URBAN TRANS FORMATION

Edited by Ilka & Andreas Ruby

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Euro **2.21**

Prag Euro **2.20**

Vilnius

Euro **1.72**

Warschau

Euro **1.38**

Kiew

96

Bratislava

Euro **2.08**

Budapest

Euro **1.96**

Bukarest

3.12

Euro **1.50**

Sofia

Munich Euro **2.83**

2.16

Ljubljana

2.73

Euro

Athens

Euro **2.**

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A Green Masterplan
Is Still a Masterplan

Mark Jarzombek

In the last ten years, we have seen the first generation of greened masterplans. But while planning and even zoning – generally speaking – are certainly important, the masterplan culture needs to be challenged. It developed in the 1960s, when, with the failures of cities looming over history, urban leaders wanted a way to restore confidence in the downtowns and to create a positive sense of destiny and purpose. Originally, the masterplan was the basis upon which the zoning ordinance and site usage regulations were defined and enforced, but then in the 1980s the reach of the masterplan expanded to include questions of tourism and culture. City centers were no longer to be torn down arbitrarily, but were to be preserved as civic environments. In that sense, the ideals of the Modernist city came to be fused with the remnants of the so-called traditional city. Holding all this together was the image of a city that was not too new and not too old, an image based on a modern notion of block ownership in combination with a rationally-controlled sentimentality.

Masterplans, however, have always promised more than they could deliver. Even today most preserve the notion of static square blocks and of individual buildings. Most envision the urban core as a tourist and convention center destination surrounded by residential suburbs. Most are accessed by highways. And one always finds the usual assortment of parks, streams, so-called "green corridors," and "green buildings," and where possible, preservation districts to house the elite and serve as tourist magnets. The basic premise of a financial, urban core and outlying suburbia is almost never challenged. All this is particularly well suited to the developed countries where there are no millions of people filling vast slums and where new cities are a thing of the remote past.

The masterplan has exhausted itself. It was a transition from the post-WWII era that helped cities survive in an age of urban doubt. But now, cities are thriving, and more and more people are living there, so what we need is not a new and improved masterplan, but a possibly new understanding of the city, and in particular of a city

stripped of sentimental associations that are always embedded in the masterplan.[1] An eco-city should speak to the eco-revolution.

A book like *Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism*, edited by Dominique Gauzin-Müller, for example, reveals many of the problems associated with current-day eco-urbanism. The developments that are taking root in Germany, France, and elsewhere are certainly steps in the right direction: green roofs, landscaping, waste control, heritage maintenance, energy, education, and planning. But in the end, the book represents nothing more than an uncritical celebration of the greening of the European masterplan; this pragmatist compulsion of cautious improvements, as tactically important as they may be, seems now to consume so much of our energy that more utopian ambitions have been pushed to the side or limited to a few prestige buildings. If Green becomes the new norm, it becomes little more than the new version of the same bureaucracies that got us into trouble in the first place. We have become so used to the masterplan that we assume that this is the only way that a city can be represented and built.

My criticism also holds true for many of the roughly 50 projects featured in the book *Eco-Urbanism*. The projects range from the serious-minded Subic Bay Philippines project (Koetter, Kim and Associates) with its Euro-centric gravitas, to the Eco-cuteness of Ecolonia (Atelier Lucien Kroll) and the Halifax EcoCity Project in Australia (Paul Francis Downtown). Somewhere in-between is the eco-mall urbanism of the Glendale Town Center California (Elizabeth Moule and Stephanos Polyzoides). Why Kirchsteigfeld, Germany (Rob Krier/Christoph Kohl), with its "retro" neo-19th-century urban blocks, is in the book is a mystery except that it, perhaps, proves that the ponderous urbanism of the 19th century can, in fact, and is still a viable urban model since it too can now be done in an appropriately "green" way.[2] All except three are in the modernized west and none are in the undeveloped world.[3] A critical discussion of these projects – outlining their successes and failures, their political agendas and theoretical subtexts – is, however, nowhere to be found.

