their own neighborhoods get the privilege to dictate development patterns?
How can a city and a mayor justify detached single family homes when there is a severe scarcity of housing? The answer is a not-so-unique equation of money, politics, and a misguided leader conspiring to achieve neighborhood preservation in only these select few neighborhoods.

Maintaining, Protecting and Upgrading: New York City Zoning in Brief

After the turn of the century, the frenetic pace of urbanization and the introduction of steel beam construction permitted development patterns that threatened all notions of order and scale. Buildings soared to heights previously unimagined, casting shadows on the ground for blocks. Noxious industrial uses, and perhaps more noxious high-rise commercial uses, were often located in the middle of residential neighborhoods. The first New York City Zoning Resolution of 1916 was an attempt to regulate this development.

The Zoning Resolution was an extremely progressive tool intended to separate incompatible land uses and establish height and setback regulations. More significantly, it was a clear indication that public policy, in this case, environmental protection and the promotion of light and air in the highest density developments, had quietly influenced the way private capital formed the growth of the city.

In the 1940's and 1950's, as the City's population changed from recent immigrants to upwardly mobile lower-middle and middle class natives, from around 5 million residents to around 8 million residents, and the City's pre-modern layout proved inhospitable to the increasingly desirable automobile, the constraints of the decades-old Zoning Resolution became more and more apparent. Looking to live in homes rather than apartments and to own a car rather than relying exclusively on public transit, these upwardly mobile types viewed the City as a symbol of their parent's generation: poverty, and huddled masses.

In an attempt to modernize the Zoning Resolution and promote the kind of development that would accommodate modern, middle class desires, the new 1961 Zoning Resolution set further limits on use and bulk, particularly in the outer boroughs, mandated lower densities and established parking requirements for all new residential developments outside of Manhattan. In an attempt to create pleasant open space in Manhattan's commercial districts, the Resolution also created "incentive zoning" by which developers would receive a density bonus in exchange for providing publicly accessible plaza space on the ground floor of commercial developments.

In other words, the public policy expressed through the revised Zoning Resolution of 1961 was no longer simply regulating private capital; it encouraged automobile use, desirable residential development in the Boroughs,
and created a serene corporate environment, ostensibly on behalf of the commuter unaccustomed to density.

Overbuilding Destruction - Zoning as a Tool for Preservation Then, in later years, a new middle class emerged. This new class is far-removed from their immigrant roots. They are often solidly, not newly middle class. They live in the "outer"-outer boroughs: further from the center than ever before. They travel to work in cars and commuter trains and express buses, rarely in rapid transit. And most of all, they have a sense of privilege and entitlement that comes from being relatively wealthy, coupled with a sense of passion and resentment that comes from being ignored in most any other mayoral administration.

The author’s of the 1961 Zoning Resolution never anticipated the skyrocketing value of land in the outermost boroughs and that development pressures and the most liberal interpretations of the Resolution would cause residents such grief. They never anticipated discussions of neighborhood density and it did not occur to them that "contextual development" would be the critical hot-button issue in most middle class neighborhoods. They certainly never imagined a lauded City Planning Commissioner, socialite Amanda Burden, and the Mayor would develop a successful campaign around "traditional" design and neighborhood preservation.

It is the goal of the mayor, in the words of Chair Burden of the City Planning Commission, "to preserve neighborhoods with unique character. Politicians may typically use ambiguous terms like "unique character" to describe complex and varied neighborhoods. In this case, "unique" describes neighborhoods with formally and socially identical characteristics.

And so, today, the Zoning Resolution is again being overhauled to reflect current public policy. This time around, however, the public policy is in the interest of a minority, mandated by a Republican mayor who favors this minority party. These are the neighborhoods that won the mayor his upset election, and without them, he has no chance of winning a reelection. These are the neighborhoods that share the most personal characteristics with the mayor. These are the hard-working, relatively wealthy, and responsible residents. He celebrates their cultural institutions and their schools. His schedule is regularly packed with appearances in Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx and Staten Island. He is truly the first five-borough mayor.

Little Neck, Douglaston, Bayside, Flushing, the Rockaways, Springfield Gardens, Ozone Park and Howard Beach residents formed the Queens Civic Congress in part to put pressure on City Hall to regulate a "...drop-dead way of making no changes to the neighborhood..." The most maligned changes are those
that create multi-family development, despite the fact that Queens is experiencing severe over-crowding. To compensate for the dearth of affordable housing, many spaces are being illegally and dangerously converted for residential occupation. And occasionally, especially in Queens, opponents of neighborhood growth claim that multi-family housing is simply too taxing on local infrastructure such as sewer, sanitation and water services.

With the exception of Bellerose, all the neighborhoods advocating for these changes are overwhelmingly white. Increased stock and increased affordability brings with it connotations of neighborhood change, not just in terms of density, but in terms of race and class. Paul Graziano, an urban planner who received a commission from a local councilmember to conduct a study on how as-of-right developments are destroying Bayside, Queens bluntly stated “The people moving into those (multi-family-ed.) houses are not making anywhere near what the people leaving those houses are making. If you don’t maintain the middle class in this city, New York City is going to be in deep, deep trouble. And you don’t maintain them by putting their neighborhoods at risk.”

The Mayor could respond by increasing the stock of safe, legal housing by means of multi-family development. Relatively innovative design regulations could require new, multi-family development to be sensitively integrated with existing, single-family stock. Even the Real Estate Board of New York, a conservative advocacy group for real estate professionals, promotes additional density and an increase in the housing stock as the most effective policy for creating more affordable housing.

Instead of advocating for continuing to increase housing stock with multi-family development to help as many residents as possible find a home in these desired neighborhoods, coupled with design regulations and increased services to help address the issue of context and deficient services, the Mayor chooses to comply with the demands of the reactionary residents and advocates for neighborhood landmarking and down-zoning.

The Republican Mayor Bloomberg carried the first election by winning these neighborhoods. These aggressive down-zoning policies are quite clearly his attempt to woo votes for his upcoming re-election. This is the public policy that the current zoning reflects.

Beth Lieberman is an urban planner living in New York City.

2 ibid
The McMansions of Manhattan Beach

By William Alatriste

America is a country of dizzying extremes, a place where theatrical extravagance is the norm and people are won over by the gargantuan. Bank accounts, stretch limos, houses, egos, breasts the size of beach-balls: to be American means to ply contradiction, embrace the 'nth degree' of all things, give life to the lie that bigger is always better. The American way is to scorn moderation and revolt against the idea that there's virtue in being average.

For some, moderation is unholy because in it one sees a decidedly un-American lack of ambition. How successful can a man be, the argument goes, if he limits himself to pursuing only what's within his reach? In order to succeed he must purge himself of small-mindedness and become a megalomaniac. His appetite, his passions, his desire for wealth and fame and glory must be reckless, operatic, Pharaonic. And he must constantly seek out ways to improve upon and enlarge the scope of his world, even if this means spending all day at the All-You-Can-Eat salad bar or "supersizing" whenever asked, no matter how recent his last meal. Supersizing is the American way.

What's lost in all this is the importance of scale. In the rush to be the biggest and the best, perspective gets magnified all out of focus. What we wind up with is a pixelated version of life, one that blurs as it expands. And the more it expands, the more details go unnoticed, and with them goes the subtle, cumulative effect they have on vision--an effect that can make life meaningful, if not utterly coherent.

What we lack is an aesthetics of the diminutive, the ability to prize smallness or accept the forlorn proposition that petit is not just a size but an art form. Other cultures are light years ahead of us in this respect. Consider the Japanese bonsai: a little world made meaningful through cultivation, lavish attention and care. Or the Persian miniature—a magnificently detailed account of a life painted on a piece of ivory no bigger than half a bar of soap. These things are beautiful despite their size, and our appreciation of them grows as we begin to see how beautifully they resolve contradiction; how ambition and imaginative vision are compressed into finite amounts of space. We marvel in the way meaning is reduced to a simple clarity of form. We admire the restraint that orders and organizes; the precision and whittling down to specifics and the abandoning of generalities.

The newest homeowners of the Manhattan Beach community of Brooklyn have rejected the diminutive in ways that are profoundly American. These immigrants from the former Soviet Union have scrubbed all reference to the small from their lives and replaced it with a whopping, outsized view of their own importance.

Most are a view of bypassed the need to be middle-class and gone straight to the top --- or right over the top.
Order is everywhere on display in the Manhattan Beach community of south Brooklyn: from its streets, which are arranged alphabetically, to the names of its streets—sturdy English names like Dover, Exeter, Kensington, Norfolk and Oxford which point to the pastoral geography of Britain. The houses in Manhattan Beach are paragons of modesty and middle-class restraint. Many were built decades ago and are today inhabited by residents whose families have lived in them for a generation or two. Recently however, the principles of balance, order and conformity that have helped organize this community have come under siege from its newest residents—immigrants from the former Soviet Union—who are buying up houses and tearing them to the ground in order to erect their own urban utopias.
Urbanism for the Middle Class in historic city centers

By Fernando Vegas and Camilla Mileto

In the historic centres of towns in the Mediterranean basin that did not suffer serious bombing in wars waged after urban reorganisation or undergo more or less traumatic Haussmanian transformations, a peculiar phenomenon took place in the second half of the 20th century. The development of the sixties and seventies brought the expansion of cities to the outskirts in the form of high-rise blocks of dwellings for a fast-growing middle class with limited but escalating purchasing power that had often come to the city from rural areas. At the same time, the ordinary modest built weft of historic town centres became the redoubt of poorer and poorer groups that rented or took over property. The improvement of middle-class economic status involved the rejection of the cramped conditions in city centres and the search of newly-built houses with a modern design and easy access by car—or with a basement for parking—and close to new urban infrastructures. There was no call for refurbishing dwellings in city centres. The environmental quality of rural surroundings and the human scale of old city centres were replaced by anonymous, impersonal blocks of dwellings on the outskirts of the cities.

In time, the experience of living in these tasteless peripheral zones began to push these middle classes in two directions, outwards and inwards, a phenomenon that has been taking place since the mid nineteen eighties until today. The outward move was towards more open suburbs to semi-detached, terraced or detached houses, in Anglo-Saxon or American style. The inward impulse sought a new quality of life in city centres. The first of these options took place without difficulty thanks to the impulse of private investment, which bought cheap land in towns near large cities and turned it into residential estates, often equipped with leisure centres, for the well-to-do, would-be gentrified middle classes. This outward movement was backed by local or regional administrations, which improved infrastructures, radial and annular communication, services, etc… The population of these towns in the vicinity of large cities has grown so much that new services and public buildings were required.

En los centros históricos del arco mediterráneo que no han estado sujetos a grandes bombardeos en tiempos bélicos con posterior reordenación urbana, ni han sido objeto de grandes transformaciones haussmanianas de carácter más o menos traumático se ha verificado un fenómeno singular durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. El desarrollismo propio de los años sesenta y setenta extendió el crecimiento urbano de la ciudad a la periferia en forma de grandes bloques de viviendas para dar cabida a una creciente clase media antaño de recursos limitados pero crecientes que, a menudo, provenía de zonas rurales. Al mismo tiempo, el tejido construido común y humilde de los centros históricos se fue convirtiendo en reduto de la clase cada vez menos pudientes que alquilaban o retenían las propiedades inmobiliarias.

La adquisición de un estatus económico medio conllevaba el rechazo de las angosturas de la vida de proyecta y construcción reciente con fácil acceso rodado —eventualmente con garaje bajo cubierta— y acceso a las infraestructuras urbanas de reciente factura. La eventual restauración de una vivienda en el centro histórico quedaba al margen de todo planteamiento. Se trocaba la calidad ambiental del ámbito rural de origen o la escala humana de los antiguos centros históricos por la impersonalidad y el anonimato en serie de los grandes bloques de viviendas de la periferia.

Con el tiempo, la sórdida experiencia en estas zonas periféricas de la ciudad ha empujado paulatinamente a estas clases medias en dos direcciones de carácter centrífugo y centripeto, en un fenómeno que se está verificando desde mediados de los años ochenta hasta nuestros días. La dirección centrífuga se ha encaminado hacia una periferia más amplia de carácter territorial en busca de una vivienda parecida, en hilera o uniformar con jardín propio, según patrones anglosajones o americanos. La dirección centripeta ha buscado una nueva calidad de vida en el centro histórico de la ciudad.

La primera de estas opciones ha tenido lugar fácilmente con el impulso de la inversión privada, que ha encontrado suelo a precios muy económicos en los términos municipales adyacentes a las ciudades y lo ha reconvertido en zonas residenciales para clases medias pudientes, con infraestructuras de alta sociedad, que han incorporado a menudo instalaciones de recreo. Este movimiento centrífugo ha venido apoyado por las administraciones locales o regionales, que han mejorado las infraestructuras, vías de comunicación radiales y anulares, servicios, etc… Estos términos municipales adyacentes a las ciudades han visto multiplicada su población hasta el punto de deber crear a su vez nuevos servicios y edificios públicos.

La segunda de estas opciones de carácter centripeto hacia los núcleos históricos de la ciudad ha necesitado de un impulso previo de la inversión pública de las administraciones municipales de actualización y renovación de los servicios y las infraestructuras urbanas para atraer la inversión privada de las clases medias a la restauración y la recuperación del centro histórico. Estas inversiones se han visto ocasionadas por veces en serie de los grandes bloques de viviendas de reciente factura.

Esta inversión de las administraciones municipales albergaba una doble intención: por un lado, revitalizar los abandonados centros históricos con nueva savia procedente de la uniformadora y la renovadora clase media antaño de reciente factura en un fenómeno singular durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. El desarrollismo propio de los años sesenta y setenta extendió el crecimiento urbano de la ciudad a la periferia en forma de grandes bloques de viviendas para dar cabida a una creciente clase media antaño de recursos limitados pero crecientes que, a menudo, provenía de zonas rurales. Al mismo tiempo, el tejido construido común y humilde de los centros históricos se fue convirtiendo en reduto de la clase cada vez menos pudientes que alquilaban o retenían las propiedades inmobiliarias.

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The second of these options, the inward movement towards the historic city centres, needed the prior impulse of investment by municipal administrations to update and renovate urban services and infrastructures so as to attract private middle-class investors to restore and retrieve city centres. These investments occasionally received the aid of European Union development funds in the nineteen eighties. The investment made by municipal administrations had a two-fold intention: on the one hand, to breathe new life into abandoned city centres by filling them with uniform, peace-loving middle classes —which were becoming less and less “middle” in the traditional meaning of the word; and, on the other hand, to eliminate or at least isolate the occupation of city centres by marginalised groups as a result of this indolence. Examples of this inward and outward flow of middle classes between the outskirts, commuter towns and city centres can be found in Spanish cities like Barcelona, Valencia or Granada and other cities in the Mediterranean basin like Marseille, Genoa, or Naples... Specifically, in the three Spanish cities mentioned, a philosophy of expanding the built network was applied by making public spaces to provide densely-built up areas with some breathing space. The idea was to endow city centres with a certain amount of porosity in order to create a product that would attract large masses of the middle classes that showed an interest in returning to the city centre, but first required compensation in the form of new spaces, utilities and services.

These delicate operations of urbanistic surgery were performed in working-class areas with serious problems of pathologies, degradation and marginalisation: the Raval in Barcelona, the Velluters quarter in Valencia and the San Matías district in Granada. The operations consisted of strategically vacating existing blocks, occupying lots where private demolitions had taken place or buildings had collapsed because of structural problems, inserting new infrastructures (gas, water, sewerage, telephones, telecommunications), planting trees, shrubs and flowers, etc...

