

APPROACH VERSUS FORMULA.

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This article has resulted from an extensive urban study on weaving, "weaving, programmatic elasticity"¹. Anne Mie Depuydt² has done a year of research in Rome on the subject of weaving, not only on a description of the notion of weaving, which was lacking up to now, but also more in particular on how weaving can be used as a project strategy. She has elaborated the result of her study in the form of a dialogue with her colleague Erik Van Daele.

The study started from a theoretical reflection on context. Within the current discussions, context usually gets a one-sided interpretation. We believe that to obtain a full understanding of context, one needs to approach and analyse it on all levels. Therefore the classic, conventional methods of analysis are in themselves not adequate. They need support. In Rome, we made a study of an area of 2000 ha. (Cinecitta Est, Romanina II, Tor Vergata, Gregna, Carcarilcolla and Gardinetti) using "a programmatic approach".

URBAN FORM AND URBAN LIFE

Our interest in a programmatic approach to the environment stems from our aim to understand the social environment in which planners work. The constant and increasing changes in our dynamic society, reverse the dimensions of our experiences and especially those of time and space. It is therefore unacceptable to continue using a classic, explicit relation between urban form and urban life.

Increasing dynamics and constant acceleration obliges us to exchange the classical concept of the urban form as a direct expression of urban life for an interest in possible confrontations between static, urban forms on the one hand, and the hyperdynamic character of urban life on the other. There is no causal relation between urban form and urban life. They coexist. While urban forms manipulate urban life, at the same time urban life conquers urban form. These confrontations are positive. The diverse relations between form and program offer an enormous number of potential

¹ "Weaving, programmatic elasticity" will be published in the fall 1999. It is a research on the subject of "weaving", an issue of major importance in the "Spatial structural plan for the Flanders". Also in France, within the current debates on the contemporary city, one speaks of "mixité". Mixité refers to the mixture of different functions that can be found in the historical city centre. Nowhere however, weaving is sufficiently explained and there are no indications as to how weaving can be introduced into a project. This book does not only attempt to describe weaving, it also gives guidelines to apply weaving as a strategy. The theoretical research in the book is applied on a site of 2000 ha in the Roman periphery (a pilot-site).

² A. Depuydt received from the French Ministry of Culture a grant for a residence at the Villa Medici in Rome during the period of October 1997 until October 1998.

from which both programs and architecture can profit. Thus, a programmatic approach does not only oppose the typological and morphological one, it forms a necessary complement.

APPROACH VERSUS FORMULA

In our Roman study, it became clear to us that confrontations between city and urban life manifest themselves in very different ways and that each confrontation is specific.

In order to understand these confrontations better, we were obliged to develop another armamentarium. This research resulted in a working procedure which helped us to discover the characteristics, the potentials and the uniqueness of a certain area. Despite the system within this procedure, it can never be used in an identical way to approach other sites. It is important to understand that we are talking about an approach and not about a prescribed formula. Therefore the study in Rome will never result in the definition of general conclusions. Every periphery is different.

EVERYTHING IS CONTEXT

The research starts with a maximum of very precise analyses of the site. The most extensive inventory possible will be made of the context, taking into account all its layers : physical, social, cultural, programmatic, economic, political... First all the information, every layer will be noted on maps or aerial photographs and later worked out in very specific drawings. These representations are very large interpretations of a certain characteristic of the site, for instance penetration, or the status of public spaces.... For this we use new spatial or non-spatial representations because not every layer of the context can receive an adequate description by the traditional 2-dimensional drawings or classical maps. Photographs and videos can for instance show the use of public spaces like parks, car parks, fallow spaces... at different times of the day and the week. They can show the resemblance's and differences. It is necessary to continue to develop new mappings.

QUANTITY AND CONFRONTATION

The results of the mappings of every layer will be compared. In their function in comparison with other layers of the site, some of the layers will seem meaningless and not relevant. In the Rome-study for instance we did not continue to elaborate all the economical and statistic data. Other layers can at the first sight seem to be irrelevant but can prove to be decisive for the characterisation of the area. In Rome, the spontaneous programs such as the little mobile shops selling melons or the black sellers peddling goods in car parks, or the sliproad of the ringway becoming a pedestrian bridge, became decisive in describing the structure of the area.

We admit that this working procedure results in a not entirely objective interpretation, but it is a reading started from a naive point of view, without any presumptions, without any pre-established theories. A reading that, starting from a maximum quantity of material, takes into consideration a maximum number of possible scenarios. Here, scientific completeness will never be the central issue but rather the diverse character of the most unexpected scenarios.

Our interpretation of the site is influenced by the extra attention to the structural potential of the trivial, the everyday life and the evident.

Example: In Rome, during the inventory we did not only notice the official functions, our attention was also focused on discovering programs introduced by the inhabitants themselves in unexpected places. It was important to understand how certain of these spaces, mainly public spaces were inhabited and used and why this does not correspond with the planned utilisation.

A certain layer of the unplanned action can only reach the surface by introducing a very extensive and very concrete study. It is a systematic study realised on site and during a certain time.