Are we then no longer able to envision cities built on different models than the ones we live in? Think back to the early modern hopes for linear cities, path cities, and radiant cities of Chandigarh, Islamabad, Brazilia, and Canberra. Urban design, going strong even into the 1970s, was, however, deflated by the rise of urban planning and, in a sense by architecture itself, which became so uninterested in urban design that most urban design programs died or stumbled ahead with minimal funding. I cannot recall a single meeting in that institution in which I teach, in which the architects have met with the urban planners down the hall to discuss their common interests and concerns; this is a common breach in academia. I do not mean that we need to fantasize about some wonderful – and probably bizarre - alternative, but that we need to break out of the mold that urban planning has imposed on our urban imagination in the last forty years. The cumulative result has been a complete erasure – from the

[1] In *Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism* we read that "the principles of sustainable development encompass an appreciation of social and cultural roots," which lead the "protection of characteristic residential districts" [Dominique Gauzin-Müller, *Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism* (Bern: Birkhäuser, 2002) p. 87]. This means that it is impossible to shape a city in the context of the eco-revolution, unless these historic districts are recognized as part of museo-urbanism suitable, for attracting boutiques, restaurants and residences for the elite.

[2] There are several projects that seem to defy the purpose of the book, like *Landsberger Allee* in Berlin (Daniel Libeskind) and the revitalization of Savona Italy (Valerio Saggini&Stefania Belloni). What they have to do with eco-urbanism escapes me.

[3] Most of the projects, as Richard Ingersoll has already noted, are, in fact, not urban, but suburban developments. Richard Ingersoll, "Building Nature's Ruin?," in *Harvard Design Magazine 18* (Spring/Summer 2003), p. 4.

point of view of both architects and planners – of our capacity to more radically and imaginatively rethink our cities.

The "Smart City" by Studio 8

Ironically, largely because of the eco-revolution, *architects* have begun to make serious contributions to the question of the city. All too often this takes the form of designing a group of high-tech, "sustainable" towers which are then mistaken for a form of urbanism. Increasingly, however, there are architects who are capable of thinking at the urban scale without falling back on the crutches of either green-building urbanism or masterplan urbanism. Take, for example, the Quangming Urban Design Competition for an eco city for a half a million people in southern China that was held in 2006. Remarkably, among the final three winners, there were no urban planners. It was a message that urban planners need to heed.

The most "green" of the projects was proposed by Studio 8, a London-based firm, headed by the architect C. J. Lim, who was born in Malaysia and studied at the Architectural Association. The project, entitled Smart City,[Fig. 1/2] was composed of artificially constructed, "green" residential hills that defined not only the city, but that also contained aquaculture terraces and vertical farms. The hills were basically inclined urban-economic landscapes that maximized natural lighting, ventilation and vistas. In the water-ways between the hills, there were artificial beaches and recreation areas. The whole was a car-free zone interconnected by gondolas. The scheme does look "utopian," but in principle there is nothing about it that is beyond present day capabilities. The reason it lost to a more conventional proposal was that it has become difficult as a society to envision us living any differently than we do.