The option chosen and the impact of these interventions on the design, layout and appearance of the historic city depended in each case on the professionals in charge of each particular area, regardless of the repopulation of these districts with this new middle-class blood to create a new socially acceptable demographic network. In the case of the Velluters quarter in Valencia, the situation of this district with a predominance of prostitution and drug peddling and the fact that it was mainly occupied by elderly residents with very reduced purchasing power, often below the threshold of poverty, was quite unacceptable because of the proximity of several urban thoroughfares traditionally occupied by a social elite. Public investment in this case strove to regenerate this part of the city and repopulate it with middle-class residents to provide an acceptable basic urban scenario for the upper-class residents nearby.

The intervention in the south of the quarter, performed by our architectural studio, consisted of the following steps: a garden was designed for a large site where a block of apartments had formerly stood and had since disappeared; dwellings were expropriated and the residents were relocated for their lifetime in new or refurbished dwellings; several buildings in the existing blocks —some of which were council houses built in the nineteen forties, fifties or sixties— were demolished; two semi-public plazas with underground parking lots surrounded by new blocks of apartments were designed for the sites of the demolished blocks; a road leading in and out of the dense network of streets was designed and built following the course of an already existing street; a large part of the area was pedestrianised; and, finally, the whole area was redeveloped...
and equipped with new services and subterranean infrastructures and the pavements, roads for traffic and pedestrians were renewed.

The area affected by this particular development, with a surface of about one hectare, went from having no vacant land at all to having some 3000 m² of parks and plazas, for which many vacant lots in the zone were used. Furthermore, from a total lack of underground and surface parking spaces it succeeded in offering some 600 underground parking spaces and about 200 end-to-end spaces in the streets. The quarter had become so deserted that only 10% of the houses were inhabited. The residents in these, mostly poverty-stricken elderly people, have been relocated in houses less than 300 metres away from their old dwellings for their lifetime in order to avoid the effects of geographic uprooting. Some community buildings have been sacrificed to provide a better quality of life for all the surrounding area. The total cost of the works, not yet completed, is estimated in 50 million Euro, to be paid by the city council.

Attraction on the middle classes has begun to make itself felt. Around the reformed area, a large number of old buildings are being refurbished, many new middle-class residents are occupying the district, the generation of elderly tenants is slowly being replaced by younger ones and the socially marginalised occupants of the surrounding streets have started to move away to other areas. This middle class, seduced by the possibility of living in the historic centre of the city in the vicinity of the internal arteries inhabited by the upper classes, which have begun to mix and blend with the new middle-class occupants, has begun to fill up these erstwhile shunned areas.

Within this urban redevelopment, a middle-of-the-road intervention has been planned, half-way between urbanism and building, which serves to materialise the ideas involved in its urban conception. A residential building that occupies almost a whole block has been designed. It contains state-subsidised apartments, although there is no doubt that the future tenants will be young members of middle-class families with limited purchasing power at the present time because they have just commenced their working life, but whose income is bound to increase in the near future.

The building was inspired by the arrangement and layout of Gothic palaces, typical not only in Valencia, but in all towns of the old Crown of Aragon, including cities like Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Alghero, Naples, Palermo, L'Aquila, etc. This building consists of a stately home arranged around a courtyard, where a semi-open staircase leads to the noble floor of the building.

In this case, the large granite slabs of the adjacent streets make their way into the courtyard of the building, where we find three communication nuclei with stairs leading to the floors above, which here fulfil the function of the old noble floor of the building. Deliberate restraint in the volume and exterior facades in contrast with the surrounding historical context is transformed into a contemporary treatment of the interior volumes and facades that boast the dynamism and fragmentation of contemporary culture.

In this project, a community apartment block has deliberately been replaced by a palace of dwellings for the new well-to-do middle-class inhabitants who are repopulating the city centre, a built allegory of what is happening in today’s society in these Mediterranean cities. The flux of movement of a middle class with an ever increasing purchasing power brought about the growth of cities in the past and today contributes to the regeneration of the very historic centres that were neglected by that expansion.

Fernando Vegas and Camilla Mileto are both Professors at the Technical School of Architecture Valencia (ETSAV)
Monu: The disappearing of the middle-class is predominantly known as an American phenomenon. To what extent is this also relevant in Europe?

Thomas Sieverts: I am not sure that this is a serious problem in Europe as yet. However many European cities complain about it. Hamburg for example is concerned about the fact that it loses 5000 solid middle-class inhabitants to its suburbs each year and in return gets either unstable lower class households or extremely rich people. These developments can become a problem even for prospering cities like Hamburg. I dont believe however that this is a common problem as of yet. An important question in this context of course is whether the financial burden sharing between cities, municipalities or neighborhoods will be eliminated. As long as this is not the case we wont have the doughnut-model in Europe, since inner cities are continually stabilized with large amounts of subsidies. I assume that this will continue to happen also in the future. It will become more difficult however since a lot of the retailers are leaving city centers while the old concepts still rely on the centrality of retail. This will change on the long run, since the inner cities are slowly realizing that they are loosing out with these policies and will start to become Zwischenstädte(1): If they cant avoid the big shopping malls then they will start to develop them in the context of their inner-cities. And if people want single-family homes at every price, they will transform areas designated for multi-family housing into single-family home areas. An extreme social polarization between neighborhoods will remain the exception in Europe, unless the neo-conservatives, who want to abolish social policies and redistribution, become strong. At the moment even the most conservative parties in Germany are still relatively social-democratic. A really neo-conservative party thank god does not exist here or in Europe for that matter.

Monu: In Europe there seems to be a displacement rather than a disappearing of the middle-class. For example the disappearing of the middle-class from the city centers. Do cities need the middle-class?

TS: Yes. If we dont want to preserve the European City just as a tourist destination then we need a strong middle-class in the cities. Without them European cities will become mere tourist ghettos or ghettos of the super wealthy this is already the case in Paris to some extent. The normal Parisian cant afford living within the periphery any more. In some cases this is also true in Germany in Munich, for instance, and to some extent in Hamburg. In cities like Berlin and Cologne these phenomena are not yet so pronounced. However, should there be a strong neo-conservative force in this country that will no longer support redistribution, then social segregation will happen on a large scale in Germany too. If the central cities are not longer supported by a confident middle-class, they will deteriorate socially and culturally.

Monu: Right now this middle-class is financially still strong enough to afford its middle-class lifestyle in the outskirts. What will happen to the single-family home developments in the outskirts when people will no longer be able to afford that lifestyle? Will there be a new form of low-density settlement or will the city have a new chance?

TS: I think this is a question that lies at the heart of urban
development and it is one that we are examining in the context of our Ladenburg lecture series. I think we will see a polarisation: A part of the population will want to move back into the city you can already see today that a part of the older generation wants to live in real cities again. In order to be attractive for old people, the city has to provide certain amenities especially in relation to green spaces and quietness. Only then will the city be able to draw older people. Cities are not really pursuing such policies. So far, most cities count on centralism and retail-urbanism, and this is not conducive for a senior-citizen friendly urbanism. But if cities would recognize contemporary realities, then they would realize that they can no longer hold on to the current amount of retail. Instead they would begin to transform their wonderful pedestrian zones with concentrated park-spaces into future housing neighborhoods. If the prices for retail in the inner cities finally start declining then the pedestrian areas could be great neighborhoods for living. If such policies would be implemented our cities would be different: Cities will then have a lot of green spaces and more low-rise types of housing comparable to London for example. Almost all of London consists of low-rise housing typologies. In my view such a transformation could be the next metamorphosis of the European City. The conditions for that exist. But a sweeping reduction of real estate prices is a tough issue. Oddly enough there is little discussion about that. But I think we should consider the possibility of making such a value-correction somewhat economically feasible. Real-estate people don't talk about this for obvious reasons. People also completely ignore the enormous office space vacancy rate. They still hope that the next economic recovery will fill up all that space because it has always been the case. In reality however I don't believe in this; a transformation of office buildings will therefore be yet another task for us. This is one possible direction for development; the other one will lead instead to efforts to increase density in single-family residential areas. Single family homes will have to be remodeled in a way that they are suitable for seniors, in order to integrate a second apartment and so on. This tendency will also be there, because if not, then the preservation of the value of single-family homes that are not in elegant locations or in prosperous regions will be difficult. This will be an interesting task: I am surprised that almost nobody is working on these things at the moment.

**Monu:** There of course is an incredible ignorance when it comes to these topics. While almost everybody is ultimately working on sprawl-phenomena, practically no one is concerned with the factors that are leading to its decline. If one looks at the scenario of the seniors that are left in the suburbs, one has to ask if these seniors are not increasingly dependent on quickly reachable urban services – ones that are in the immediate neighborhood. Will suburban regions increasingly have urban elements and services?

**TS:** I think that will happen. One path of development will be that certain parts of the suburban fabric will urbanize. For a while now in the U.S. one has been able to see that the typical mono-functional shopping malls, the ones that have a mega-store on each side and a strip in between, are dying because they are no longer attractive. New malls are emerging that are enriched with doctors offices, lawyers, small hospitals, museums and the like. These are urban elements for urbanity without a city. Elements like these will also develop in our in-between-cities (suburban environments). Also, office locations in the outskirts—of which by now you can find several generations already in the suburbs—will urbanize. The most recent office parks even have small public

dann eine neue Form von dümmer Besiedlung oder bekommt die Stadt dann eine neue Chance?


**Monu:** Es wird diesbezüglich natürlich auch eine fantastische Ignoranz an den Tag gelegt. Mittlerweile beschäftigt sich zwar schon fast jeder mit Sprawlphänomenen, mit dessen Rückgang aber noch niemand. Betrachtet man das Szenario der in den Speckgürteln zurückliegenden Alten genauer, so fragt man sich ja auch, ob diese dann nicht zunehmend auf schnell erreichbare städtische Einrichtungen angewiesen sind, die sich unmittelbar in der Nachbarschaft befinden. Wird die Region dann zusehends mehr städtische Elemente und Einrichtungen bekommen?

**TS:** Ich glaube, das wird kommen. Eine Weiterentwicklung wird die sein, dass sich bestimmte Elemente in der Zwischenstadt urbanisieren werden. In Amerika z.B. kann man seit einiger Zeit beobachten, dass typisch monofunktionale Einkaufszentren mit zwei Kaufhäusern auf beiden Seiten und einem Strip dazwischen kaput gelangen, weil sie nicht mehr
plazas and in a way pretend to be cities.

Monu: In what typologies do these occur?

TS: The typologies of the newest developments are closed layouts with central access and a neo-historicist architecture. The stuff that is built in the New Urbanism style already tries to create some sort of urban atmosphere. And I am convinced that New Urbanism will become extremely popular here.

Monu: Disneyworld?

TS: Yes, the intention is to give areas the character of a village or a small town with the help of traditionally proven architectural forms.

Monu: Will we also have Gated Communities?

TS: Some isolated cases of these are already here. They are examples of urbanizations processes that increase social segregation.

Monu: In the future, how can one read the connection between the suburban phenomena you described and the city? Will cities fall into small pieces or will a new whole emerge?

TS: This will lead to a diversity of developments. And partly it will depend on the historical preconditions. In regions with cities that have a rich historic heritage you will get something like a network of self-confident cities that operate on a relatively equal footing. In these regions one could then also imagine that the collaboration will result in some sort of treaty-regulation. Cities would by contract agree to a regional division of labor. In cities like Berlin, for example that do not even have other nearby cities we will see other tendencies. And in these cases it will be interesting to see what happens on the periphery. I think that anarchic forms of urban development will appear, and I cannot yet tell how they will work or what they will look like. Planning will have little impact on this process. Very peculiar networks will emerge that are pieced together from very diverse cultures and traditions. These are environments that Klaus Matthiesen at the IRS Institute in Berlin has been researching for years.

Monu: What forms will they have specifically?

TS: They can have all kinds of forms. In the area surrounding Berlin the transformation of the Datschen (2) areas is especially interesting. The Datsche was always the lovingly cared for home as a counter-world to the prefabricated housing and has always been permanently occupied to a large degree. The Datsche is the sprawl-phenomenon of the GDR. And they are increasingly urbanizing because people no longer want to grow their cabbage there.

Monu: Rotterdam for example had the problem of lacking a middle-class in the central city for years. It has now succeeded in getting the middle-class increasingly back into the city center by creating high-quality housing. Is this a European trend perhaps?

TS: The Dutch are very dedicated to the goal of creating more housing space within the city. This happens in Germany only in exceptional cases. Hamburg is making an attempt with the development of the harbor-city.


Monu: In welchen Typologien tauchen die auf?


Monu: Disneyworld?

TS: Ja, da versucht man Gegenden mit traditionell bewährten Formen den Charakter eines Dorfs oder einer Kleinstadt zu geben. Also, wenn das gut gemacht ist, dann habe ich da gar nicht viel dagegen.

Monu: Wird es dann auch zu Gated Communities kommen?

TS: In Einzelfällen gibt es die ja schon auch bei uns. Das sind die Fälle von negativen Urbanisierungs-tendenzen, die die soziale Segregation verschärfen.

Monu: Wie kann man in Zukunft den Zusammenhang zwischen derartigen peripheren urbanen Erschei- nungsformen und der Stadt beurteilen? Wird die Stadt dann eher in kleine Teile zerfallen oder wird ein neues Ganzes entstehen?

TS: Da wird sich ganz Unterschiedliches herausbilden. Und zwar auch je nach historischer Vorprägung. In Regionen mit Städten von großer historischer Tradition, wird sich so etwas wie ein Netz selbstbewusster Städte herausbilden, die relativ gleichberechtigt miteinander operieren. In solchen Regionen könnte man sich auch vorstellen, dass die Zusammenarbeit auf eine Art Vertragsswesen hinausläuft. Städte würden sich vertraglich darauf einigen, wer was macht, also eine regionale Arbeitsteilung vereinbaren. Bei Städten, wie z.B. Berlin, die gar keine umliegenden Städte haben wird es aber andere Tendenzen geben. Und da wird es interessant werden, was sich da eigentlich auf der Peripherie herausbildet. Ich glaube, dass sich da anarchische Entwicklungen herausbilden werden, von denen wir noch gar nicht genau wissen, wie die eigentlich funktionieren, bzw. aussehen werden. Planung wird da relativ wenig bewirken. Da werden ganz merkwürdige Netzwerke entstehen, die zusammengesetzt sind aus den unterschiedlichsten Kulturen und Traditionen, Lebenswelten, die Klaus Matthiesen am IRS Institut in Erkner bei Berlin seit Jahren untersucht.

Monu: Was für Formen können die im einzelnen Annehmen?

TS: Das kann alle Formen annehmen. Um Berlin herum ist die Transformation der Datschengebiete natürlich besonders interessant. Die Datsche war ja die liebevoll gepflegte Heimat als Gegenwelt zur Platte und schon immer stark dauerbewohnt. Die Datsche ist das Zersiedlungssphäomen der DDR. Die verstädtern jetzt zusehends, weil die Leute keine Lust mehr haben, ihren Kahl dort anzubauen.

Monu: Rotterdam z.B. hat schon seit Jahren
Monu: There have been repeated attempts at forced spatial integration of middle and lower classes, but they don't seem to be very successful.

TS: No, they do not integrate after all. The question about the relationship with migrants and the form of their urban integration is completely untouched. Nobody dares to touch that one. But there are some thought-experiments: in the context of the shrinking cities competition, Johannes Fiedler made the proposal that the 3rd World by contract takes over parts of the 1st World. That competition entry describes how whole urban regions like Halle and Bitterfeld are contracted out to China. They basically have to subscribe to the European basic legal standard but otherwise have their own economic zone in Europe.

Monu: Then one could also say that while the middle class is needed in a city it does not matter who composes that middle class. The preservation of middle-class values seems to be more important than the middle-class people themselves, who are exchangeable.

