



FROM PLANNED TO UNPLANNED CITY: COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT?

OD PLÁNOVANÉHO K NEPLÁNOVANÉMU MESTU: UCHOPENIE NEURČITOSTI VO VÝVOJI MESTA?

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PLANNED UNPLANNED CITIES

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The scholarly colloquium “Unplanned Planned Cities”, organized by the Department of Architecture of the Institute of Construction and Architecture, Slovak Academy of Science (SAS), took place in Bratislava on 8th of November 2017. Gathering over 30 participants, mostly architects, historians, urbanists, geographers and sociologists, the colloquium aimed at fostering international scientific networking and interdisciplinary research in the field of urban development. Using Bratislava as a lens through which contemporary challenges of the city planning and unplanning can be comprehended, the conference provided a space for exchange on variety of topics related to the urban transformations, (dis)continuity and fluidity of the contemporary city, as well as the process of repositioning the role and activity of urban practitioners. Through presentations, poster session and panel discussions, the colloquium critically investigated how urban dwellers approach challenges of planning, unplanning and re-planning and accommodate different socio-political needs of the city into the existing plans.

Discussing concepts of uncertainty, contestation, difficulty and ambiguity in urban planning, participants addressed planning, un-

planning, re-planning and de-planning as mutually interconnected phenomena, questioning the fluidity of concepts related to urban design of the cities. As most of the discussion centered around historical transformations of the urban settings, the colloquium instigated critical reflection on planning and re-planning as tools for urban remembering and forgetting. Highlighting the importance of (dis)continuity in urban designing, the colloquium invited participants to rethink how urban planning has been mobilized through different political, socio-economic and architectural regimes.

The panel session was opened by Matúš Dulla (Faculty of Architecture, Slovak Technical University STU, Bratislava), who provided some general lines of reflection concerning the urban planning. His introduction presented several examples of failed urban plans, exploring the limits of planning and entropy. In his presentation, Dulla raised a number of open questions and ideas related to the urban planning, from which most of the discussion originated, such as – do we really plan a city? Or could it be that the city is, on the contrary, the result of *unplanning*? What is planned, what is not? What makes a plan successful? How did we start to plan our cities? Arguing that architects have

a tendency to design a city that corresponds to their own specific time, thus almost designing the very people who will inhabit the city and the way they will be dressed, Dulla asks: what is bad planning? Can we accept that the previous plans were designed and executed by smart and competent people even if they had different points of view?

Most of the other presentations gathered examples from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and the Balkans, using as a starting point the first plans dating from the late 19th century, when industrialisation and the need for sanitation facilities created the conditions to start rethinking urban development. Peter Szalay (Institute of Construction and Architecture, SAS, Bratislava) specifically looked at the sanitation act of Bratislava, questioning how this policy influenced urban development. According to Szalay, in order to create a modern and representative environment for the new Republic, sanitation was approached as a great opportunity for the development of the city. The area around today's *Námestie Slobody* used to be the main district concerned by this policy since

it was planned as the new city centre, which it never became despite the plans. Throughout the conference, it became clear that for many other cities, as well, the starting point for urban planning was sanitation, as Karel Maier (Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University of Prague) presented similar processes taking place in Plzeň and Hradec Králové and Richard Biegel (Department of History of Art, Charles University, Prague) addressed these issues through the example of Prague.

In his presentation on Czech regional centres, Karel Maier specifically approached the question of how the first urban planning attempts in the late 19th century created solid foundations for the planning processes of the following century. Maier's research highlighted the importance of industrialisation in initiating the urban planning agenda, since it was at that point that cities had to start dealing with a variety of additional requests related to the infrastructure, the arrival of new inhabitants from countryside, as well as provision of additional services. Faced with these challenges, Maier argued, cities appointed new administrations to deal with the land ownership, the



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creation of plans and their implementation, creating thus pre-conditions for the first serious projects of urban planning.