The Studio 8 plan for Quangming has obvious connections to the ideas of the Metabolists of the 1960s, but it is a vast improvement over standard Metabolist conventions of a formally anonymous, post-individualist society. Today, with the gradual collapse of Postmodernism – ending, one can say, in the star architect phenomenon – there is a new yearning, especially among Europeans, for a neo-Modernist and neo-Metabolist-style return to anonymity. However, even though there are any number of architects who are trying to return to the principles of biological rationalism, combined usually with severe doses of technological asceticism, the urban as such is rarely addressed. This is more than obvious with such vast buildings as Kenzo Tange's Fuji Broadcasting Center where Metabolism becomes slick, cool, and corporate. What makes the building "metabolic" is simply the fact that it is big and that people walk and move about the gigantic spaces. Metabolism (here more as "survival" than "revival") has blended to some extent with Rem Koolhaas's idea of Generic City, except that the Metabolist City is grounded in a critique of individuality whereas Generic City is a critique of capital. Neither were originally envisioned to address questions of ecology and to retrofit them in the language of green as disingenuous.
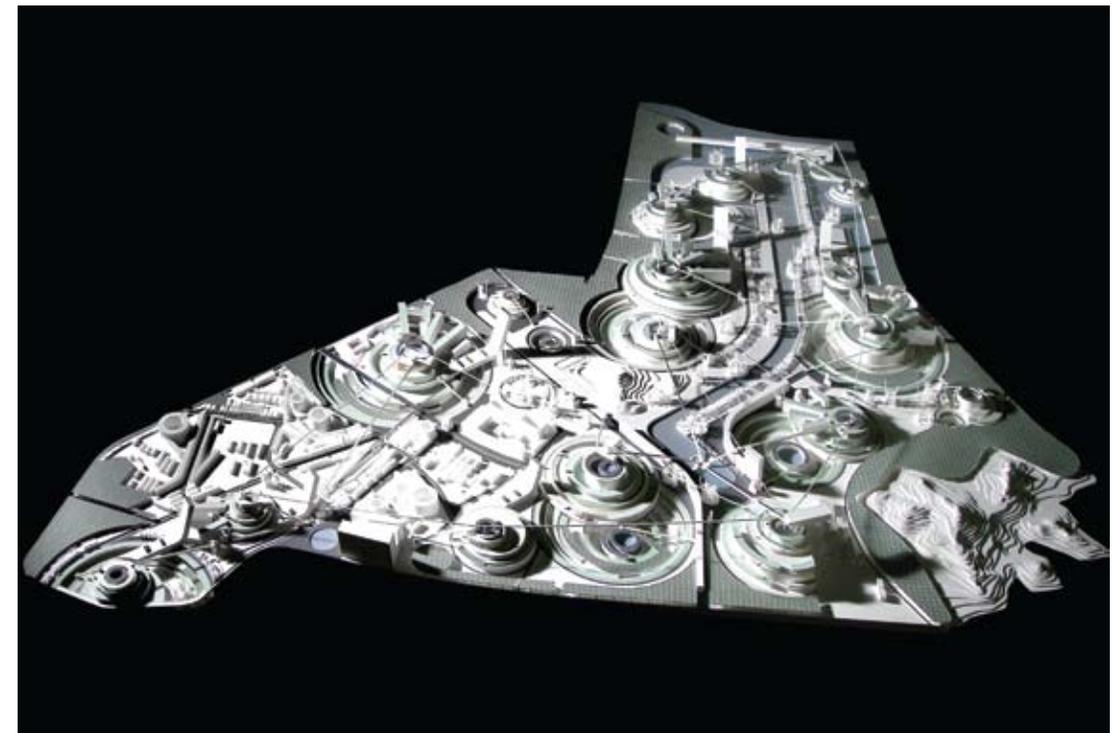

Fig. 1: Smart City, Perspective

Fig. 2: Smart City, Studio 8, Quangming Urban Design Competition, 2005, Model

To make matters worse, both possess an aesthetics of cynicism that is clearly incompatible with the need for a more positive image of a city that one would expect from urban life. But just as that image cannot come from the conventions of masterplan urbanism, which is still beholden to the museal preservation of "historical culture," it cannot come from mega-buildings that are little more than stand-ins for urban life.

What Studio 8 proposes is, therefore, all the more extraordinary. It is neither an anti-urban, generic city, nor an empty form, metabolized by tiny humans. Nor is there, from the point of view of the masterplan, any politically-correct attachments to "heritage." Smart City is, first of all, a city and that means, for Studio 8, that it takes into consideration the flow and use of water, the production and consumption of food, the production and "digestion" of waste, the psychologies of pleasure, as well as the intangible aspects of identity and place. The city, one can say, though pro-rational, is thus designed with an obvious sensibility and openness to the various human, environmental, and community scales that define the urban. If the debate has up until now been about the historical city versus the non-historical city, Colin Rowe, on the one hand, and Rem Koolhaas on the other – a debate, therefore, about Postmodernism – Studio 8's Smart City brings us into new territory.