TS: Basically, yes. That seems interesting. The middle-class defines itself as a class that has certain values, that invests in children and that spends a lot of money on education and on culture. And this is not specific to a nation in China for example you find similar things.

Monu: But aren't in-between-cities really a middle-class phenomenon?

TS: No, I don't think you can say that. For a long time the theory was that in-between-cities were a pure middle class phenomenon. But that hasn't been true for a long time now. The periphery around Munich does not differ in the type of housing or in the population composition from Munich itself.

Monu: We talked before about what would happen if, lets say, the middle class could no longer afford their single-family homes on the fringes of the cities. I would like to come back to that. Lets suppose that every other family couldnt afford its single family home any longer. Will the houses then be redistributed, and the well-to-do families that remain buy up the houses and inhabit two houses? Or would we have a tearing down of those houses and the density becoming even lower?

TS: Yes I think that in certain location houses would be torn down. We once did a study where we showed that it would indeed be possible to bring a town back to the state of 1850, to a layout of an agrarian small town for example. Then you would find large gardens with walls and fences in the middle of the city. One could imagine something similar also in single-family home areas those could be upgraded with double size gardens for example.

Monu: Along the same lines one could imagine that all inhabitants of a city would move in along the periphery. Some sort of middle-class dream.

TS: The ring on the periphery of course has the privilege of being able to unite the advantages of the city and the countryside. In that case like in a ribbon-city everything is oriented towards nature. People seem to be drawn to the fringes of cities. These are worldwide tendencies as Klaus Humpert as shown in his book Probleme mit dem Nichtvorhandensein der Mittelklasse im Zentrum. Sie haben es jetzt geschafft die Mittelklasse zunehmend wieder ins Zentrum zurückzubekommen, in dem sie hochqualitatives Wohnen schaffen. Ist das eventuell ein europäischer Trend?

TS: Die Holländer verfolgen ja ganz bewusst das Ziel, mehr Wohnfläche in der Stadt zu schaffen. Das ist besonders in Deutschland nur ausnahmsweise der Fall. Hamburg versucht das z.B. mit der Hafencity.

Monu: Es gibt ja immer wieder Versuche der Zwangsvermischung von Mittelklasse und Unterklasse, was aber scheinbar nicht wirklich erfolgreich ist.


Monu: Dann kann man ja im Grunde sagen, dass die Stadt die Mittelklasse sehr wohl benötigt, es tatsächlich aber egal ist, wer sie physisch darstellt. Das Aufrechterhalten der Mittelklassewerte scheint dann wichtiger zu sein als die Mittelklassesellschaften selber. Diese sind austauschbar.

TS: Eigentlich ja, das ist doch interessant. Die Mit telklasse definiert sich als Klasse, die Werte hat, auf ihre Kinder setzt und sehr viel Geld für ihre Ausbildung und für Kultur ausgibt. Und das ist nicht an die Nation gebunden – gerade z.B. in China findet man Vergleichbares.

Monu: Ist die Zwischenstadt eigentlich ein Mittelklassenphänomen?


Monu: Wir haben vorher darüber gesprochen, was passieren würde, wenn sich die Mittelklasse ihre Einfamilienhäuser am Stadtrand nicht mehr leisten kann. Ich möchte darauf noch einmal zurückkommen. Angenommen jeder 2. kann sich also sein Einfamilienhaus nicht mehr leisten. Werden dann die Häuser umverteilt und die wohlhabenden Zurücksiebenen kaufen die Häuser auf und bewohnen z.B. jeweils 2 Häuser? Oder kommt es auch dort dann zu Abriss und die dünne Besiedlung wird noch dünner?

TS: Ja, ich glaube, an bestimmten Stellen werden auch Häuser abgebrochen werden. Wir haben mal eine Studie gemacht, wo wir gezeigt haben, dass es durchaus denkbar wäre, eine Stadt wieder auf den Status Quo ante von 1850 zu bringen, z.B. im Erscheinungsbild einer „Ackerbürgerstadt“. Dort findet man dann wieder inmitten der Stadt große Gärten mit Mauern und Zäunen. So was könnte man sich in Einfamilienhausgebieten auch vorstellen, die mit verdoppelten Gärten wieder aufgewertet werden könnten.

Monu: Genauso gut kann man sich auch vorstellen, dass sich alle Bewohner einer Stadt komplett in den
Fundamental Principles of Urban Growth.

Monu: In that case there would be no more centers in the classical sense. What is center and what is periphery in that case?

TS: That is an interesting question. In our Ladenburg seminar series Achim Hahn from Dresden tries to answer the question of what life in the periphery looks like in relation to the center. He found that while people all have their center this center is no longer a collective center in the traditional sense but rather that centers become individual notions: Everybody has his own private center. This can be a horse-riding club or it can be a shopping center or an old bar in the city. But the notion of a collective center in the old sense cannot be defined any longer. Although there might still be collective centers like the Oktoberfest, precisely this example shows that the character of centers has changed.

Monu: Monumental public buildings however still seem to work pretty well. The cathedral in Cologne for example.

TS: For some people yes. Symbolically and pragmatically there are still charged centers, but they no longer have to be congruent with the actual city center. Certainly people need centers, I am sure. They need collective ties. But it is highly interesting to see what happens in the US in the so-called exurbs, since these no longer seem to have any centers whatsoever.

Monu: Connected to the disappearing of the middle-class is also the notion that more money is distributed amongst fewer people. Will the wealthy at some point be able to make their private urban dreams come true?

TS: That will happen for sure. There is a good chance that out of new extreme wealth very successful business models will arise, which could also lead to private city-quarters.

Monu: Will the old centers then be replaced?

TS: If the cities no longer had the money the old centers could also be bought up privately. Why should Siemens not buy the Frauenkirche? (3) Privately financed urban development that builds whole areas in a city will also happen here. And we will see new property and development forms. Fifteen years ago we did a study for the Sternstrasse in Bonn. The Sternstrasse is a main shopping street that consists of small, medieval houses. We found out that the upper floors were all empty because there are not profitable anymore. The shops were only on the ground floors: the staircases had been removed to gain more retail space, and instead of the staircases you had step irons to get to the second floor. Hardly anybody had realized that, since in the upper floors decorations and lighting projected an alive scenery? A small developer is now trying, together with the real-estate owner, to find a fond-model in order to develop larger housing units that overlap buildings in these upper floors.

Monu: One could also imagine something along those line for the periphery.

TS: Yes of course. If, for example, a creative developer would convince the owners in a dilapidated single-family home area to put their homes in a find? in order to remodel the whole thing and redistribute it. One would no longer speak of localities but äußeren Ring begeben würde. Im Grunde ein Mittelklassestraum.


Monu: In diesem Fall würde es ja die eigentliche Mitte nicht mehr geben. Was ist denn dann noch die Mitte und was die Peripherie?


Monu: Monumentale öffentliche Bauten scheinen dafür ja auch immer noch gut zu funktionieren. Der Kölner Dom z.B.

TS: Für gewisse Leute ja. Es gibt durchaus noch symbolisch und pragmatisch aufgeladene Mitten, die aber mit der tatsächlichen Stadtmitte nicht mehr zusammentreffen müssen. Sicherlich brauchen Menschen Mitten, davon bin ich überzeugt. Sie brauchen kollektive Bindungen. Aber es ist ja auch höchst interessant zu beobachten, was gerade in den USA mit den sogenannten Exurbs passiert, denn diese scheinen überhaupt keine Mitten mehr zu haben.

Monu: Mit dem Verschwinden der Mittelklasse ist auch verbunden, dass immer mehr Geld auf immer weniger Leute verteilt wird. Werden die Reichen dann irgendwann ihre ganz privaten Stadtträume verwirklichen können?

TS: Das wird es sicher geben. Aus dem extremen neuen Reichtum werden wahrscheinlich sehr erfolgreiche Geschäftsmodelle entstehen, die auch zu privaten Stadtteilen führen könnten.

Monu: Werden dann die alten Zentren, bzw. Mitten ersetzt?

rather of communities of interest.

Monu: But it is hard to imagine that if such a fond-model? would be successful in a city center that then we would have really high-density housing in the city centers again?

TS: Why not? In many cities one can already observe that the profitability of office space has drastically declined. For housing in inner cities in contrast it has increased. If the prices for office space keep falling, then living in inner cities will become highly attractive since the whole infrastructure is there. There were massive public subsidies for inner cities in the last 30 years: for traffic, parking, boulevards, trees etc. And as soon as it becomes profitable again (due to lower real estate prices), developers will rush to recreate high-density inner city housing mostly in the form low-rise but high-density.

Monu: So if the subsidies would be redistributed in favor of housing investment, then the inner cities will get full again?

TS: At the moment this does not work in the housing market, but in the office sector models are being developed that could potentially be transferred to the housing market. Hamburg for example is creating such a district at the Neuen Wall. It is based on the American model of the Business Improvement District. If 70% of the retailers in an area come together then the other 30% have to join as well. Then this new society is afforded the right to improve its own neighborhood. For the improvement of public space, public funds are available for a limited time. I think this is basically a good model. And such a model could work for all kinds of areas. New kinds of cooperatives in which the fond-owners also have a vote, could well work for old residential areas. A mass use of such organization methods would profoundly change our cities. Cities could emerge that have medieval characteristics: self-governed, with groups that are self-organized and that mutually contract with each other. Once you start getting creative about civil-economic organization forms, you get new urban forms without having to think neo-conservative on the one side or neo-socialist on the other side. In this direction there are many interesting ways in between these extremes. It would pay to think radically in a literal sense here – starting from the root. We need nothing more in our profession or regional planning than radical thoughts to revive our guild. Because the old academies and the like are terribly ossified - dreadful.

Prof. Thomas Sieverts is an architect and urban planner with SKAT architects in Cologne. His publications include Zwischenstadt in English under the title Cities without Cities and numerous articles and essays. He taught at The HdK in Berlin, at Harvard University and the TU in Darmstadt. He was the director of the Internationale Bauausstellung Emscher Park from 1989 to 1994.

Thomas Sieverts talked with Bernd Upmeyer. He is co-editor of Monu magazine, he works as an architect in Rotterdam and teaches architecture and urban design at the University of Kassel

1. Zwischenstadt: a term coined by Prof. Thomas Sieverts describing the western European version of suburbia. Literally translated in between city.
2. Datsche: a typically east-German and East-European form of cabin / summerhouse.
3. Landmark church of Munich

(The interview was translated from german by Thomas Soehl)
IKEA when Cathedrals Were Blue: The Pragmatic Marriage between Mild Middle-Class Values and Voracious Multinational Capitalism

By Manuel Shvartzberg

IKEA and the Middle-Class

Is IKEA the world’s middle-class thermometer? In this article I suggest a definition of today’s middle-class that is based upon the IKEA phenomenon and the inextricable relationship both the middle-class and IKEA have with certain values of pragmatism.

I will analyse IKEA and its relationship to the concept of “middle-class” first in geo-political terms, and secondly in terms of how pragmatism can be viewed to be the conceptual catalyst fusing IKEA and the middle-class today.

IKEA’s middle-class: A Geo-Political Reading

The distribution of IKEAs across the globe both reflects and affects geo-political dynamics. Looking at the world map plotted with the locations of all the IKEA stores in the world, the hypothesis of IKEA being a reflection of the world’s middle class becomes untenable. It would seem that IKEA is more the expression of one type of middle-class: that of the rich neoliberal commercial sphere. In terms of income, is there no relative middle-class in Latin or Central America? What about in the richer countries of Africa? And the wealthy Asian-pacific?

In terms of the values, needs and demands of different communities, the map also renders the search for a “world middle-class” with IKEA as a possible universal measure as a somewhat naïve pursuit given the huge variety of cultural differences. Central-America, South-America, or Africa have no IKEAs whatsoever. This containment (to a certain extent) of the IKEA expansion could be interpreted as part of an unfinished colonisation of the pragmatic doctrine over the world; an interpretation we will focus on later.

A look at how IKEA is now ferociously expanding into previously no-go areas is also an example of the shifting paradigm of the world into a single unified whole of neoliberal capitalism. This is also why IKEA never entered the ex-soviet states until after 1989.

Far from being a “universal” parameter for establishing a world middle-class, the extent to which IKEA has actually expanded globally is determined by the fact that it has only infiltrated a certain kind of economic-cultural sphere. Even though present in a set of radically different cultures, whether in Philadelphia or Dubai, its
audience is in a certain way reduced to an aspiring westernized elite.

IKEA: a Swedish company This does prove the point, however, that those countries now biting into the IKEA deal do share a similar middle-class, evidently in base economic terms, but also in their cultural make-up: their demands, dreams, and tastes. The aspirations and reality -sensual, practical, but also in terms of values and fantasies- of this somewhat global or globalized middle-class is represented by Sweden's middle-class ideals? Is IKEA the matrix for this global middle-class? What is the relation between IKEA and the Swedish ideals of egalitarianism? And, what is the relationship between these Swedish ideals and the middle-class in general?

IKEA was born within the egalitarian-minded, severely modernist Sweden of the 1950's. Social Democracy has one of its greatest exponents in the Social Democratic Labour Party of Sweden, which has had a hegemonic position in the Swedish political scene for most part of the 20th century and up to this day. At the time of IKEA's birth, the Social Democratic movement was already beginning to look towards a utopian future of installing a fully socialist society in favour of the ubiquitous social democratic system we know today: the welfare state under neo-liberal economic laws. IKEA was and is an example of this fusion between egalitarian and capitalist concerns and methods, and is in this sense a true child of its times. What allows for the establishment of this vast middle-ground are in effect the same circumstances that make the middle-class what and how it is today, and it can be argued that certain virtues of utilitarianism and pragmatism explain and foster such a reality.

The belief in “common sense”: a universal middle-class value? IKEA, as a complex and organic phenomenon is evidently a mixture of these and other different philosophies, yet, like the middle-class itself, it finds and borrows its identity from them, guided by the fundamental precept of a typically Swedish principle: common sense. A principle also shared by all the prudent cultures where IKEA is present. IKEA works as a sanctuary for the middle-class' unfettered belief in “common sense”.

What is commonsense for the IKEA type of middle-class is synonymous to what is practical, convenient, useful, and profitable. In realising that much of IKEA's marketing jargon is aimed at converting the “common sense” into the “profitable” we may uncover the fallacy of considering the commonsense a universal and infallible measure of empirical truth. One of the ways in which IKEA turns images of commonsense into profit is through the marketing of its style by appropriation of a common Swedish icon: the Larsson family.

IKEA and the Larsson Family: not a wholly legitimate appropriation Carl Larsson (1853-1919) was a prominent watercolour painter from the south of Sweden. Together with his wife Karin, and their seven children, they created a lively family environment: she was very creative with textiles and decoration, and he dedicated his time to revealing to the public their intimate life through watercolours. His watercolours often depict light; fresh interiors, which have become icons for the Swedish home and Swedish style, and have been adopted by IKEA's style as their own. But also, Larsson's watercolours depict the internal affairs of the family with brutal honesty: in many of the paintings the children are portrayed naked and in a very natural and disordered manner. In their day, those pictures shocked the middle-classes: they were abhorred by the vision of a family without strict rules, with the vision of unashamed nudity, and with the fact that Larsson was able to

años 50. La Socialdemocracia tiene en el Partido Socialdemócrata Laborista sueco uno de sus mayores exponentes; había dado dicho que tal partido ha gozado de una hegemonía política en Suecia durante la mayor parte del siglo XX y hasta hoy. En la época del nacimiento de IKEA, la Socialdemocracia destacaba en favor del estado totalmente socialista, defendiendo la idea de un bienestar que se había convertido en una economía neoliberal. IKEA era y es un ejemplo de esta fe de las clases medias en el “sentido común”: el establecimiento de un estado plenamente socialista. IKEA es, en su lugar, floreció el estilo de Socialdemocracia que tiene hoy como objeto el establecimiento de una economía con una economía neoliberal. IKEA era y es un ejemplo de este sentido, un verdadero hijo de su tiempo, que permite la idea de un estado medio de un terreno medio tan vasto son efecto las mismas circunstancias que hacen a la ideología de IKEA, y como es que puede sostener que ciertas virtudes del “sentido común” pueden explicar y fomentan dicha realidad.

