



**HAL**  
open science

## The included third as urban project

Pascal Amphoux

► **To cite this version:**

Pascal Amphoux. The included third as urban project. Européen 6 : Règlement et thème, pp. 17-18, 2000, Entre villes, Dynamiques architecturales et urbanités nouvelles. hal-01566980

**HAL Id: hal-01566980**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01566980>**

Submitted on 21 Jul 2017

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

## The included third as urban project

by

**Pascal Amphoux**

**geographer, researcher at the Polytechnical School of Lausanne**

**Suisse/Svizzera/Schweiz**

### From the intermediary city to the hybrid city

The EUROSPAN 6 session's theme is "In between cities"; and it is interesting to consider two possible, related, senses this expression can have.

The first sense is morphological and geographical. It favours the notion of the inscription of the town in existing space and, conversely, that of the **localisation** of spaces within the urban extension.

It is this first, most obvious, sense that has guided the choice of sites for EUROSPAN 6. One way or another, these are situated *in between* two towns, *in between* several neighbourhoods, or at least *in between* zones that are clearly differentiated, which presupposes that they can be recognised and identified as **morphologically distinct spaces**: modern town and historic town, centre and periphery, village and suburb, etc.

Clearly it is this first sense that must orient the designers' work, in that they are being asked to resolve questions of both spatial and functional links that these **intermediary territories** are able to establish between two existing entities. Classified as intermediary, these territories can nevertheless not really be given a name. As a best attempt, we call them, "abandoned", "wasteland", even "no man's land". They are generally most noticeable for their evident indeterminacy: their borders are vague, their characteristics invisible, and their future uncertain. The fact that they are usually in a residual situation means that they can only be defined by default, as void, or negative. As such, projects submitted are expected to reverse this situation, return form to that which has lost its function, reimpose a strong image on that which has failed to retain one.

The second sense is morphogenetic and historic. This favours the notion of the inscription of the town in time and, conversely, that of the **"temporalisation"** of spaces in the town.

It is this second sense, which is more difficult to apprehend, that we wish to bring to the fore, because it seems to us that this is, in fact, the session's main issue, and an area that invokes new thinking capable of leading to a renewal of approaches to design, in which architectural creation can no longer be detached from the complexity of the urban project. Whatever the intermediary territory upon which the intervention takes place, the project approach must, articulate, synchronise, and intermingle eras, rhythms of development, or, at least, types of relationship to the town that are clearly differentiated. This

presupposes that morphogenetically distinct spaces are identified: the immutable neighbourhood, the neighbourhood undergoing transformation, and the newly created neighbourhood; the permanent town, the town in movement, or the emerging town; the known space, the lived-in space, and the sensitive space.

It should be noted, in this case, that the work of the designer is no longer focussed on the revaluation of an intermediary territory, in the spatial sense of the term, but on the constitution of what we call **hybrid territories**, in a logical sense. It is no longer simply a question of establishing a link between two spaces and filling a void, it is a matter of generating complexity, that is to say, rigorously, thinking through the hybridation of different logical levels which interact in the actual process of town formation. Schematically, we propose to distinguish three such logical levels: that of **functionality**, that of **sociality**, and that of **sensitivity**<sup>1</sup>. What, therefore, can explicitly be expected from these projects is that they form a composition of these three levels, that they invent forms of articulation between them, that they propose new ways of enabling function, use, and form to evolve simultaneously.

### **The logic of the included third**

The preceding semantic distinction between intermediary territory, understood as a morphological category; and hybrid territory, understood as a generative process; leads to three remarks, which, in our opinion, form myriad challenges for EUROPAN.

1. From the old notion of "urban architecture", we move on to that of "architectural urbanism". The challenge is no longer to produce an image of the town through typically urban architectural production (town houses, contiguous order, composition of façades, and other criteria that are dear to typo-morphology). Now, the challenge is to design architecture as a means to generate the town, not only in terms of its form, but also, indeed above all, in terms of its evolution and its own dynamics. The building is to be conceived less as a work in itself, more as a **medium** (an intermediary or transitional object), which has the potential to bring to bear certain effects on the development of the town, on the mutation of its functions, or on the transformation of its uses.