Nina Bartošová (Faculty of Architecture STU, Bratislava) focused on how Bratislava planned the industrialisation within the city. Before Bratislava became the capital city, it used to be a regional centre which was not planned as an industrial hub. Consequently, industry was not integrated into the city plans and industries were mostly placed outside of the city centre, close to the railway. According to Bartošová, after the first phase of industrialisation, the urban dwellers of Bratislava started incorporating the city's industrial development into urban plans by designing new infrastructural facilities. However, these plans were never realised and in conclusion, Bartošová argues that Bratislava shifted from a situation of unplanned industry to one of unrealised planning.

Anna Gondová (Faculty of architecture STU, Bratislava) observes similar processes using the case of Bratislava's castle and its hill as an illustration of unrealised planning. Gondová, who studied the development of this area and the discussion which accompanied it, argues that at the beginning of the 20th century, when the castle was still a ruin, two discourses dominated the debate: one advocating its demolition and the other its renovation. Thus, several projects were suggested for replacing the castle until the mid-century, when the renovation started.

This last example found an echo in the presentation of Henrieta Moravčíková (Institute of Construction and Architecture, SAS, Bratislava) on the planning of Modern Bratislava. Architects from the socialist period, according to Moravčíková, are considered to be the ones who contributed the most to the transformation of the city, which was then seen as a tool of regime. Urban planning, thus, was supposed to reflect the ideology and requirements of socialism, which is how the Castle Hill and the former Jewish district were separated from the historic centre by the highway. This infamous project of urban transformation, attributed to the socialist regime, remained one of the most criticised plans in history of Bratislava until today. However, Moravčíková sheds light on the less-known fact that this road was already envisaged in the previous plans dating from the beginning of the 20th century, which included also the construction of the ring-road and bridges, as well as the reshaping of *Kamenné Námestie*. Thus, although considered a specifically socialist urban planning disaster, this project designed at a much earlier stage reminds us how often we are under delusion when it comes to the origins of urban ideas.

Similar phenomena could have been observed in other Slovak cities such as Košice, according to the architect Jan Sekan, who studied the different plans implemented by the city and their evolution. He pointed out that

the expansion of the city to its western part, the district of Terasa, was originally proposed in the plan of the architect Bohuslav Fuchs (1951) and not by Milan Hladký, Ján Kurča and Ivan Bányai, who, although given credit for the project, designed the new plan of the city only ten years after Fuchs. According to Sekan, this sort of confusion arises mostly out of shifts in political power – in the case of Košice, after Fuchs's dismissal, the demands for the Stalinisation of architecture resulted in new plans in line with this trend and forgetting everything that had been done previously.

Throughout the conference, it became obvious that many other examples can illustrate how the changes of political regime are matched to changes of planning. Ěva Lovra (Institute of Construction and Architecture, SAS, Bratislava) illustrated the socialist transformations of architectural standards, trends and endeavours through the example of Serbian city of Subotica. Similar processes have been observed in other post-socialist cities, such as Prague, where the process of urban planning, according to Richard Biegel, mirrors its historical discontinuities. Arguing that the urban development reflects the trends and ambitions of a given time, Biegel addresses Prague and many other cities as a compilation of a range of different, partially achieved plans. As such, cities preserve a trace of each period of planning.

The colloquium concluded with a panel discussion on what makes city planning successful. For Karel Maier, the success of the plan is dependent on the impact it has on the future discourses about the city, in either positive or negative manner. A similar conclusion arose from Lenka Štěpánová's (Veletřhy Brno, a.s.) presentation about the differences between visions and reality in the realisation of the historic fairground of city of Brno. Observing

this area in order to analyse the planning as a dynamic process, Štěpánová concluded that the sustainability of the plan is conditioned by three main characteristics: finance, form and function. Namely, it is indispensable that the plan is financially sustainable, that its form and design are simple and that it includes all the required functions.

Addressing urban planning as a laboratory of contemporary political, economic and social trends and movements, the colloquium called for a more diverse, more interdisciplinary and more fluid understanding of urban transformations and the city's necessity to 'reinvent' itself. In this, it might be interesting to address through some of the future events the role of the resilience of cities to the challenges of planning and unplanning. Taking into consideration the turbulent socio-political conditions and the world of possibilities and uncertainties related to the urban design of the modern city, one must admit that creation of urban spaces is constantly negotiated between memory and forgetting, control and freedom, acceptance and contestation, resilience and fluidity – planning and unplanning.



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