La fe en el “sentido común”?; un valor universal de la clase media? IKEA, como fenómeno complejo y orgánico es evidente una mezcla de éstas y otras filosofías distintas, aunque, típicamente sueco: el sentido común. IKEA pide y presta su identidad de ellas guiada por un precepto fundamental de un principio titulado “sueco” de la utilidad. Un principio compartido también por todas las culturas prudentes donde se puede encontrar un centro IKEA como un santuario para la inquebrantable fe de las clases medias en el “sentido común”.

Lo que es de sentido común para la clase media de tipo IKEA es sinónimo de lo práctico, lo conveniente, lo útil, y lo económico. En otras palabras, en gran parte del lenguaje de marketing de IKEA se usa para convertir lo que es "sentido común" en algo "provechoso" o "rentable" reside la posibilidad de destacar la facilidad de considerar lo que es de sentido común como una parte universal de alguna verdad empírica. Una de las maneras en que IKEA convierte las imágenes del "sentido común" en algo rentable (para ellos, en términos económicos) es mediante el marketing de su estilo apropriándose de un icono sueco común: la familia Larsson.

IKEA y la familia Larsson: una apropiación del todo legítima. Carl Larsson (1853-1919) fue un destacado acuarelista del sur de Suecia. Junto a su esposa Karin, y sus siete hijos, creo un entorno familiar activo y feliz: ella era muy creativa con el diseño textil y la decoración, él dedicaba su tiempo a revelar al público escenas de su vida íntima a través de sus acuarelas. Sus acuarelas describen interiores frescos y tienen una labor oscura, en los que han pasado a convertirse en íconos de lo casa sueca y el estilo sueco, y han sido adoptados por IKEA como su estilo oficial. Pero las acuarelas de Larsson también retratan con brutal sinceridad los asuntos internos de la familia: en muchas de las imágenes que los niños son retratados desnudos en su estado natural, en un entorno cálido y desordenado. En sus acuarelas, aquellas acuarelas supusieron una gran conmoción para las clases medias de la época, por la visión de una familia sin reglas estrictas, por la visión de la desnudez íntima, y por el hecho de que IKEA podrían presentar unos retratos tan domésticos y poco pretenciosos como "artísticos". En muchos sentidos, se podría decir que la estilización de lo "artístico" por las clases medianas hoy en día incluye estas campañas de marketing de la propia IKEA (repite esa repulsión fundamental que para ellos concierne a las acuarelas de Larsson desde el siglo XIX hasta el presente) esa repulsión hacia todo aquello que parece salir de lo establecido por el “sentido común”.

IKEA usa la historia de los Larsson de una manera pragmática: coge prestado su estilo de la informalidad, la simplicidad
get away with disclosing such domestic and unpretentious visions as "Art". In many ways, the current dismissal of the "Arty" by the middle-class today (and indeed by some of IKEA's own posters and marketing strategies!) echoes that desire of the middle-class to repulse anything that seems to depart from the established "commonsense".

IKEA uses the Larsson's story in a pragmatic way: it borrows its style and the feeling of informality, simplicity and mystery of the interior to the portrayied in the paintings, but fails to adopt the narrative wholeheartedly, thereby perverting the appropriation by eluding the fundamental meaning within the message of the Larsson's story, which does not help IKEA's ulterior objective of profit.

This fundamental difference between IKEA and the way the Larsson's decorated the home is that the Larsson family was always involved directly in creating their own environment. They didn't pick up their furniture from a shelf at a large store. There was a making of a magical everyday by painting aristocratic armchairs in bright colours, or designing their own beds, or changing their everyday. There was an inherent artistic approach in the way they lived, a subversive relationship with materials: they used and changed their space, not only inhabited it. This difference is fundamental to the middle-class type being exported by IKEA and the one the Larssons truly represent.

In this light, the Larssons stand as a refutation of the universal middle-class belief in "common sense" - an example of how what is considered common sense shifts along time. It is grotesque to see how IKEA has appropriated and perverted the Larsson's story to use it for their own ends, and at the same time, it is coherent with the unflinching pragmatism of the philosophy of commonsense of IKEA and the middle-class.

Common sense: the containment of the "real" within the "real" Contrary to the IKEA vision, the Larsson's had a fluid relationship between the desirable, the necessary, and the real. As artists they constantly negotiated the boundary between the real and the fictional. For the doctrine of the "commonsense" there is difficulty in dealing with that which lies outside of the already established, or the "actual". The middle class is fascinated with reality. Reality is unquestionable: the beginning and the end, there is no depth to ideas, desires, theories or theses; they are all played out in the flat carpet of established existence. That which cannot exist as an extension of the established reality, in its same language and forms, does not exist or means nothing. So all the projections of yourself are permissible and negotiable with reality only in terms of their reality. Desire is coerced by the commonsense, and when the commonsense inspires desire, it always offers the vision of a pragmatic reconfiguration of reality: it keeps the real delimited by the real. Pragmatic concerns shape desires and possible realisations of desire. There is where IKEA stands in relation to the middle-class: its visions mild, realisable, comfortable, and emphatically real.

The IKEA Catalogue: pure scenes of pragmatic dreams These visions are communicated to the consumers through the IKEA catalogue. A yearly publication that had more editions in the last fifty years than the Bible in the whole of its history.

For IKEA to be able to sell to different peoples a rather discreet set of objects, it must make you believe that it can and does foster so much difference. It articulates this projection of difference through two ways: the y la modestia de los interiores retratados de los Larsson, ya que éste no sirve al objetivo ulterior de IKEA: los beneficios. Esta diferencia fundamental entre IKEA y la manera en que los Larsson decoraban su casa es que es la familia Larsson estuvo siempre involucrada directamente en la creación de su entorno. No reconocían los muebles de una estantería en un gran supermercado, sino que compraban lo que hacía de lo cotidiano, pintando butacas aristocráticas de colores fuertes, o diseñando sus propios camas y cambiando su espacio. Había en la manera en que vivían un enfoque irreflexivamente artístico: una relación subversiva con los materiales: usaban y cambiaban sus propios fines. No deja de ser coherente con el pragmatismo enriquecedor de la filosofía del sentido común de IKEA y su clase media. El sentido común: la contención de lo "real" contra el sentido común de IKEA. Los Larsson tenían una relación fluida entre lo deseable, lo necesario y lo real. Como artistas negociaban constantemente las fronteras entre lo real y lo ficcional. Para la doctrina del sentido común hay dificultades para relacionarse con aquello que queda fuera de lo ya establecido, y a la vez, no deja de ser coherente con el pragmatismo enriquecedor de la realidad.

El catálogo de IKEA: escenas puras de sueños pragmáticos. Estas visiones son comunicadas a los consumidores a través del catálogo de IKEA. Una publicación anual de la que se ha llegado a decir que ha sido más editada en los últimos 50 años que la Biblia en toda su historia. Para que IKEA pueda vender a distintos consumidores un rango bastante discreto de objetos, debe hacernos creer que puede y de hecho alberga mucha diferencia. Articula esta proyección de diferencia de dos maneras: en las escenificaciones de los catálogos y las estrategias de marketing.

La clase media de IKEA es más heterogénea que en términos de mercadología con algunos de los mismos productos a personas o públicos distintos, ya que el romántico tiene sus gustos cubiertos con la introducción de suaves lámparas.
catalogue set-ups, and its marketing strategies.

The IKEA middle-class target is actually more heterogeneously than the range of products they sell, which means that the term "egalitarian" has come to mean, must deliver a distinct story to each audience for them to be able to sell the same products to different people. This way, the romantic has her tastes catered for with the introduction of soft light lamps, or candles in their product range. But so does the social democrat, who finds that the terms "egalitarianism" or "affordable design" are much quoted on every IKEA statement of intentions. Even the environmentalist has a story to buy in their website if he wants. In Spain, for example, a country widely concerned with the excesses of multinational corporations, IKEA’s website stars a declaration of intentions severely condemning child labour and anti-environmental design. No such declaration is found in IKEA's USA front website, where the story to sell is about a prize awarded to IKEA for embracing working mothers. However, both Spanish and North-American consumers sleep upon the same MALM beds, and relax over the same POANG armchairs. What they are buying is not a unique product, but distinct ideas.

IKEA and the Pragmatic Sublime

In its historical make-up, IKEA is a mixture of past and present ideologies: a collage of Swedish Social Democracy, egalitarianism, pragmatism, utilitarianism, capitalism, and specially, the general and ubiquitous common sense of the middle-classes. But this is the result of founder Ingvar Kamprad’s unhesitant tenacity before a direct intentional appropriation of the ideals of any ideologies. Kamprad's ideology, if any, is that of being a radical opportunist.

It is at the representational interface of projection and reality where IKEA has truly deployed a creative potential. Their products are neither mediocre nor genial; in fact much of their catalogue remains the same for the past 50 years. Innovation in design has not been their strong point as a business. However, the recognition of pragmatic concerns over a design fetish is obviously where they have really excelled. The design of the business itself is truly spectacular; the creation of a machine so tight that it has needed to open on Sundays to make a profit for a long time, and still be a multinational monster. To achieve such slim and yet enormous success, the company has identified the nuts and bolts of their business plan; and in a sense, a sort of pragmatic utopia. Parallel to such a resilient corporate culture, firmly anchored on pragmatic grounds, they have also identified that a large group of people all around the world, the middle-class, is willing to, in fact is eager to have their material dreams reduced to a catalogue; the grotesque counterpart to their pragmatic doctrine and determination that is yielding the business such an elitist turnover.

Although being a grotesque attribute, IKEA has reached the sublime with the creation of its own world. Its vision casts a shadow over the entire world, like a tabula rasa; it is marketable, or viable in the business of engineering and design, a human face. It won’t be long until IKEA’s masterful technocrats infiltrate governments and institutions -they already affect road map layouts in post-industrial landscapes- as it won’t be long for them to become our preachers and architects, and design all there is to the sphere of the urban, much further beyond the house. Microsoft will soon merge with IKEA (have you noticed the surprising similarity of their corporate blue aesthetic?) and our cathedrals will be furnished with IKEA spiritual light-fittings, and will be painted in blue, as the sign of a new, fresh, modest, pragmatic and good religion…or are they already?

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o velas en su catálogo. Pero también los Socialistas muestran el socialismo que encuentra que la palabra “egalitario” o “buen diseño asequible para todos” se usa con arrepentimiento en cada declaración de IKEA. Incluso el ecologista puede comprar una historia particular en cada página web. En España, una nación ampliamente preocupada por los excesos de las corporaciones multinacionales, la página web incluye una declaración de intenciones conforme con al menos sostenibilidad (y el diseño no-mediaambiental). No hay ningún tipo de declaración parecida en la web de IKEA, donde la historia a vender es acerca de un premio otorgado a IKEA por acoger a las trabajadoras en el trabajo. La empresa nos presenta un plan de negocio que pesa la riqueza de narrativas distintas: los consumidores españoles y los consumidores norteamericanos duermen sobre las mismas camas MALM, y se relajan sobre los mismos POANG armchairs. ¿Qué compran? No es un producto único, sino distintas ideas.

IKEA y la sublimación Pragmática

En su biopsia psico-histórica, IKEA es una mezcla de ideologías del presente y el pasado: un collage de Socialdemocracia sueca, Egalitarismo, Pragmatismo, Utilitarismo, Capitalismo y sobretodo, el imperialismo y urbano de las clases medias. Pero esto es más bien el resultado de la tenacidad y obsesión del fundador Ingvar Kamprad por la proyección directa e intencionada de los ideales de cualquier ideología. La ideología de Kamprad, si acaso, la de ser un oportunista radical.

Es en el interface representacional de la proyección y la realidad donde IKEA ha conseguido ser un clásico del capitalismo creativo. Los productos no son ni mediocres ni geniales, sino que son la gran parte del catálogo y se mantiene igual desde hace 50 años. La innovación en diseño no ha sido su punto fuerte como empresa. Sin embargo, en el reconocimiento de ideas pragmáticas sobre un diseño fetichista ha sido donde han destacado, a pesar de las actividades medioambientales. El diseño de la empresa en sí es verdaderamente espectacular, la creación de una máquina tan precisa que ha necesitado abrir los domingos durante mucho tiempo para sacar algo de beneficioc y a ser una gigantesca multinacional. Para conseguir un éxito a la vez tan fino y tan enorme, han escrito una historia increíble, una historia que merece ser estudiada al detalle en su plan financiero: a algunas empresas una serie de utopías pragmáticas. Paralela a tan robusta cultura corporativa, firmemente arraigada en bases prácticas, han identificado el hecho de que un gran número de personas en el mundo, la clase media, está dispuesta y hecha para la doble cesión de poder reducir sus sueños materiales e inmediatos a la insípida forma de un catálogo: el grotesco polo opuesto de la doctrina pragmática y la determinación que le está proporcionando a la empresa tan gigantescos beneficios.

Aunque sea un grotesco atributo, IKEA ha alcanzado lo sublime con la creación de su propio mundo. Su visión hace que el mundo entero se mueva bajo su sombra como obra de arte total, o un régimen de utilitarismo casi total. IKEA no está fabricando un rostro humano. No queda mucho para que los maestros tecnócratas de IKEA se impliquen en gobierno y las instituciones -ya afectan a los planes de las nuevas carreteras en recorridos suburbanos, y también un aspecto más intimo que uno mismo- y en nuestras codicaciones y arquitecturas -sobre lo que hay que diseñar en la esfera de la ciudad que ahora llega a lo doméstico. Microsoft pronto se fusionará con IKEA (ya han fusionado el mismo azul de sus estéticas corporativas) y nuestras catedrales estarán decoradas con lámparas espirituales de IKEA… y estarán pintadas de azul -como el signo de una nueva-, modesta, pragmática y buena religión.
Neu-Karow a new space between Berlin’s past and its border By Katherine Bourke and Gregor Harbusch

A surprisingly short ride on the S-Bahn from lively and much-cited Prenzlauer Berg exists Neu-Karow. This is the name of a suburban development from the second half of the 90’s in the northern outskirts of Berlin, not far from the border of the city. Having been promoted as “a Californian dream” by former building secretary Nagel, the new neighbourhood shows a certain proximity to the principles of New Urbanism, as pointed out by Harald Bodenschatz for example. But it is not the aim of this text to deliver an examination of the neighbourhood in accordance to the programmatic aims of the New Urbanism or to the tradition of suburban neighbourhoods from Berlin’s Gründerzeit (a phase of industrial growth and prosperity in the late 19th and early 20th century). Rather, the observers’ standpoint shall not be neglected – as it is our first-hand wandering through the area, which is the basis of this writing. The walking-wanderings’ root is photography and art history and an interest in the urban and in architecture, fed by a critical, heightened by poetics; this approach dangles somewhere in between. Wandering throughout the area now, a few years after it has been completed, aims on slowing down our pace and looking for the breaks and obscurities of the area, as we found them. Walking the area in a conscious way is seen as an approach to reduce the distance towards the neighbourhood to a certain degree – always being aware that this approach can only yield a fractional success.