Netzstadt by Franz Oswald and Peter Baccini

Similar in spirit is the work of the Swiss architect, turned urban theorist, Franz Oswald, professor of architecture and urban planning at the ETH in Zurich. His book *Netzstadt* (2003), written in collaboration with Peter Baccini, Professor of Resource and Waste Management at the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the ETH in Zurich, makes a unique proposal. *Netzstadt*, roughly speaking, stands close to some of the themes of Richard Register, the noted planner and author, and the force behind the International Ecocity Conferences. Register wants to "reshape" cities "for long term health of human and natural systems."[4] And while this environmentalism and its associated urban activism – usually retro-fitted over existing urban conditions – is important and needs our support, it is not the same as urban design. Register's book, *Ecocities*, is filled with strange-shaped buildings, some of them quite enormous, dripping with green ivy and exuding a fairy tale mood of urban bliss.[5] Oswald and Baccini, by way of contrast, are by comparison more realistic, having developed a deep and complex research agenda that works at the complex interface of morphological and territorial analysis in a way that is intended to help in the design of cities even in the most implausible of areas, namely, in Europe, the Masterplan Continent.

Starting with the fact that for the first time in the history of civilization, more than 50% of the world population is living in cities, the authors turn their attention to the growing problem of dense cities and vacuated hinterlands. Inspired to some degree by Frank
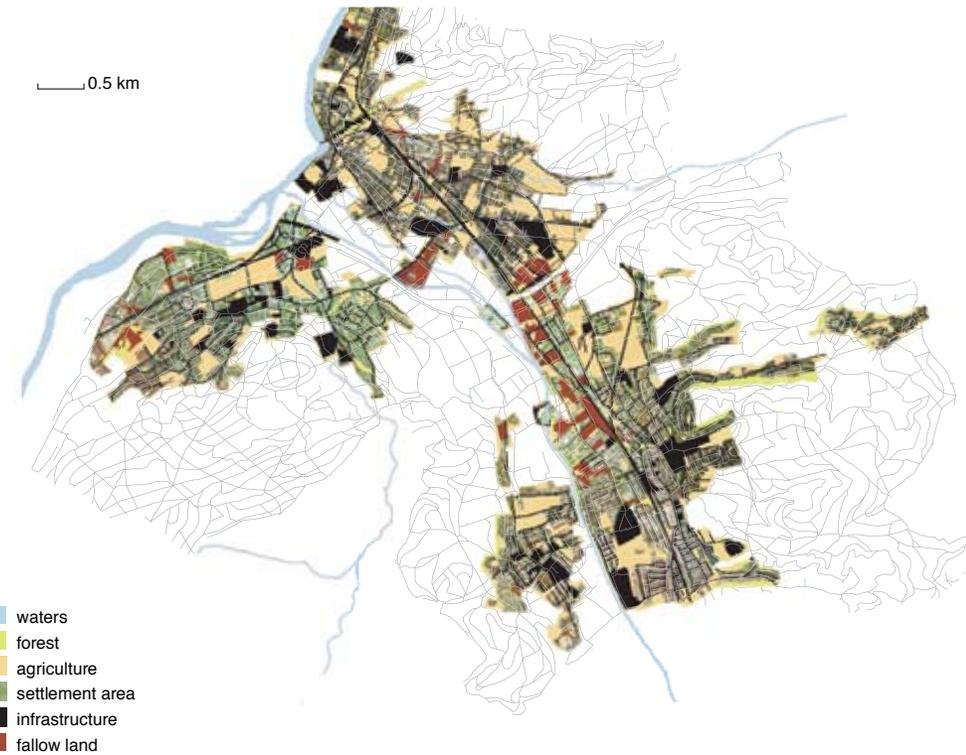
[4]
http://www.ecocitybuilders.org/

[5]
Richard Register, *Ecocities, Rebuilding Cities in Balance with Nature* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2006) pp. 81, 193.

waters
forest
agriculture
settlement area
infrastructure
fallow land

Fig. 3: Wigger City, *Netzstadt*, Franz Oswald and Peter Baccini, 2003, plan

Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City and the ideas of Lewis Mumford, Oswald argues that the urban need not be centered in massive power-cities, but that it can and must be distributed. The not-in-the-center quality of these micro-cities would be offset by their connectivity to the larger urban fabric and their economic semi-independence. The distinction between city and suburb will be removed: there will only be urbs. What makes these cities urban, regardless of size, is an attention to time-honored qualities, but these cities will be designed so that from the point of view of certain environmental issues, like electricity, engineering, food production, and waste, they can be relatively self-sustaining. It is no accident that the center of Oswald's study is the call for a new Swiss city to be called Wigger City, located at the interstices between Zurich, Basel and Bern.[Fig.3] Like all real cities, Wigger would exist as an economic reality. Its buildings would not have to look strange or be dripping with vines to be green.