2. From a model of determinist conception, we move on to a contextualist model (physicists would say a probabilistic model). Far from thinking that a work, a plan, or a programme can be imposed, by applying fixed stylistic or urban norms, what is sought today, with a greater degree of modesty, is to

---

<sup>1</sup> Let it be clear here that these levels are, by their nature, incommensurable, which means that it is impossible to establish averages or weightings between them. They are not part of the same value system, and cannot be placed in any order of importance. It is only the singular context in which a project is developed which can lead to a choice of relative weighting whose differentiation is a function of the effect that is sought.

impose upon oneself the rules of the game in such a way as to modify trends, or orient the evolution that is under way. These rules can only be set forth in relation to a certain context, which is always local and circumstantial.<sup>2</sup> The expected effects are probable, but are never certain. The "rules" of the game, as the word indicates, are not normative, but regulatory (they do not seek to normalise the product, but to regulate the process).

3. From an implicitly dualistic logic, we move on to an explicitly compound logic. From dualistic logic, which tended to oppose form and function, by excluding any third facet from the debate (and indefinitely prolonging the debate on the supremacy of one over the other), it is now a question of considering a compound logic in which the project only gains any substance from its ability to *configure* the technical level of functionality, the social level of use, and the sensitive level of perception. The first instance is a logic of the excluded third; the second instance is a logic of the **included third**. Behind this tripartition there is an instrument for theoretical, methodological and pragmatic conceptualisation. We would like, briefly, to evoke its efficiency by looking at several examples taken at different project levels or stages which can henceforth be carried out conjointly: definition of the programme, design formalisation, and project methodology.

### **A tool to redefine specifications**

Take the classic tool for the definition of specifications or of a programme, which tends to give a normative functional breakdown of surface areas or plot ratios. The compound logic referred to previously enables this mode of action to be dealt with in a new way. On one hand, it abandons the obsession with exhaustive definition of *concrete objectives*, which are completely determined in space and in time, in order to endeavour the redefinition of *precise intentions*, that are open and adaptable over time. Moreover, it enables three types of issue to be specified which correspond to three registers of reference.

What follows is one example. An urban study commissioned by a Geneva local authority on an intermediary territory situated between the historic centre of Carouge and the housing estates of the two outlying communes leads us to propose a progressive constitution of the "Park of the United Communes", with the aim of preserving a major void on the scale of the increasingly dense town, and bringing together these two, previously separated communes<sup>3</sup>. Such a project, on a territory which is at present totally destructured, and split into several small parcels, by myriad interlocking roads of all sorts, requires that an

---

<sup>2</sup> Without doubt, the notion of context is not absent from the determinist model, but the context only plays an accessory role, which is purely spatial and morphological (cf. ancient debates on mimetism or architectural integration, as well as more recent ones around deconstruction or fragmentation). In the following model, on the other hand, the context plays a basic role, but its sense is no longer only of an environmental nature (it is no longer the physical framework in which the building is inscribed) it is also temporal and pragmatic: for example it integrates the opportunities of realisation and the actions of those involved which have an effect on the probable outcome of a particular orientation of an urban project.

<sup>3</sup> Gp-b *Un projet urbain pour le secteur Praille-Bachet* [An urban project for the Praille-Bachet sector], DAEL, République et Canton de Genève, summary document, January 2000

identification, recovery, and plantation strategy be put into place on this land. Called upon to sketch out a programme with the aim of proving the realism of such an idea, we decide to avoid the requirement of definition of the future functions and the surfaces to be recovered, by stating, instead, as clearly as possible, the challenges involved in such an implementation.

**Functional challenge.** To create, in the long term, a large park whose gardens will possess different functions, by the progressive recovery of parcels of wasteland, or land that is falling into disuse; and to reconnect the neighbourhoods that are today separated by a play of elevated walkways which cross the roads or motorways. The challenge is to progressively bring together the types of garden that can have as wide a variety of uses and practices as possible: family gardens, or allotments for use by the underprivileged; nature parks, theme gardens, or virtual gardens around specific amenities; guided and unaccompanied walks; highly organised and carefully maintained gardens, and land left to develop naturally, but nonetheless requires to be maintained, though in a different way; large areas that can host temporary activities (cultural events, or temporary parking), and free spaces for play, sport or simply for people to stroll in. The exceptional accessibility to the site, by all forms of transport, gives it the potential to be a site of regional importance. The network of pedestrian paths become a structuring element of the park, linking the housing neighbourhoods of the "United Communes" to the Geneva countryside.