It cannot be denied that there is a principal and probably insurmountable gap between a perception of the urban from an objective standpoint or from a poet’s somehow always irrational approach that treats the urban as a trigger for streams of feelings and complex interdependencies beyond the planners’ rational terms. We do not venture to provide a solution to this in between space but rather to embrace the many in between spaces (in the city as well as in thinking) and use them as a playground for breathing, reflecting from.

In between space is a term that we use to refer to both the fluid thinking space present whilst walking and the diversity in the urban composition, in this case Neu-Karow. This phrase lacks a clear definition and as a result allows for many interpretations by the reader. It is possible to think of being in a between space, or be in between a space depending on one’s viewpoint. Either way this space has a rippling effect reaching the walker, their surroundings and the reflection that exists when the two collide. As if each step is a new thought – an attempt is made to explore and be grounded in Neu-Karow.

What is between? Is it the structures of the city: flats, schools, restaurants, sports facility and the seeming inconsistencies that exist in the development of such a planned community? Or it is the space between these structures: the green spaces, the peace and quiet of the lake, the playgrounds in the courtyards, the city square, and the pathways between building clusters?

In between space on the edge. It is difficult for us not to consider
Neu-Karow’s proximity to the edge of the city. On an edge not present but implied... There seems to be a preoccupation with the sea in the playgrounds of Neu-Karow. A boardwalk with streetlamps lights up a pathway between two ships that set sail in the imagination whilst docked in sand. Another playground hosts a rocking boat and lookout point.

Unlike the theme that seems to exist throughout the playgrounds – the housing and commercial structures do not have a strong continuous link. A striking characteristic of Neu-Karow is, that it comprises a mixture of different, past forms and traditions, brought together in between the city and the edge – a feature that made us think about the specific characteristics of a current manifestation of the middle class in this very case: Less a retrogressive urbanism that clearly pursues one specific theme (even though there are design guidelines, defined by the master-planers Charles Moore, John Ruble and Buzz Yudell), rather, we perceived kind of a retro-conservative attitude that creates spaces by bringing together differences while avoiding any grand gesture, spaces that are characterised by a distinctive indecisiveness– an indecisiveness that may be interpreted as aesthetically and unconsciously mirroring the whole complex of urbanistic, social and economic aspects that made a project like Neu-Karow come into being.

In particular in the western part of Neu-Karow, some parts resemble a village. On the on hand, by citing rural architectural forms, on the other hand by situating the individual buildings in a village-like way, thus creating somehow picturesque, non-rectangular, small spaces between the buildings – spaces who’s design reveal a clear idea about a small-scale perception and movement of the individual, an individual that prefers open spaces that embrace like a home. Open space as an easily appropriated one, without fear – thus pointing to an ideal of middle-class living condition who’s characteristics are all too easily criticized from certain standpoints as retrogressive. We were wondering if such a critique would become silent when encountering the pond in the middle of this part of the neighbourhood. Beautifully composed in a valley, surrounded by a variety of different kinds of residential buildings, most of them not taller than two to four storeys, the pond and the plants around it successfully simulate flown time by making use of the strategy of the picturesque (for good reasons not written with a capital ‘p’ here, as we are not talking about Uvedale Price and his people).

But Neu-Karow cannot be reduced to an attempt to simulate a village-like fabric. There is no such clear agenda like that. Rather, different spaces and areas, sometimes only different points of view (in a spatial sense) reveal different ideas how to organise edifices. Call it a (probably unconscious) sampling of different programs, a strategy that looks into the rich past of bourgeois urban tradition, merging parts of this tradition, making them usable for the middle-class. (For pragmatic reasons the necessary definition of this term cannot be delivered in this text.)

Thus, the pond that has been mentioned above, is connected by an axis to an oval square, the Ballonplatz (“balloon square”). The Ballonplatz is an architecture parlante, an oval square that points into the past, not only by citing the tradition of Baroque urbanism but also by connecting the new town with the great past of engineering during the European Enlightenment, as one of the earliest successful balloon-rides in Berlin (undertaken by Jean-Pierre Blanchard in 1788) ended on the fields near the small village Karow. The square’s form and its name remind to this event – which may
be one of the rare moments in the village’s history that created a glance of connection to the context of bourgeois culture of real European dimension.

The Ballonplatz has grown from its original planned state. We think of this grown state as a way to describe the state of a city when the layers of time and use build and reveal themselves. This state is not planned by any one urban planner, it is a composite, it is a palimpsest of time on space. This phrase grown complements in between space in that the grown state is as flexible as in between space and it is up to the explorer and appreciator of the city to perceive and imagine and breathe life into this state. It is in the process of discovering the planned steps to the Ballonplatz water fountain platform that its grown state, hidden through neglect by overgrown grass, is revealed. The grown state, though not possessing an intended character is not one without beauty. It is our desire, by using this term, to draw attention to the beauty present in the urban landscape when the layers of time alter the planned into the grown.

There are many details lost through the neglected landscaping around the Ballonplatz. Bricks form a pattern on the platform that leads us to the circle within the square with the water fountain and vista towards the lake. At this square we become confused... Initially we knew we were in Neu-Karow but then this rural lake presents itself across the square. A confusing and welcoming thought-provoking experience in the suburban development leaves us in between. This in-betweenness made us think and reflect and become bemused – “the defined” may be seen as a distinct quality of the urban, i.e. the urban ideal: The definition as an urban planner’s ideology. In Neu-Karow, there are some glances that point to an uncertainty, indecisiveness, in-betweeness, irrationality... Some things simply do not go together or fit – somehow they lead us between the urban and the rural.

Neu-Karow’s locale on the edge makes its middle-class urban structure transparent and upright in the midst of a sea of fields, train tracks and motorways surrounding. The closest thing to vertical competition in the surrounding landscape is a windmill and power-tower. Wallace Stegner’s thoughts about the North American Prairie landscape resonate for the rural walkers in us as we peer on the edge between the vertical Neu-Karow and the echelon that reaches Berlin’s city limits: “You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.” (Wolf Willow: A History, A Story and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier, NY 1995, p.8)

Empty space is not a novel idea in Berlin, the collapse of the wall has left many empty spaces, some as vast as those surrounding Neu-Karow. This is an attraction for citywalkers and one that begs for a comparison between the space at the edge, or Neu-Karow’s boardwalk at the edge, and the empty areas within the in-between space of Berlin.

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Urbanism – Two Ways of Life

It is now almost 70 years since Luis Wirth published an article entitled “Urbanism as a Way of Life” (Wirth 1938). This article, which is famous and influential to this day, was an inquiry into the question of just how the metropolis that was emerging throughout the world in the 19th century would affect the lives of people. Is there such a thing as a ‘metropolitan’ and if so, how does he differ from a villager or the small city dweller.

Wirth’s Essay connects two traditions in European sociology in order to answer the question about urbanism as a way of life: The structural analysis of Emile Durkheim on the one side and the social-psychological analysis of Georg Simmel on the other side. He [Wirth] defines the metropolis not only by its sheer size but also by heterogeneity and density. At the level of the individual--the metropolitan--this leads to a differentiation of his roles and to something Simmel called blasé: An overload of stimulation which leads to the metropolitan distancing himself from his environment. One has to see this as a continuous learning process; however, the city dweller learns how to deal with increasingly complex situations and thus becomes psychologically more differentiated himself. The inhabitants of villages, small towns or solitary settlements lack this learning opportunity – that’s why a small amount of complexity is already too much for them.

Because the metropolitan is more differentiated he can operate in all kinds of social circles; he is a stranger amongst strangers himself, and thus learns not only to cope with difference but with the usefulness of it. He can piece together the different to get something new.

Urbanism as a way of life is related to the structural characteristics of urbanity (size, density, heterogeneity) and is, at the same time, connected to the continuous economic, cultural and social modernization of society. This thesis was tested and differentiated in numerous studies (Fischer 1972) and from the start it was part of a dualistic concept of space: On one side the metropolis, and on the other side rural areas. Although the suburb was the rural part of the city, it was closely connected to the city through the centrality of services and industries. This picture is rapidly dissolving.

In this paper we want to show how this urban model of urban space is changing, and formulate some hypotheses that might show how a new form of landscape urbanism could establish itself. We should emphasize at this point however that these elaborations are part of a research program and we are far from having firm conclusions.

2. The Regional City and the Urban Landscape

In the last two decades numerous areas in Europe have developed in a way that one can read them as urban regions. While in the early stages one could characterize these developments as a form of suburbanization—that is, a dualistic pattern of central city and suburb--today we are dealing with a polycentric model in so far as different cores and nodes have developed in a network of land uses and functions. We refer to them as urban landscapes and emphasize the close relationship between forms of land use, life styles and cultural patterns on one side, and the dynamics of ecological systems on the other.

It is possible that within (and in conjunction with) these urban landscapes, a new pattern of the European City is developing in which the central city is only one of many elements. In relation to this area of inquiry we pose the questions: What potentials and constraints are connected with this type of city? What lifestyles and what types of use are developing?; and how does this impact the sustainability of the urban landscape? Sustainability refers to a match between living environment, system and ecology that is expressed either in a substantive agreement of these factors, or in the way that they are expressed. It is to be understood as a process.
the fact that existing contradictions and conflicts can be worked out. The phenomenon of urban landscapes was the main topic of the German Pavilion at the 2004 Architecture Biennial in Venice (Ferguson 2004). This shows the timeliness of the topic. Scientifically the theme will be followed in projects that were started at the ETH Zurich by Peter Baccini and Franz Oswald. The concept of the network-city was applied in a study on the urbanization of the Swiss middle-lands and in the development of a design method (Baccini, Oswald 1998). The projects on the Zwischenstadt (in-between-city), funded by the Robert-Bosch Foundation, that look at the example of the Rhine-Main area are a German approach. Important intermediary results were published by Lars Boelling and Thomas Sieverts in the volume “Mitten am Rand” (“Centers on the Fringe,” Boelling, Sieverts 2004). The project about the urbanization of the Po-pla-teau is the first work in scientific urban planning on the urban landscape between Turin and Venezia (Venturi 2003).

Although we find urban landscapes across Europe, just one glance at aerial photographs reveals how different these landscapes are from country to country. You find metropoles and their peripheries (Paris, London, Hamburg, Barcelona), polycentric landscapes that contain several large cities like the Ruhr-area, the Rhine-Main area, the Po-pla-teau; and urban landscapes without metropolitan centers (Lake Constance). One of the first tasks will be to develop a well-founded typology of European urban landscapes in order to create a basis for study. And this suggests another aspect of the process, one being that respective research questions need to be considered and worked through comparatively. This is the only way to answer the questions of whether or not we are dealing with the emergence of a new type of the European City, what the potentials and problems of those urban landscapes might be, and how planning can react to the challenges ahead.


In the wake of industrialization and the alteration of the space-time relation through the introduction of the railroad in the second half of the 19th century, the structure of the major cities in Europe changed. The circular concentric urban structure as described by Thünen changed in favor of a radial-concentric urban structure in that urban development happened along the corridors created by the track-system of the railroad. Since the beginning of the last century, planning and governance concepts were developed for fast growing industrial regions in order to react to these developments and to include the periphery of cities in urban development. Thus the idea of the urban region was born (e.g. creation of greater Berlin, Schumacher’s Axis-concept for Hamburg). These concepts were also connected to the idea to break up the structure of the compact ‘stone’ city and interweave it with landscape. The emerging mass-motorization which started in the western democracies of Europe in the 50’s, together with the CIAM guidelines for functionalistic urban design, brought about guiding concepts like the ‘car friendly city’ (Reichow) and the ‘structured, thinned out city’ which propagated the landscape-like city—the urban landscape. The early phases of suburbanization that became visible in the 50’s and 60’s in the periphery of cities was almost exclusively an expansion of residential areas. Cities remained the dominating industrial and tertiary centers. Residential suburbanization was to a large extent a way of avoiding the scarcity of housing in the cities in which the population was quickly rising. Due to the Fordist modernization policies that most western democracies subscribed to, the living styles in urban and rural areas increasingly equalized. The networking of infrastructure between cities and their periphery made possible a further expansion of urban areas. In addition to improved roads and a public transportation system, the periphery was also urbanized in ‘invisible’ ways, in the form of connection to centralized sewage systems; cable-TV and cooking gas became also common in the periphery.

Since the 1870’s, population growth in many cities in Western Europe stagnated or became negative, while the larger metropolitan areas generally kept growing. In France and in many southern European cities this trend was delayed (Caruso 2001). Between the years 1970 and 2000, cities like Liverpool and Milan lost about a quarter of their inhabitants. Copenhagen a third (Balducci, 2003). A recent study on seven German
large cities (Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Nuremberg and Munich) shows that they had a net loss of about 9% of their inhabitants in favor of their periphery (Schoenert, 2001). The population development of the City of Bremen and its surrounding region shows this trend in an exemplary way.

In many urban regions today the surrounding area has a higher population than the central city. Aside from functioning as residential areas, in the last decades we could observe an increased suburbanization or new development of manufacturing and commerce in the peripheries of major cities. This development only became possible after the networking of infrastruc
tures, as Wenz has shown for the Rhine-Main area (Wenz 1994). Large differences in real-estate prices, lack of areas available for development in the central cities, and the competition between municipalities are the driving forces. What is described in German as ‘suburbanization’ is referred to in French speaking countries less normatively as ‘periurbanization’. In the UK, the term decentralization is common. (Caruso, 2001). Despite the use of varying terminologies, the same phenomenon can be observed, especially since the 80’s, and this is that the monopoly of the central cities on central functions is weakening. Sophisticated goods, leisure facilities or workplaces are no longer predominantly concentrated in the central city but in the urban region. There is also a reduction of the formerly large difference in the workplace- and population density between the central city and the surrounding areas (Maeding 2004). One consequence is that the classical ‘center-periphery’ commuting pattern is displaced by more diverse networks – for example, tangential traffic patterns.

The preference of many citizens for housing that is close to nature—mostly in less dense housing types—enforces this trend. People are using functional urban spaces less in the central cities and more in urban regions. The urban region is the place for their shopping, their leisure, and is their labor market. “Thanks to the well developed traffic routes and the motorization of most households, a selective pattern developed in the use of space which one could also define as the ‘regionalization of life’: Living in nature, working either there or in the central city, leisure in the suburban space, but also in the metropolitan cultural centers. The spatial node for the organization of everyday life is no longer the central city, but the individual net of activities that is cast over the whole urban region or over larger areas (the example Autobahn or ICE [German high speed train] long distance commuters)” (Hesse, 2004). The Hanover-region is a case in point: while employment in Hanover declined about 0.7% between 1990 and 2000, it increased by about 6% in the surrounding areas – in some municipalities even by 86% (Region Hanover 2002).

In the western part of Germany, for example, the surface used for residential areas and traffic has almost doubled since 1950, while population has decreased. The regionalization of cities obviously also has effects on land allocation. In the 1970’s and 1980’s of the compact urban city as an answer to suburbanization, was incapable of stopping this trend, and is increasingly detached from the reality in the urban regions. Only since the latter half of the 1990’s has there been a discussion about whether or not, and how the periphery of cities would be moldable (vgl. Sieverts 1997, Baccini/Oswald 1998), without disqualifying the so called ‘in between city’ (as is usually done in theoretical construct that opens up an interdisciplinary path for the analysis and planning of urban regions. Before one can attend to the question of which use of the term landscape opens up a rewarding approach to space and the perception of space, the scientific argumentations around the concept of landscape have to be at least clear in their outlines. Without recourse into the theory pf landscape, our hypothesis could appear random. If one consults an etymological dictionary it is revealed that the term ‘land’ has an old Germanic root with the meaning ‘moor, steppe’ or even ‘clearing’. In the course of the middle ages the term was charged with political meaning. ‘Land’ now also includes the human, the social collective that is farming the land, and includes the name of governed zones. This meaning occurs in a series of terms and place-names. It is the ‘Land- mann’ [land-worker] who works the steppe, the ‘Landetala’ refers to an area that still has to be cleared. In the 9th century ‘Landscaf’ refers to an area of authority and is congruent with the Latin regio or provincia (Mueller 1977).
In the second part of the word ‘Landschaft’, ‘schaft’ refers to the make up or the Gestalt – similar to the English word ‘scape.’ Just as the “Botschaft” (message) refers to the nature—the content of an information, the “Landschaft” refers to the Gestalt, the content, of a space. Of course “schaft” has a relation to “saffen” (making) so that is seems to lean toward the characteristics of a man-made Landscape. The emphasis however is on Gestalt, so that the term “landscape-painter,” which was first mentioned by Duerer and later used as a subject-term by Goethe, is also referred to as ‘Landschafter’ (landscape). Landschaft is also the image of a space. Landschaft is to be understood as the real constitution, the real nature of a space, as well as a pictorial symbol of this constitution.