One could compare Wigger City with soon to be completed Solar City in Linz, Austria, which is advertised as the largest settlement ever built on the basis of the tenets of sustainable architecture. The masterplan was made by Roland Rainer. Solar City has parallels to some of the ideas worked out independently by Oswald and Bac-

[6] The first 630 homes were designed by Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and Thomas Herzog. They were assisted by the environmental engineer Norbert Kaiser. Construction began in 2004. *http://www.floornature.com/articoli/articolo.php?id=433&sez=3&lang=en*

[7] Nash is professor of environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

[8] See: *http://www.ecbp.biz/actions/lectureseries/franz-oswald.html*

cini, except that Solar City is a stand-alone project on the already familiar model of a Modernist *Siedlung*, and not a real city, as Oswald and Baccini would want, nor part of a network of urban centers defined in the context of a larger territorial analysis.[6] Oswald's position could also be compared to the ideas of Roderick Frazier Nash[7] – author of *Wilderness and the American Mind, The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics, and American Environmentalism* – who calls for the creation of "Island Civilizations" in which cities become ever more compact so that human kind can be emptied out of the spaces in between. The difference between Oswald and Nash – and to some extent between Oswald and Register – is between utopian realism and utopian fantasy. Though Oswald, like most eco-urbanists, wants compact cities, what he wants is not a pure agrarian hinterland, but a self-consciously complex relationship – a network – between the urban and the natural. There are, of course, places where nature exists – and should exist – as such, but in Europe, there is not an inch of nature that is not defined and controlled by the hand of man, and this is increasingly the case in the US.

Oswald admits his thesis is utopian given that there is little chance that governments which are used to operating in a certain way will start to redesign their cumbersome bureaucratic machinery to make changes any time soon. His focus is, thus, on the developing world, and he has turned much of his attention to Ethiopia where in the next years, given, on the one hand, the massive rise in population growth and, on the other hand, the realities of an already overfarmed land, millions of people will be flooding into Addis Ababa from the countryside mostly moving into the rapidly expanding slum. In Ethiopia, the stresses on the city are, thus, more acute and the opportunities for action, perhaps, both more apparent and more realistic.[8] His proposed cities, called NEST (New Energy Self-sustained Towns), are places where these millions begin the translation from an agrarian lifestyle to an agro-urban one.[Fig. 4] The towns, built with simple means, are designed not only around environmental and electrical self-sufficiency, but also around the principle of microeconomic capitalism that intertwines certain modernities, such as electricity (the wind and solar electricity plant being positioned on the main square) and education, with the traditions and conventions of Ethiopian community politics. Without utopian challenges like this, we will not be able to begin to envision alternatives to a technologically-improved version of more-of-the-same.

Conclusion

Ten green buildings do no make a green city, and perhaps not even a hundred. And if this fallacy comes from the side of architects, the fallacy coming from the urban planners is that a green masterplan is better than a non-green masterplan. Clearly, a green building and a green masterplan are steps in the right direction, but there MUST be the space for a third type of inquiry, which is about how

Fig. 4: New Energy Self-sustained Town (NEST), Ethiopia, Franz Oswald, 2005, Perspective

to rethink the urban in the context of eco-revolution, and here, I suggest that Studio 8, from the view of practice, and *Netzstadt*, from the point of view of theory, hold a lot of promise. On the surface, and if viewed through the traditional lens of the architecture/planning divide, the two approaches seem to be diametrically opposed to each other. But they both attack the hegemony of the masterplan, though from different angles, and they do this without sinking into the presumption that a greened society is a happy society.

When we take the two projects together, what they propose is a triangulated field of research between the technologies of sustainability, the economics of globalization, and – as Oswald frames it – morphologies of territory. The relationship between the first two is already being developed, but one is hard pressed to find all three together at play in a situation where urban design (and I mean design and not planning) is allowed to be an equal partner, and not just the passive recipient, if you will, of initiatives made by the other two.