**Social challenge.** To compose a "score" of all the activities linked to nature in the town. These developments should be created over time as a function of the opportunities for development of areas for housing, shops or adjoining amenities. They could be the object of territorial concessions to communes, associations, or other institutions, provided their creation fits into an evolutionary framework of a long-term landscape plan for the whole of the park.

**Sensitivity challenge.** To link neighbourhoods, and to damp down traffic circulation by the creation of movements of land that will enable roads to be integrated into it; and to organise and bring together the land by the homogenous plantation of tall trees. This plantation could be carried out rapidly (sponsoring, urban nursery, etc.), in order to generate an almost immediate image of landscape unity in such a way that the limits of the park are defined, and provide a unity and a common ambience (filtering of the light and the noise, for example), which will, over time, give it an ever stronger image, (plant growth and spacing), and ensure a continuity of development, by offering maximum liberty in the management of development programmes, and the principles of garden creation (evolution of relationships with nature).

While the above is just one example and a particular case, it nonetheless provides understanding of the role that can be played by formalisation of challenges in this way. By avoiding the fixed exposition of a classical programme (that the uncertainty of the actual rhythm of land recovery in this

particular situation would have rendered obsolete very quickly), the formulation of these three types of challenge can enable ideas to be fixed for the long term, on a number of different levels, and as such, motivate players from different fields (political, institutional, associative, private). We find ourselves, if you like, in an "intermediary programme" situation, which reflects an intermediary position, and may be considered as a new craft that today's architect has to invent when he or she is in charge of urban studies, and lies, inevitably, *between* the logic of designer and client (hybridation again).

It should be added that the definition of such challenges can serve as a long term reference point for the management of successive operations which can be realised on the territory concerned. These challenges, so defined, form a tool of **negotiated design**, between the author of the urban project, and the architects of operations placed within the perimeter concerned, the discussions on each particular project are no longer focussed on the form or the style of the project, but on the way in which the project enhances, or not, the initial challenges<sup>4</sup>.

### **A tool to decline transversal concepts**

This second example is in another register.

Here, we are talking here about the **notion of density**, which creates a wide consensus in different milieu, inasmuch as it seems to have a universal value; but which also creates problems in that it marks an almost infinite diversity of significations (between disciplines), uses (in the very heart of a given profession, in particular, for example, with architects and planners), and effects on the urban form or social practices. The setting up of the compound model requires that we formalise its sense in relation to three different fields of signification which we have grouped under the respective notions of polarity, mix, and intensity<sup>5</sup>.

Above all, the word **polarity** connotes the spatial dimension (geographic notion) and the measurable dimension (physical notion) of density. But unlike density, the notion of polarity is a reflection of a dynamic geography, and a physics of relativity. It designates the state of equilibrium in which are to be found two bodies of opposite polarities. The polarity of a place, is, in a way, its power of attraction or repulsion in relation to the places it polarises; it is the way in which it articulates several scales (those, for example of the building,

---

<sup>4</sup> This was the happy experience we had with 36 teams of architect-landscapers and artists who created as many gardens in the town of Lausanne during the summer of 1997 on the occasion of the first international festival of the urban garden "*Lausanne, Jardins '97*". For each of the sites that we retained in the feasibility study, we defined an urban challenge particular to the site, and the projects were discussed, among ourselves and the teams, not in any way on the basis of a formal critique (a wide variety of styles were in this instance being sought) but around the way in which each project enhanced the criteria for urbanity that we had defined, and which, for its part was strictly non-negotiable.

<sup>5</sup> Pascal Amphoux et al. *La densité urbaine, du Programme au projet urbain* [Urban density, from programme to urban project], research report N°142 IREC, EPFL, Lausanne.

the neighbourhood, the town, etc.); it is again, the way in which the centre, (or more precisely, a pole) is formed or unformed. Why, refer to *polarity* rather than *centrality*? The reason is that *centrality* suggests development of a centre to the detriment of a periphery, which, in its turn, becomes functionally dependent in a hierarchised geographical system, whereas *polarity* signifies, on the contrary, poles, which are neither central nor peripheral, but which auto-equilibrate in a dynamic and reticular geographic system. In other words, the problem is no longer one of monocentrality in a hierarchic system regulated by density indexes, but that of a multi-centrality in a reticular system that other tools must permit to orient or manage.