To this day, both meanings of the term are preserved and have often led to confusion in the world of science. Geography, which has mainly dealt with the concept of landscape, simultaneously referred to different things, as Hard could show. The ecological system plays into the concept and so does the perception-dimension or the emphasis of the natural in contrast to human civilization (Hard 1970).

The few sociologists that are occupied with landscape emphasize from the beginning the social construction that is part of the concept landscape. Simmel compares the perception of a landscape to the creation of an artwork. Just as in the practice of the landscape painter, the gaze is let loose from the endless array of singularities and creates, by emphasizing some parts and passing over others, a new whole (Simmel 1983). The image of landscape is created in the cause of our cultural development, through poetry and painting and lower carriers of culture: covers of penny novels, cinema, TV and tourism advertising (Burckhardt, no year). And Burckhardt further continues: “We see now how the concept of Landscape is constructed, or what renders a given environment into a landscape. It requires on the one hand a certain agrarian tradition that puts its imprint on the area and, in addition, it requires a visualization of this character that is created by economic and natural conditions through literature and art. (Burckhardt, p.4).

Landscape thus constitutes a concept that describes a relation. The relation is between a human and an environment that is shaped by nature and labor. The relation of modern man to his thus-formed environment is directly tied into the complex of division of labor and alienation, by which modernity has developed in the last three centuries. An essay by the philosopher Ritter is insightful and influential in that regard. It is the same society that brings man liberty by objectifying nature while at the same time alienating him from it: “While the divorcing of society and its “objectifying” nature from the surrounding nature is the condition of liberty, the aesthetic collection and envisioning of nature as landscape has the positive function--to uphold the connection between man and the nature surrounding him, and to give him voice and visibility…” (Ritter 1990, p.39). Landscape maintains an openness for experiences that, in the relation between the individual as a societal subject and the environment—in the objectification of the relationship to nature—have been lost. Landscape does not serve the reconstruction of a safe and sound world; it is neither escape nor compensation, but the counterpart of a liberty gained by objectification of nature.

What could be understood as untarnished freedom from the forces of nature in the 18th century (and Ritter is referring to Schiller here), has been taken for granted in parts, and in parts it is clear to us that this is an objectification of nature that threatens liberty. Landscape can, when it becomes part of the preferences of the individual and the political system, contribute to the development of sustainability in the objectified relation to the nature of modernity.

Something that has to be contemplated further at this point is deconstructing the concept that landscape exists apart from, or as a contrast to, the city. As long as landscape only happens in the countryside, the discourse around the causality of landscape and sustainability is stuck in a dualistic thinking pattern. On one hand, there is the city with its urbanized space, and the idea that resources are consumed and the self-cleaning forces of nature are exceeded in order to maintain the freedom of personal life; on the other, the landscape is ‘out there’ like a reserve that is supposed to compensate that damage psychologically and physically.

The field of tension that emerges between the material and the image—dimension of the concept of landscape, points to the fact that landscape abzualiquifizieren.

4. Landschaft als theoretisches Konzept


Konsultiert man ein etymologisches Wörterbuch, so zeigt sich, dass der Wortbestandteil "Landscape" oder "Landschaft" einen allgemeinromanischen Ursprung mit der Bedeutung "Beide", "Steps" bis hin zur Rodung hat. Im Laufe des Mittelalters gültete sich der Begriff mit einer politischen Bedeutung. Land meint nunmehr auch die Menschen, den sozialen Verbund, den und der Wirtschaftlichkeit, bis hin zur Benennung eines Herrschaftsgebietes. In einer Reihe von Bezeichnungen oder Ortsnamen taucht dieser Begriff auf. Die "Landschaft" als der Raum, der die Steppen bearbeitet, das "Landetal" bezeichnet einen Ort in einem noch zu redenden Raum. Im neunten Jahrhundert bezeichneten sich die Einwohner auf einen Herrschaftsbereich und ist gleichbedeutend mit dem lateinischen regio oder provincia (Mühl 1977).


Landschaft stellt sich so als ein Begriff dar, der eine Beziehung beschreibt. Die Beziehung kann nicht in sich selbst, in einem Mikrotypus einer einheitlich und übernatürlich geformten Umgebung enthalten sind. Die Beziehung des modernen Menschen zu seiner so geformten Umwelt ist unmittelbar in den Konflikten der Arbeitsziehung und Entwicklungsebenen eingebunden, durch die sich die Moderne in den letzten drei Jahrhunderten
can only be understood if different disciplines are put in relation to each other. First, the materiality of the landscape is related to its natural characteristics. Geological formations, geomorphology, water cycle, soil and local climate, plants and animals have potential natural characteristics and interactions. De facto landscape can’t be seen isolated from human influences – at least not in Europe. Next, the treatment of nature and its use influences the material exchanges and modifies the characteristics of places. For example the use of fertilizer changes the fertility of the soil; the density of settlements changes the local climate; and the canalization of rivers alters the water cycle. The treatment of landscape is not only a technological matter, but is subject to a number of societal regulations. This we call the social structuring of landscape. Property rights or limits in use by environmental protection laws are examples of this. All planning-related regulations are other important social structures of the landscape. In the middle we see the concept of culture. Culture is a system of interpretations and meanings: it contains codes that make it possible to comprehend a landscape and the evaluations that are connected with landscapes. The landscape-image is probably the most important part of the culture of landscape. So for both—the development of landscape and the image of the landscape—the conditions of use and the forms of use are important.

At the same time the development of landscape and the image of landscape influence each other. The image that emerged though the clearing of the Rhönblick (a mountain-area in Germany), today is as guiding image of the biosphere reservation part of the landscape planning (the landscape of open views) and thus influences the future development of this landscape. In order to keep the plains open, the biosphere-reservation subsidizes the raising of sheep flocks and the grazing by cattle, which are especially attuned to the natural characteristics of the area. The interest driving this guiding principle is tourism which has developed in the Rhön area.

Behind the form of treatment and use of nature are complex societal processes that one can divide up into several spheres of regulation. Also what we call nature and its uses are differentiated. Thus a scheme emerges that systematically names the components of the network of relations of landscape – one could also speak of a human-ecological landscape system.

With the aid of this table one can now formulate specific causal relations as questions or hypotheses. How, for example, does European agrarian policy (systemic political regulation) affect agrarian use of a landscape? Will intensity be increased, decreased or will areas be redistributed within a landscape? How does this affect the water cycle and what consequences does this have for the spreading of certain groups of plants? Or: How do changes in the value-system affect the development of life styles, and what consequence does this have for the urbanization of a landscape? In the previous paragraph it became clear that the social regulation of landscape refers to three interconnected but at the same time separate clusters of regulation. The first area we named in reference to Haber-
mas: "systemic regulation". This refers to the control of the economy and politics. In the area of economics, this means the contemporary logic of accumulation, the specific patterns of investments, the wage structure, the labor and marketing processes. The logic of accumulation in the 19th century was basically characterized by the fact that it tried to hold the costs for wages and raw materials as low as possible in order to make profits this way. The logic of accumulation in the 20th century was emphasizing mass-incomes and mass-consumption. Also governance changed its mode. The state now can extend itself and deeply regulate society (for example though its elaborate social-welfare state) or it can retreat to core functions. The cultural regulation refers to the specific lifestyles that emerge and are influential in a certain period; consumption practices and social groups, from household forms to friendship circles, clubs, communities of interest and political groups insofar they are not completely part of the political system. If these levels of regulation are coordinated and have a high level of coherence once can speak of a 'regulation regime'. This does not exclude the possibility that there are breaks in the chronology - that older and seeds of newer forms of regulation coexist. Coherence thus means a relative, fluent state which is characterized by tensions, contradictions and conflicts. One of these regulation regimes is called Fordism. As mentioned earlier this form of regulation shaped the economic and social conditions of the second half of the 20th century. A central principle of spatial organization was zoning. City and rural areas should be clearly differentiated. Within the city, clearly defined functional areas dominated – areas exclusively for housing, shopping and service centers, and commercial areas. Since the end of the 1970s it has become increasingly clear that this phase of modernity is no longer prevalent. In regulation theory this phase is called flexible regulation. The urban landscapes that are in the center of our research program are the result of this flexible regulation. Instead of clear zones you find a number of different functional modules – modulated landscapes.

In his essay "Total Landscape" the historian Sieferle describes a steady process of dissolving of local forms and structure of the landscape. The cheapening and acceleration of transporting materials, energy and ideas has made it possible, for almost a century now, to build anything anywhere. The old is torn down, emptied and filled with the new. Forms from all over the world can be combined. A good example is the thermal bath in Kassel. Here you find elements of Japanese philosophy and style next to imitations of tropical forests, images of the Finnish tundra and hay-carts of the old-European farm tradition. This mix has been rated successful by a Japanese group of investors and consequently in Japan you have a copy of the Kassel thermal bath. These are the processes Sieferle describes as the liquefying of form and material, image and reality.

With his term "Zwischenstadt" (in between city), Thomas Sieverts has started a lively debate about liquefied landscapes. In the project "Centers in the Middle," planners and social scientists are working on concepts that could make the liquid urban landscape graspable in images. At the ETH Zurich, Peter Bacchini, who is a professor for Material Systems, and Fritz Oswald, a professor of Urban Design got together in order to try to understand urban landscapes by applying the concept of the network city and, if they succeeded at this venture, to design them as planners. But what is the problem of these landscapes that is being addressed here? The problem can be easily framed within the theory of the transitory landscape: You lose the concept of landscape, the image of landscape. Behind this is a theoretical as well as a practical problem. Theoretically the modern image of the landscape is closely connected to the acceleration of mobility. Together with railroad travel a new image emerges that does not concentrate on details any longer but rather captures the larger whole as a panorama. Landscape consists of a view into the distance in order to construct images in fast travel. However this cannot be done randomly, but only if large-scale accentuations of the spatial environment -- the landscape -- are plausible. Urban landscapes though, especially consist of a multitude of heterogeneous elements that coexist without intrinsic connections. A last piece of farmland; sprawling houses; manufacturing halls and furniture outlets; traffic routes and high voltage lines; derelict lands and secondary wildernesses; tennis courts and sewage plants -- all are the elements of this sprawl-landscape. They overlay and adjoin each other but are neither functionally nor aesthetically connected. I call this land
scape “modular”. One can take out a module and replace it with another one without destroying the whole – because there is no whole. It is exactly these characteristics that guarantee a high flexibility and thus keeps this landscape constantly accommodating new demands from its users.

Concepts of landscapes and images of landscapes emerge through communication. Sieferle writes about the intensification of communication that needs time to stabilize a concept of landscape (Sieferle 2003). The individualized interest neither has the time, nor is it reliant on such an intensification of communication. In the functional patterns only specific modules have meaning. Theoretically this is therefore a problem of perception. With an old panoramic image of landscape, a modular landscape can hardly be comprehended. One can even say that there is no incentive for the user to see a section of space as a whole, to fit it with an image of space (see Ipsen 1997). Images of space however are necessary conditions for conceptual planning that wants to lay out a perspective. With the use of the interdisciplinary concept of landscape that we selected, it should be possible to read the modules as a system in order to understand causal relationships and identify distortions. In the long run, this might contribute to an understanding of the urban landscape as a spatial image that could have a real and ideological impact similar to the impact the image of the European city had until the end of the 19th century, and continues to have today in certain places.

5. Urban Landscape and Landscape Urbanism Although the relationship between urbanity (in Luis Wirth’s sense) and urbanism as a way of life has been studied in many ways, it is only possible to formulate hypotheses about the relations between urban landscapes and the ways of life that have developed there. The equipment of urban landscapes with a multifaceted infrastructure for leisure activities—the horse riding compound, hobby-airports, tennis courts and golf courses, the athletic fields and bicycle routes—give rise to the assumption that the lifestyle of the resident population is characterized by a certain leisure-mentality. One does not sit in a café and read the latest newspaper but rather one meets in the club. It doesn’t have to be that these clubs are socially homogenous. This might be a new form of the heterogeneity that was typical for classical urbanism. At the same time the low density makes possible the development of socio-culturally homogenous neighborhoods. In its totality however, a heterogeneous image, just like in high-density urban neighborhoods, can be found. The sectoral distribution of the economy gives cause to the assumption that in the higher density cores, especially if they are part of an urban landscape, you are more likely to find professional services and cultural production. In the low-density parts of the urban landscape, not only manufacturing firms but also research oriented firms settle. The attraction of the urban landscape as a whole could be grounded in the fact that overall it permits a higher diversity of lifestyles that the traditional European city. However, this also has to be reflected in the image of a space in order to be projectable to the outside. Not only regional-parks but also the creation of special places could be ways to increase the visibility of the urban landscape.

The ecological cost of this development is far from clear. Furthermore, with the propaganda terms ‘destructive sprawling’ and ‘surface consumption’, the answer is by no means complete. Material cycles, energy consumption, the contamination of ground water, of soil and air – all these questions need to be thoroughly researched. The studies concerning the economic, social, cultural and ecological aspects of the development of urban landscapes are just beginning. In a couple of years we will know if a landscape urbanism has developed and if we are witness to a new urban revolution in the sense of Lefebvre.
5. Urban landscape and landscape urbanism

During the transition from the Bassin Parisien to the metropolis, the nuclear city had the character of a "laboratory," as Sieverts (1997) has demonstrated. The region between the cities of Bremen and Hamburg was formed, with a population of 5 million, in 1962. It is characterized by a high degree of urbanization, a complex network of transportation routes, and a diverse range of landscapes. The region is known for its cultural and natural heritage, as well as its important economic activities, including shipping, fishing, and tourism. The city of Hamburg has a long history dating back to the 7th century AD, and is known for its cosmopolitan character and cultural diversity. The city is home to a number of important cultural institutions, including the Hamburg State Opera, the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Hamburg Museum of Art.

The Bassin Parisien, with a population of 10 million, is known for its dense network of transportation routes, including the Paris-Strasbourg railway line, which connects the city to the rest of France. The region is also known for its diverse range of landscapes, including the Sena

...
“circuitous”
8”x10”
ink on board

Leah Leeferman is an artist and graphic designer with a feverish interest in architecture and urban space. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.
www.inkbox.org/monu
Adi, Audi, Aldi

By Theo Deutinger

Over the last decade, the debate on the future of the German welfare state has been rising to a catastrophic climax: can Germany maintain the ‘high quality’ middle class economical giant while simultaneously keeping its intricate welfare system? Can Germany hold on to its ‘Vorsprung durch Technik’ or is it already too late? I argue that Germany has had an unconscious revolution, and become the country where Porsche owners shop at Aldi. In the following article he presents the unfolding of the mythical stages of Germany’s modernization, from Adi’s projective Third Reich to the Wirtschaftswunder to the triumph of cheapness...