Whatever time it takes, only by use of this kind of interest in an area, can one make such a kind of interpretation - which would be impossible if we were only to make use of the conventional methods. Only considering the site through a morphological approach would give the interpretation that Rome corresponds with the image of an archipel. Indeed, the periphery of Rome seems to be a large conglomeration of islands without any interaction between them and with a sea of meaningless, in between, fallow spaces. But by studying the daily life on the site it becomes clear that this spatial structure is interrupted in very specific places, for instance by a pedestrian connection crossing the fields between Cinecitta Est, an area of 45 000 people, and the Terminus Anagnina metrostation or connections under the ringway becoming exclusive shadow-and meeting places... The interpretation of Rome as an archipel is incomplete.

ANALYSIS AS PROJECT STRATEGY

By use of diagrams, the complex information resulting from the different mappings will be synthesised and interpreted. Themes, potentials and/or the needs of the area can now be formulated. Whenever it is necessary, these will be completed with the issues described by public institutions, investors, inhabitants... By use of the diagrams, different project strategies will be developed. In other words, we are writing very diverse scenarios resulting from the themes and needs described in the analysis.

Independently of each other, these strategies will be elaborated on different scales. Scenarios will be implemented on the smallest scale, this means considering the minimal amount of information necessary, or they can embrace more areas and different programs. Small scale strategies are not necessarily derived from large scale strategies. It is important that regardless of its scale, every

strategy will create a maximum of potentials, possibilities that through time can be re-evaluated according to the specific needs at that moment in time.

In Rome we noticed traffic jams in different places on the ringway - the "General Raccordo Annulare". The traffic jam is related to the quick succession of slip roads and exit-ways and in some areas happens on very specific places that are cut through by the ringway. Example: In one part the GRA seems to operate like an urban boulevard. The ringway is caught between big commercial buildings selling electrical equipment, furniture, clothes... This "furniture-boulevard" ends at a very chaotic and complex interchange regulating the traffic between the GRA and 2 important access-roads to the centre of Rome (Via Tiburtina and Via Anagnina). This interchange is limited by on the one side an impenetrable fallow site and on the other side a completely isolated metro and "park and ride" station, Anagnina Terminus. At this particular spot, the "Communa di Roma" wishes to enlarge the GRA. As it seems there is no place, they did not propose a solution to this date.

We propose to split the ringway into 2 parts, each with a different status. The continuous traffic is diverted behind the commercial buildings and the part of the way in between them becomes a real "furniture-boulevard". This manipulation of the road will continue with the creation of a less complex and much larger interchange. Thus, the fallow site next to it becomes integrated and accessible and the connection with the Terminus metro station becomes easy.

The introduction of a new hierarchy within the system of the infrastructure ensures not only that this part of the GRA becomes much more understandable, the function of the surrounding areas is completely changed and at the same time their potential use is increased.

This very concrete approach to Rome allowed us not only to give a description of "weaving" on a theoretical level, we also studied different project strategies on different scales and we made a description of the Roman periphery within its most diverse relationships. We became aware of the poverty and hollowness of the Roman approach and how the "Communa di Roma" still continue to apply their very systematic and abstract urbanism. Rome is a metropolis of 129 000 ha. and 2,7 million inhabitants with a periphery covering 82 000 ha or 64%. Since 1883, the city has a "Piano Regolatore Generale". This PRG is a master plan, a very abstract plan, established somewhere behind an office desk without any notion of the concrete situation. This year, the plan was adapted for the first time since 1965. The PRG gives an unambiguous image of how the metropolis should be, how it should be organised throughout the years. The plan relies essentially on the realisation of a very intricate network. On this basis, different areas and their destinations are determined. The consequences of this very abstract and official planning is that some destinations will be or are already realised according to an infrastructure, which is itself completely or partly absent. At the same time, over a number of years, Rome has battled with the illegal constructions. Complete

neighbourhoods are built without building permission and without taking into account the actual infrastructure or services. This "savage urbanism" of housings, industrial and commercial buildings got its apogee during the 50s and 60s. At that time, the cost price of 1 m² of legal construction was one the highest in Europe.

The city is not only confined to a very abstract image, made from a distance and completely obsolete today, somehow there is a deficit of "legal urbanism" because every illegal intervention makes the legal ones impossible. The consequence is that time and again the PRG needs to be corrected to be able to adapt itself to the spontaneously grewed constructions. This juxtaposition of a legal and an illegal organisation results in a far less intricate network wherein one can find "islands". This is also the reason why one can find programs, functions in very absurd situations. Example : Cinecitta Est is an area with 45 000 inhabitants a long the GRA. Its boulevard, the backbone of the operation, finds itself as an isolated piece of unfinished infrastructure in the landscape.

The Roman system also works like a tree-structure because the different islands are essentially impenetrable. Therefore parasite connections between the islands are created by their inhabitants themselves. Instead of a fine-mesh network structure, we distinguish 3 structures : a coarse-mesh network or as much as could be realised of it, a tree-structure of islands and a hybrid or spontaneously created structure. Strangely enough, Rome continues its planning with island-structures.

Consequently, the official Rome does not work as a metropolitan system. All the urban factors are present, but there is no interaction between them. This interaction is after all impossible, because the island-structure becomes stronger with time.

Following our approach, it would be much more interesting to make some of the areas in between denser and to restructure them instead of building more bastions, even within the existing ones.

This abstract, systematic planning is planning from a distance, "society-strange planning" that only legitimises itself. "Concrete planning" focuses its attention on a programmatic approach of a site, on the structural potential of the trivial, the everyday life and the evident. This approach provides a range of possibilities and unexpected results responding to the actual needs of a site.