The word **mix**, whose use today is part of the technico-scientific jargon of urban planners, has a clear connotation on a second level, the social dimension of density. Density and mix are often associated, and considered to be the lifeblood of urbanity. But, like density, mix is often reduced to the notion of functional mix. A neighbourhood which comprises housing and offices will be called "mixed"; a street which combines residential and commercial functions is considered as a "mixed" zone, etc. Although, indeed, such functional mix, which is measurable, can undoubtedly generate, in certain cases, real social mix, we prefer to apply the term specifically to designate the aptitude for a group of people living in a particular area to generate social and convivial links. Put another way, in the same way that the notion of polarity is different from that of centrality even if the latter notion may be incorporated into the former, that of mix is different from that of *functional mix* while at the same time incorporating the latter notion. It designates any form of interaction between the technical level of a measurable mix of particular urban functions, and the symbolic level of an observable mix (even if it is not measurable) of uses and ordinary practices. On the first level, the implicit set of problems involved is the classic set of functionalist problems of the modern era: creating order in space, and classification of humans according to social class and functional categories. On the second level, the problem becomes specifically that of the management of disorder which gives a place urbanity, coupled with that of the generation of human "biodiversity" which ensures, without pretending to determine it, a minimum equilibrium between populations or cultures that are possibly highly contrasted.

As far as the notion of **intensity** is concerned, it connotes in terms of difference the perceivable dimension of density (it is well known that there is often a great deal of difference between actual density, and the perception of density). Why should this be? The answer lies in the fact that on one hand the word *intensity* signifies the degree of activity or energy of a perceivable phenomenon (sound, light, gesture); on the other, it designates the plenitude or the vivacity of a feeling, a regard, or a relationship. To intensify the town, will therefore be, by perceptible means, to intensify the relationship to the town, to offer it a better perceptive acuity, to reinforce the feeling of urbanity or indeed to reinforce the identity of the territory considered. But, here again, in the same way that the notions of polarity and mix can be distinguished respectively from those of centrality and functional mix, even though the

former incorporate the latter, so *intensity* distances itself from, and includes, *identity*. The latter etymologically "the same", presupposes a circular sense which closes back in upon itself, the former becomes tense (intensus, stretched, from the past participle of the latin *intendere*, to reach out) and suggests a circulation, an opening of the senses. From a theoretical point of view, the proposal thus has a double sense: on one hand, it returns to the perceptible dimension of density the same weight as its technical dimension, and its social dimension (whose status, moreover, must not be allowed to become ancillary); on the other hand, for the problems of definition of urban density, it substitutes those of the definition of urban intensity and the principles of perceptive intensification.

This second, semantic, use of the logic of the included third could be considered by some as a vain theoretical game. However, it has to be noticed that this type of compound distinction forms an operational instrument of **critical analysis**, that is to say that it is a method of reasoning which enables one not simply to reduce critical activity to the stating of value judgements, but to make it establish logical distinctions between undertakings of different natures. This was the case, for example, with the distinction "motricity, movement, emotion" which we established when analysing the EUROPAN 5 results, whose projects were brought together under the sign of mobility; and again with the distinction between the figures of the domino, the fragment, and the puzzle, which we used to undertake the analysis of the winning projects in the previous session<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, it must be made clear that such distinctions are not without consequence on the very practice of the urban project. In the present case, to densify an area does not consist simply of filling in the empty spaces by applying coefficients in a sort of quantitative prescription. It consists of specifying and balancing three orders of qualitative features which consist of negotiating respectively polarisation, "mixation", and intensification of urban spaces by reintroducing the three dimensions of time, use, and perceptibility into the approach to the project.

### **A tool for verification of the project method**

The third and final example is more concrete and directly attached to the very activity of the project.

This is the notion of the *città diffusa*. True to its name, this notion tends to diffuse itself in the fields of urban planning even faster than the phenomenon that it designates. Why should this be? Without doubt, it is because it gives a name to that which everyone can see as a form of intermediary territory, in the morphological sense that we described in the introduction: these extended territories which are neither town nor countryside, which do not extend around existing centres, but which link them by a series of continuous bands, which do not hierarchise space but tend to reticulate it. Faced with this new form, the planner is ill at ease.