Adi - “FOLLOW”: The masses in the 3rd Reich were seen as powerful instrument that could be used for the realization of political and military goals. The mastermind of this period, Adolf Hitler made promises to give work to everybody and lift the prosperity so that consumer goods would be affordable. Recognizing the need for leisure, projects like the Prora on Rügen were initiated to serve the masses, part of an intensive campaign to create a “healthy middle class” (see insert). But the taste of the middle class is mediocre and the monumentality of architecture is too sublime and frightening.

Contrary to the propaganda in the program of the NSDAP, the 3rd Reich with its racial, nationalistic and idiosyncratic policies was not suitable for the creation of a middle class. Since the phenomenon of a middle class is not defined by racial or geographical parameters and it is, rather, based on giving everybody the same opportunity to contribute to the whole out of its own will.

Hitler’s aggressive expansionist dreams left middle class projects like the Volkswagen linger in favor of conquering the whole of Europe, abusing the power of the masses instead of contributing to their individual benefits. The basic needs of a stable middle class, personal freedom, good education for everybody and trust in the governmental institutions were not there; the creation of a middle class was not the aim...

Point 16 of the NSDAP program:

We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, the immediate communalizing of big department stores, and their lease to small merchants at cheap rates, and that the utmost consideration shall be given to all small merchants in the allocation of State and municipal orders.
Audi – “PRODUCE”: After the Second World War, the German economy grew, fueled by the Marshall-Plan, at an unprecedented speed. Miraculous growth above 10% was achieved, generated by highly motivated Germans that put all their energy in rebuilding the nation and its economy. Disciplined by the former regime it was uncannily obvious for a society of a whole nation that their only task was to produce.

Building on the theory of “social market economy” (soziale Marktwirtschaft), a concept propagated by the architect of the Wirtschaftswunder Ludwig Erhard in his book “Wohlstand für Alle”, the market was stimulated and competition became the essential element of regulation. The whole theory was based on growth. The distribution of wealth to the masses was a mere side effect. Erhard explained it with an example: “if the “cake” becomes big enough, everybody will get a little piece.” And so it was. As the national economy grew, the average personal income grew and the average German became rich.

Due to the vast damages of the war and the unsuitability of the existing residential building stock, the shortage of appropriate living space was enormous. By the year 1949, only 94 million residential units had to serve 14,6 million households. Huge subsidies by the German government stimulated the real estate market and the building industry became the driving force of the German Wirtschaftswunder. An extraordinary building boom followed. Whole cities reappeared in the blink of an eye, designed according to a single formula: convenience. As a theory this city of convenience was phrased as “structured, dispersed city” (“gegliederte aufgelockerte Stadt”) and because of the extreme speed of development the theory became narrowed down to easy access of the city by car. Everything had to serve the practical needs of this time. Everything heroic was wrong and suspicious.

The city of convenience is a trivial movement in construction determined by mediocrity and built by architects nobody ever heard of. It is amazing that in such an enormous period of production, where brands like Porsche, BMW, Mercedes became big, in architectural terms not one single building was worth mentioning. The building industry, the motor of the German Wirtschaftswunder, left behind its cities and buildings as fallout. Cities like Bochum, Essen and Erlangen standing there like an old worn out Beatle uninteresting for the masses because their lack of luxury, uninteresting for the expert because of the lack of maintenance and extraordinarity.

Coinciding with the end of the building boom in the 80s, the basis of the German economy made the transition from manufacturing to service. Although growth slowed, income levels remained high and working hours were reduced; this provided people with time and money, the two main ingredients for consumption. With the removal of the Berlin Wall an architectonic element finally disappeared which separated two Germanys.

A new era seems to begin. A bigger middle class = more consumers = more wealth.

We are living in the culture of middle class. Here in Holland Pim Fortuyn, a populist politician that was killed by a fanatic animal welfare activist, is our hero. Populists are the ones who understand us. Coming home from McDonalds, H&M is what we undress before we have sex in our IKEA bed. Staring at the ceiling out of sheet-rock from Knauf or Rigips. The only architect we know is Friedensreich Hundertwasser (*best known architect in the western world, source: AD/3 2004), an Austrian Artist who made colorful designs for apartment blocks, churches, restaurants and a spa.


Aldi – “CONSUME”: With consumption as the new task of the middle class, new companies entered the stage. Industrial corporations like VW, Miele and AEG were suddenly joined by Aldi, Media Markt and RTL, etc. The ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ already left Germany for a global trip to Japan, going further to the ‘Tiger States’ and will finally arrive in China, where it will give birth to the biggest middle class ever. Together with this economic wonder the companies went on tour in search of cheap and motivated workforce, leaving behind the unified Germans with their expensive cars.

Yet the German middle class became mobile too, joining a larger movement throughout Europe, set in motion by holidays and events. The formation of this European middle class coincided with globalization, the IT-boom and a huge wave of privatization, as the new dogma of European politics. As if private consumption needed a political counteraction, governments started to sell all their assets, gained in the period of production in order to simulate growth. Government’s intervention decreased and left everything up to the market forces.

In this environment discount-companies evolved, luring with no-frills offers enabling the realization of dreams for little money to vast parts of the society and thus stimulating them to consume. Especially the ability to travel distances with almost no money changed the urban system completely. As mass-mobility initiated the...
suburb as the 20th century city structure, cheap flights and fast train connections transformed a whole continent into a huge fragmented patchwork. No city can serve these exclusive needs of the middle class, treating cities like homes and a continent like a city. The public space is not the urban park anymore but the Mediterranean coast in summertime and the Alps in winter. The quick shift from here (Germany) to there (Ibiza) is massive, making the Airport of Palma de Mallorca the fastest growing airport in Europe and the 23rd largest airport on the planet (*http://www.a2a.aero/stats_traffic.cfm)! Cities like London, Paris or Amsterdam retain no other meaning than being huge shopping malls or nice open-air museums. Culture is dissolved in phenomena formerly described as banal. The biggest cultural events are the Oktoberfest in Munich (6.3 million visitors), the car fair in Frankfurt (14 million visitors) and the Euro2004 in Portugal (0.5 million visitors) but if one considers smaller events like erotic fairs, tuner meetings, dog shows, etc., middle class culture would cover Europe. Just like the middle class in its adolescence did not care about status, now in its phase of maturity, luxury and cheapness is key. And the market is stretching out its helping hand. After lowering prices for air-flights to a point that flying becomes cheaper than hitchhiking now cruises, once known as the symbol of ultimate splendor become affordable for everyone. ‘Easycruise’ is starting this year with a new, no-frills cruise concept based on a day-to-day pay rate docking every day at a different Mediterranean seaport.

The adjustment of the market to the consumer with no-frills products, especially in the infrastructure sector is reinforcing the model of the patchwork city. Proximities become more important than size – extremism is chosen instead of mediocrity.

If the middle class in the period of production was about mediocrity, the middle class of consumption is about excellence.

**Conclusion**

According to the latest study about the trust of the German society in their companies, Porsche and Aldi were at the top. Looking at the consumer behavior one recognizes that there is no such thing as segregation in society (Zweiklassengesellschaft) but freedom of choice is so refined that people choose driving a Porsche and shopping at Aldi. You buy what you believe is worth the price. Germany manages to be expensive and cheap at the same time! Similar to London, the only European capital that attracts high-end as well as low-end flights and establishes a crucial position as European air-hub. So it turns out that the cheapest way by air from Amsterdam to Vienna is via London!

Our scope as urban planners needs to be extended. Urban design as it is practiced currently is nothing more than large-scale architecture. It is lacking any kind of basic understanding of how a middle class family is planning its destination for the next summer vacation. The inter-urban scale is the scale that people experience their daily lives and how they choose their living. Cities can only be understood, organized and managed if we see them and its infrastructure in an international and global context.

It is not anymore about how to design the city but how to position it.

*Theo Deutinger is an architect and lives in Rotterdam.*

This essay about the three essential periods of European modernity marks the starting point of a more thorough investigation that should contribute to a better understanding of planning in Europe. Currently we are looking for a university / institution that provide us a platform to extend our investigation. If you are interested in contributing in any form please contact: t.deutinger@hetnet.nl
Middle Class Emulations

By Angie Waller

There is no standard definition of middle class. The gap between the poorest and the wealthiest is a wide canyon, and the area in between – the “middle” is usually defined by what it is not. For instance, in the second 2004 presidential debate, John Kerry repeated his campaign promise to fight for the middle class meaning his tax hikes would only affect himself, the president, and the moderator, Charlie Gibson of ABC news. A more concrete definition was set by factcheck.org who chose a family income between $25,000 to $75,000 a year as middle class– the mid range of latest census data.

Aesthetics of the middle class that no one knows how to define are somehow clinched in television sitcoms. A recent example is The OC on Fox. The show’s web site uses the synopsis: “The O.C., also known as Orange County, California, is an idyllic paradise – a wealthy, harbor-front community where everything and everyone appears to be perfect...”

If The OC classifies one attempt to pinpoint middle class aesthetics, the real world example of this cookie cutter community model is in the makings in Beijing, where Chinese consumer aspirations are increasingly Western and 70% of developers are emphasizing Western styles as a marketing tool. This influence goes beyond names which include among Orange County the likes of Long Island, SoHO, and Museum of Modern...
Art. Not only are familiar names crudely attached, so are the aesthetics. From a snapshot, you might feel you have entered the set of The OC or The Long Island (if there was such a show). Both require a shallow level of engagement to be understood. To walk among these show rooms and recently built developments in Beijing, culturally removed from their historical precedents (i.e. orange groves and avocados or the first Disney theme park) is the same feeling the characters of the movie Galaxy Quest must have felt when they entered a “real” alien space craft modeled after the space craft in their spoof Star Trek series.

The plot of The OC, deception behind the perfect facade is a familiar theme to American TV dramas. It is hard to foresee if the Beijing version will play out in the same way. However, perhaps its lack of plot and removal from television clichés allow it to be the best way to conclude the affects of middle class culture on urban planning – when all aesthetics are removed from their original Western contexts and placed in a Beijing Petri dish for microscopic examination.

Long Island If I were old enough to have had the experience of walking in to a Chevrolet showroom in 1957, I imagine the lobby of the Long Island Beijing showroom would have given me a sense of deja vu. The cardboard models of the new Long Island homes were painstakingly constructed to sample every mid-century American suburban cliché. The catalogs for Long Island have the heading “Back to the Future” – a slogan commonly used by New Urbanism in the United States. What new urbanism in America and China have in common is nostalgia for a past that never was. However, for the Chinese, new urbanism is the American middle class suburb of the 50’s.

The Long Island homes will be series of duplexes with small brick porches and private back yards. The model had eclectic decoration that fused cow print pillows and snake skin lounges with oversized stuffed polar bears lying next to long stem roses on Santa Fe colored plaid comforters. Not only did the choice in fabrics look like clip art packaged with 3D software, the layout of the house provided isometric viewing options of the living room from the upstairs hallway – similar to SIM city.

Convenient traffic at The Home of Tycoons A common companion to urban sprawl, is the car and the freeway. The building of a new freeway implies traffic jams, more commuting time, and the demise of public transportation. In the Chinese real estate offices, the freeway is the focal point to sales literature, models and virtual fly-throughs. An example of the fetishization of the freeway is at the Home of Tycoons - a luxury high rise site on the Third Ring Road. In addition to resembling an Ethan Allen furniture showroom, the lobby has a plasma screen displaying a flythrough of the future development as well as the freeway. The animations were not just airplane perspectives of soon to come saunas, but an action-packed explosion of the future city. The freeways are depicted emerging from the ground just in time to meet the growing
I asked the MOMA realtor, Jack Chang, if MOMA Beijing had anything to do with MoMA, New York, or if the development MOMA Beijing had any areas designated for art exhibition. After all, one of the interiors appeared to be an artist’s bedroom with paints and an easel and one of the sales brochures pictured MoMA's founders with the caption “Performance art.” I could tell by Jack’s expression that clients do not ask this question. During an awkward silence, he struggled to find an answer that would please me, the potential buyer. Finally, he responded that MoMA's lower level would feature the Alexandra Gym, rated #1 in Asia for the past three years.

Angie Waller is an artist and lives in New York.
The disappearance of the middle class is now taken for granted. Direct evidence is the bankruptcy of German retailer Karstadt. Middle-class clothing retailer C&A has also fallen on hard times. But has the middle class really gone? And if not, what has happened to it? And what are the implications for urban design and architecture.

The complete extinction of the middle class is far from certain if you think about it. Just look at car sales in the Netherlands. For more than 30 years the Opel Astra (previously the Kadett) has been one of the top-three best-selling cars in the country. For years this car has been almost a middle-class mascot, and it hasn’t declined in popularity because of the supposed middle-class crisis. Meanwhile, the current range of TV programmes is proof that, when it comes to taste, the middle class is more strongly represented than ever before. Extreme makeovers, travel shows, interior redecorating, love islands, dating shows and big-brother series are all standard fare. That these reflect middle-class values is clear. Viewing figures are all that matter. These are the most popular things on TV, so they simply must cater to middle-class taste. The middle class is still around. But what does it look like?

The middle class in disguise

Changing the behaviour of typical people (once called the middle class) gathered force in the 1970s. The 1950s-style behaviour expected of a society segregated according to religious or other persuasion (Catholic, Protestant, Socialist, Liberal) was becoming less recognisable. That choice of four was losing validity. So how many types of people were there? For commercial as well as political reasons, the postal code became the tool to gauge the temperature in the country at the time. In the Netherlands there are six million postal codes, i.e. six million households whose activities were closely monitored. (1) Three households share each postcode, and details concerning income, car and shopping were known for each code in the 1970s. But this control system seemed to be failing, too. By the mid-1980s the big supermarket chains discovered that the range of goods on the shelves didn’t meet the needs of the customers. The neighbourhood postal codes didn’t reveal consistent information about buying habits. After extensive research, experts came to the bewildering conclusion that the buying habits of the modern consumer were completely unpredictable. As soon as they thought they had discerned a trend in a consumer group, the pattern turned 180 degrees on its head. The 420,000 postal codes were broken open. The consumer market no longer consisted of households, but of individuals, each with his or her client card. Buying habits were individually registered (Delta in Belgium and Albert Heijn in the Netherlands) All individual clients together determined the assortment on the supermarket shelves. Mass customisation was discovered and the middle-class consumer had become a whimsical, strong-minded individual who was difficult to recognise.

The middle class exists!

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De middenklasse bestaat!

Dat de middenklasse is verdwenen wordt inmiddels beschouwd als een voldongen feit. Het faillissement van het Duitse winkelbedrijf Karstadt is hiervan een direct voorbeeld. Ook de middenklasse modeleverancier C&A heeft betere tijden gekend. Maar is de middenklasse echt verdwenen en als deze niet is verdwenen wat is er dan gebeurd en wat is de impact hiervan op stedenbouw en architectuur.

Het totale uitsterven van de middenklasse lijkt bij nader inziens niet zo heel duidelijk. Wanneer er wordt gekeken naar de autowerkoop blijkt in Nederland de Opel Astra (de vroegere Kadett) al meer dan 30 jaar aan het verlies te lijden. In de top 3 van verkoopstellingen, travel programme's, love islands, dating shows en big-brother series zijn we deze te vingertrefwaardig om duidelijk te zijn: kijken of het een feit is of niet. De meeste mensen bekijken deze programme's dus ze moeten wel aan de smaak van de middenklasse voldoen. De middenklasse bestaat, maar hoe ziet ze eruit?