---

<sup>6</sup> See respectively the EUROPAN 5 and EUROPAN 4 results catalogues.



His or her reflex, naturally, is to approach the problem of regeneration of such territories by favouring the landscape dimension, by developing meticulous analyses of the parcels, the slopes, the views, the relationship between greenery and construction, between high and low, within and without; all of this to bring out topological principles that are capable of fighting against the phenomenon of landscape diffraction which generates both multiplication, fragmentation, and heterogeneity of constructions.

Once again, putting into practice compound logic enables the problem to be looked at in another way. Obliging the designer to consider simultaneously and without any order of priority, not only the landscape dimension, but also the social and functional dimensions of these extended territories, enables us to query the conditions of the *città diffusa* that, once again, we would like to decline on three different levels.

The first of these is that of environmental conditions. In our terms, these are objective factors, measurable, and as such can be mastered, on the ground<sup>7</sup>. They will in this case be characterised, for example, by problems of accessibility, network, energy saving, etc., but also, and perhaps above all, by the microscopic parcelling of land into narrow strips, and the tendency for land to be completely privatised. Such a periodical filling of the plan leaves no place for any major space to allow for the creation of even micro-centralities or public spaces on a larger scale which are capable of housing even a strict minimum of public services.

Next, the medial conditions designate the conditions for the appropriation of a "milieu" with which can be maintained fusional, natural, and living relationships. The continual growth of a radical heterogeneity of individual constructions implies, paradoxically, a total uniformisation and indifferentiation of uses which renders the constitution of such a milieu nearly impossible. Alterity is no longer possible in such an environment, because in its infinite demultiplication, the "other" comes back to being the same!

Landscape conditions, finally, touch the sensitive, aesthetic and infinitely variable relationship that is offered, both in the arts and in ordinary life, by the perception of a "landscape". Faced with the multitude of parcels and individual buildings which go as far as the eye can see, all historical structure of the way the land is parcelled, its countryside origins, and its material characteristics are wiped out. Walls collapse, earthworks disappear, grid pattern and road networks become confused. The landscape culture has disappeared.

The absence of big public spaces, loss of "otherness", occultation of the memory of the way the land was parcelled, are all so many missing conditions

---

<sup>7</sup> The rigorous distinction between environment, milieu, and landscape forms a transversal and recurrent argument in much of our work. It was first established in our research into the acoustic environment. P. Amphoux et al. *Aux écoutes de la ville, la qualité sonore des espaces publics européens* [Listening to the town, the acoustic quality of European public spaces], research report IREC N°94 EPFL, Lausanne, CRESSON, EAG, Grenoble, 1991. P. Amphoux *Le paysage sonore urbain* [The urban acoustic landscape] CD hifi, IREC, CRESSON, Lausanne, Grenoble, 1997.

of urbanity that mean the *città diffusa* no longer merits the name of town or city. As such, they become so many challenges for an urban project.

The third, methodological, use of compound logic shows that this can become an instrument for the **verification of the approach** to a project, as much for the designer as for the expert. Has the activity of the project not been reduced to a particular approach to the detriment of others? In the previous example, through trying to struggle against market logic, has the landscape dimension not been over-privileged? In any case, the model enables us to control a form of minimal balance between the three forms, to carry out in parallel, then interrelate, and create hybrid environmental, medial and landscape approaches.

### **Conclusion in the form of a hypothesis**

The logic of the included third is the practical foundation for the urban project.

*In between* the definition of technical, social and sensitive, challenges, *in between* environmental, medial and landscape approaches, the practice of the urban project is being mobilised<sup>8</sup>.

Let us hope that the responses to the 6<sup>th</sup> session of EUROPAN will demonstrate an ability to take up the challenge laid down by such a mobilisation.

---

<sup>8</sup> From the preceding examples the following points can be retained:

1. The three logical levels are not three categories: they only have a sense in terms of their relationship with each other, or rather, the relationship that each one has with the other two.
2. Neither are they three positions that are hierarchically organised: they only have relative positions, and the hierarchy is intermingled; that is to say, it is variable as a function of the context.
3. They are not three successive activities, but joint, which enable the generation and regeneration of the movement without which the notion of urban project loses all specificity.