De middenklasse in vermomming

Het veranderen van het gedrag van de standaardmens (de toenmalige middenklasse) heeft zich ingezet in de jaren zeventig. Het verwachte gedrag van de verzelfde samenleving (de katholieke, de protestants-christelijke, de socialistische en de neutrale of liberale) de jaren vijftig was langzamerhand aan het verdwijnen. Het keuzelandscap in vier soorten bleek op te bestaan; hoeveel soorten mensen zouden er zijn? Om commerciële, maar ook om politieke redenen is destijds de postcode de thermometerteller geworden van de handelswijze van het land. In Nederland bestaan 6 miljoen postcodes; dus 6 miljoen huishoudens waarvan de handelswijze nauwkeurig werd volgt. Drie huishoudens hebben één en dezelfde postcode en per postcode was in de jaren zeventig bekend wat de gegevens waren van het inkomen, auto en boodschappen. Ook dit controlessysteem leek te falen. Midden jaren 80 kwamen grote supermarkeetchronicten tot de ontdekking dat het aangeboden winkelassortiment niet goed overeenkwam met de wensen van de klant. De buurtpostcodes gaven geen consistente informatie meer over kopersgedrag. Na uitgebreid onderzoek kwam men tot een onthullende ontdekking; er was geen bell op de inkopen (lees: gedrag) van de huidige consument te trekken. Zodra men dacht een patroon in een consumentengroep te ontdekken, veranderde dat patroon terstond 180 graden. De 420.000 postcodes werden opengesneden. De consumentenmarkt bestond niet meer uit huishoudens, maar uit individuen met zijn of haar eigen klantenkaart. Het kooipgedrag werd

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The individual and architecture (housing)

Why does the above not apply in the housing sector? Firstly, in terms of life-span, houses cannot be compared to consumer products such as food, clothes and cars. In the Netherlands a building has an average life of one hundred years. (2) Secondly, what’s on offer on the housing market cannot be compared with the choice available when it comes to consumer goods. Dwellings are always in short supply. This scarcity forces people to live in what the market offers. We hope that developers and architects know what people want in terms of housing. But if the obedient middle-class homeowner of old has now become a strong-minded and unpredictable housing consumer, then who knows what he wants? Probably the resident himself? He moves house every seven years on average. But individual self-determination in architecture usually results in a chaotic overall picture. Where do we draw the line between what is acceptable and what brings chaos? And who decides where to draw it?

The designer and the unexpected

Drawing lines, which is in fact what a designer does, is a matter of including or excluding things. It is a way of fixing the surroundings, and behaviour too. The danger with drawing is that it has become a method. We draw as we’ve always drawn. We still draw houses for the same patterns of usage: living room for living, bedroom for sleeping, bathroom for washing. Middle-class housing is designed thus, and built in large numbers.

The task for the architect is to translate the wishes of occupants. The difficult question for designers is to create a living environment for the whimsical housing consumer that can be freely inhabited and will be habitable for around a hundred years. The paradox in all this lies in defining things and allowing for change at the same time. The designer draws and fixes, but the dwelling should be able to accommodate change too.

Dwellings in the middle-class market segment are not equipped to accommodate change. When alterations are required, the whole undertaking usually becomes a nightmare for all concerned. A good example is that standard middle-class home extension we call the dormer. This adventure is a hell, and so can be useful when it comes to advising homeowners against the idea. Everyone concerned – the designer, builder, urban designer, local planner, residents themselves and neighbours of course – is unhappy with the effort required to complete the job. Moreover, the result is often substandard. Even though nobody is happy, the project is still the most common amongst the Dutch middle class. Dwellings are designed as finished articles, as intended by the architect. They need no further alteration. But the home for the new middle-class citizen will have to accommodate change. The ‘finished’ dwellings of the past hundred years are the Karstads of the future.
The middle-class home of the future

The task for the architect is to draw the dwelling. But the dwelling should not be ‘drawn’ as such but designed for a whimsical occupant who moves house every seven years. Building technology in combination with behaviour shows that ‘open’ structural systems can satisfy needs. Load-bearing walls of concrete and stone are no longer suitable in housing construction. The future belongs to frame structures, which allow walls to be removed and alterations to be made with ease.

What’s more, the architect will have to design the structure of dwellings in such a way that they remain the palace of the proud owner and neighbour even after altera-

digie, de welstandscommissie, de bewoners en natuurlijk ook de buren; niemand is blij met de inspanning die verricht moet worden om deze uitbreiding tot stand te brengen. Daar komt nog bij dat het resultaat vaak zeer overig is. Niemand tevreden, terwijl deze bouwopgave de grootste in middenklasse Nederland is. Zoals de architect het betaamt zijn de woningen af ontworpen; ze zijn klaar, niet meer aan te komen. De woning van de nieuwe middenklasse zal wel deze aanpassingen moeten kunnen verdragen. De ‘geslo-
ten’ woningen van de laatste 100 jaar, zullen de Karstade van de toekomst zijn.

De Middenklassewoning van de toekomst

De architect staat voor de taak de tekening van de woning. De woning dienst niet te worden getekend, maar te worden ontworpen voor een grillige bewoner, die om de zeven jaar weer naar de volgende woning gaat. Bouwmethodiek in combinatie met gedrag, laat zien dat ‘open’ bouwsystemen hieraan kunnen voldoen. Dragende wanden van beton en steen zullen uit de woningbouw moeten verdwijnen. De toekomst is aan framebouw, waar wanden makkelijk zijn te verwijderen en aanpassingen doorgevoerd kunnen worden.

Bovendien zal de architect het samenstel van woningen zodanig moeten ontwerpen dat deze woningen met de bedoelde aanpassingen nog steeds het paleis van de trotse bewoner en buren is.

Kortom, de architect zal zichzelf opnieuw moeten uitvinden. En wanneer dat het geval is zal hij zichzelf terug zien bij de middenklasse programma’s op de tv. Dan is de architect de held van de middenklasse. En dat is toch wat elke architect wil?

Robert Winkel is director of Mei architects and urban designers, Rotterdam. Mei invented the Smarthouse, dwellings made out of steel frames.

Examples of dwellings built using a frame structure

1. Dutch system of postal codes.
   There are around 420,000 postal codes in the Netherlands. A full code consists of six figures and covers an average of seventeen addresses or ‘delivery points’. The four-figure map of postal codes consists of 4000 areas, in each of which the first four figures of every delivery point are identical. Natural boundaries such as roads, waterways and buildings define the extent of the areas. The five-figure postal-code map consists of 35,000 areas that are automatically generated within the ‘natural’ four-figure postal-code boundaries.

2. Interview with Berhard Leupen (PhD, Delft University of Technology) by Robert Winkel held on December 14, 2004
Middle Class Desires

By UAS

The German Government is debating most recently if it should end single family home subsidies and commuting subsidies in order to counter the large deficits. The initial motive behind those subsidies since the end of WWII, to create more housing became obsolete years ago. In the meantime these subsidies fostered processes that transformed German cities into amorphic super-regions. While traditional central cities empty out, the Regions grow and flourish.

Kassel a city in the middle of Germany, situated directly on the border to the former GDR exhibits symptomatic developments. Often referred to as the only East German city situated in the West, Kassel combines East German as well as West German tendencies in development. The city can be classified as representative of a new middle European type of city. Kassel has lost about 10000 inhabitants in the last 10 years (5%).
about 1000 people every year. Five years ago Kassel had 195,000 inhabitants, in 2010 according to estimates it will be 17,000 less. In Reality the city doesn’t lose all of those people. Parallel to the emptying out of the city the Region will probably grow by about 11,000 people. It can be assumed that about 2/3 of the urban flight will remain in the Region. In that sense Kassel is less the victim of population loss but in the middle if a decisive transformation process. Generally one can assume that the main reasons for people leaving the city are qualities of life that the city cannot provide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Kassel</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>202,000</td>
<td>210,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>196,000</td>
<td>216,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>179,000</td>
<td>227,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ownership of a freestanding home with a private garden is one of the existing desires. Wishes like this are not a new invention but the seem to reflect existential desires. The were existing all along only they were not affordable for the majority. Since the state was giving out subsidies for single family homes the housing dreams of millions became realizable for a broader population. Germany subsidizes private housing construction

Existing boundaries become obsolete. The Region is integrated into the city.
Subventions can guide the form of cities. The existing subsidies would create a ring city in their extreme. The other extreme would create a hyper dense point city. Kassel recently did step one towards a ring city. Step five would have an equal density of 1000 people per sqkm.

Urban flight. The Region becomes filled as a low-density housing paradise.
Kassel reaches its desirable expression with a uniform density of 1000 people per sqkm.

with up to 22,000 Euros per family. For the 11,000 people that will move into the Kassel region until 2010 the government will spend about 60,000,000 Euros if we assume 2 children families. Next to the housing subsidies, the commuting from the Region into the left-behind cities will be subsidized with a commuting-bonus. These traffic subventions transform into a luxurious city reminiscent tool. The emergency exit to the city is kept open and all fears to be cut off the city were muted. The initially socially motivated ideas developed into a middle-class tax-subsidy machine. Urban flight could not be subsidized more efficiently.

Paradoxically today it is politicians that complain the loudest
Even though the city is not dense in general, some parts can reach high densities. Most parts are mono-functional, some combine two functions, others are completely mixed.
The parts of the city shrink to 40%, the region grows to 225%. All parts coexist in the landscape.

Just like the growth of regions was subsidized, the shrinking of urban quarters has to be guided with subventions.
All parts are floating, comparable to villages, connected via transportation systems in the landscape.

The parts of the so-called region create together with the parts of the city a new „City of fulfilled desires“. Region and City complement each other. To achieve an equal density of 1000 people per square kilometer the Region has to grow to 225% and the city has to shrink to 40%. To guide such an extensive transformation process the city has to create new streams of subsidies – comparable to the home owning subsidies. The inner city shrinking processes must be guided not stopped. Process strategies have to be developed to regulate the developments in the city over the next 50 years in which according to forecasts the population of the city will shrink to 70% of its current size. The expected population for the city for 2050 will be around 140,000 people.

The ideal form of shrinking has to be found. One possibility would be a shrinking of the parts towards their respective center, so that at the fringes ring like parks could develop. An alternative would be a spotting of small parks – which would probably reflect real processes better. In the same way also the growth of the region has to be guided. Strategic rules would be able to guide such transformation processes.

UAS - Urban Architectural Studies at University of Kassel
Wolfgang Schulze, Alexander Söder, Heinz - Josef Geissen, Bernd Upmeyer

UAS is currently working on a concept for the future development of the city of Kassel. Middle Class Desires is part of a longterm study Wildnis Kassel. More Information can be found at www.uni-kassel.de/FB6/UAS
Book review: Integrated Perspectives on Places of Modernity By Kai J. Jonas
In 2004 a book was published with a remarkable concept, in German though, but nonetheless. The two sociologists, Joachim Fischer and Michael Makropoulos, identified a prototypical place of modernity, the Potsdam Square in Berlin and presented an profound analysis using seven current approaches in sociological reasoning. The historical scope of the approaches differ, some go back to the early days of the double square Potsdamer Platz/Leipziger Platz, other only look at the reconstruction after 1989.

The reason why I am taken by this book is twofold. First, defining places of modernity such as the Potsdam Square and using them as prototypes for a profound analysis is a method of combined social scientific and architectural/planning endeavours that I believe to be rather fruitful for the future. Since need more comprehensive analyses for decision making processes in the field of urban planning when we want to go beyond monolithic and thus random planning in accelerated areas of growth, we also need exemplary places, prototypes as “laboratories” and units of analysis. We should devise a framework to detect those urban prototypes. Some theorists have, astounded themselves by highspeed growth, posited that planning in economically uprising nations is anachronistic because planning errors are simply rebuilt. This may be fascinating, but it is wrong. Humans continuously strive for behavioral security and not continous change. Secondly, the book is widening the theoretical scope of existing debates of architectural sites. It can help architects and urban planning to enrich their analytical framework. Furthermore, it puts all social sciences in demand to partake in this analysis. Some, as demonstrated in this book are already apt and able to do so. Others, such as psychology have lost or at least not developed their initial expertise.

The seven chapters cover the following perspectives. In the first chapter, by Joachim Fischer, marks a demanding introduction into the topic. On the basis of Plessner’sphilosophical anthropology, the author, by means of a succession of elegant phenomenon-commentary figures throughout the text, posits that the Potsdam Square is a project of civil society that tries to manifest itself again at this place of construction and destruction. The following chapter is driven by a rational choice perspective tries to analyze the planning and construction of a common good by looking at the behavioral options of the relevant players. The approach unfortunately falls short of an in depth analysis. To do so, classified information above and beyond the official sources and protocols would have been necessary to allow for a reasoning that goes beyond official views in some instances. The next three chapters employing a system theory approach, a cultural studies and a critical theory position. In the case of system theory it is a novel approach that definitely should spark discussion, and overall these are worth reading pieces that add up to a deeper understanding of the Potsdam Square. Using gender studies as a standpoint to analyze the Potsdam Square may certainly have its entitlement, yet the chapter also offers an insight into the development of the underlying theory, compared to the other perspectives in the book. Hannelore Bublitz and Dierk Spreen describe the Potsdam Square as a “bachelors machine” as a looking glass that unveils the power structures in society. Michael Makropoulos take on the square is rooted in discourse analysis. In a well written integration of historical developments he generates a comprehensive understanding of the myth of masscultured urbanity. The final chapter is comprised of a detailed chronological depiction of the development of the Potsdam Square. For the better understanding of some chapters, I would recommend to first read this chapter and thus brush up one’s historical knowledge.

In sum, the strength of the book lies in its novel approach, defining a prototypical place of modernity and analyzing it from multiple perspectives. This character is both demand for architecture and planning to integrate other perspectives and for social sciences to further this path of integrated analyses.


Dr. Kai J. Jonas is a social psychologist at the University of Jena.
The third issue of Monu invites projects, articles, interviews and photographs that address the topic of political urbanism. Our third issue will be released in summer of 2005. The deadline for submissions is end of April 2005. For more information contact: editors@monu.org

www.monu.org

The relations of urban form and typology to ideology, power and politics.
Call for submissions for Monu 3.0 Political Urbanism - the relations of urban form and typology to ideology, power and politics

For our third issue of Monu we invite articles, projects, photographs, artwork, research projects and wild speculations that are engaged in the field power/politics and urban form/typology on any level. Interested contributors should contact the editors ASAP at editors@monu.org. The deadline for contributions will be the end of April 2005.

scale 1:1,000,000

The red state – blue state phenomenon became commonplace even in Europe in the last years: Democrats have the upper hand in the coastal states and republicans in the rest of the country. But not only the US have a particular map when it comes to politics – traditionally the two most southern states of Germany have also been the most conservative ones. In Bavaria the conservative party had a hold on executive and legislative for almost 60 years now and achieved that state and the party are virtually synonymous in perception; the political party as a brand for an entire state.

scale 1:10,000

NY Times columnist David Brooks conceptualized exurbia as a place that houses a certain value-system and political convictions. Exurbs are communities that are both spatially and functionally virtually completely detached from urban centers. And they are as Brooks argues, communities of conservative, family value oriented households. In the 2004 presidential election, while Democrats generally did well in urban regions – George Bush and the Republicans generally won overwhelmingly in those new communities on the fringes of urban life.

scale 1:1,000

New urban typologies such as shopping malls, office parks and gated communities or new urbanism towns create their own political microclimate. Classical democratic principles as invented in the polis and developed in democratic cities and regions over centuries seem to be suspended in these environments. In a mall you buy your right to existence with your identity as a consumer and the security guards are enforcing house rules that have been drawn up in corporate boardrooms. The inhabitants of gated communities or other post-modern residential typologies together with the purchase contract generally also sign away part of their civil liberties. Given that these and similar kinds of typologies are becoming more and more parts of our urban environment what are the larger consequences of these perforations of the democratic process and the civic space?