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### REGIONAL CITY

***Back to territory. Positions and forms of sustainability in Germany.***

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#### ***Regional sustainability***

***Jörg Schröder, Maddalena Ferretti***

**Territory** is gaining increasing importance in the current development policies in Germany. This has to do with a renewed interest towards city regions and in particular with a specific attention to **sustainability** manifested in spatial realities.

As claimed in the **National Urban Development Policy**, established by the Federal State already in 2007, «cities cannot perform their function as drivers of growth and innovation unless they see themselves as part of a region» (NUDP). City regions or Metropolitan regions are indeed seen as effective key to the reading of contemporary territory and are understood as the main contexts where to address the future transformations.

According to the **City Report 2012**, German cities are today challenged with increasing shrinking phenomena and at the same time witnessing the growing success of these enlarged territories where almost ¾ of the German population is living and working. The biggest metropolitan areas are Berlin (3.4m inhabitants), Hamburg (1.7m inhabitants), Munich (1.3m inhabitants), Cologne (1.0m inhabitants) and Frankfurt a.M. (0.6m inhabitants). These conurbations have acquired a higher relevance especially in terms of economic power.

Dealing with this scale is not something new within the urban disciplines. In 1983 Corboz describes **territory as a palimpsest**, that is «a manuscript on which two or more successive texts have been written, each one being erased to make room for the next» (Collins Concise English Dictionary). Indeed territory is the result of a continuous process of accumulation and for this reason it is «heavily charged with traces and with past readings», even though many of the layers of which it is composed are very thin and full of gaps. This complex system is first of all a network of relationships and it must be described not anymore only as the physical but also the imaginative and cultural foundation of our society. As such, it becomes also the main «foundation for planning», the primary element to be considered in any project and the basis to which the city has to be subordinated (Corboz, 1983).

Therefore the focus of the contributions collected in this issue addresses space and society in an architectural and urbanistic perspective, extending the theme of Metropolitan regions to spatial realities, perspectives and performances, and extending economically centred scenario-building for "Metropolitan Regions" to ecological and social dimensions of sustainability. Specifically a new understanding of current challenges and potentials of the rural-urban setup of European regions, in form of shared territorial visions and governance models can be connected to this task (e.g. the RURBANCE project in the Alpine Space Programme of EU).

Regionalization entails cooperation among public and private sector at a territorial scale. More and more of today's problems – be it climate change, transport, settlement patterns or the development of centres – can only be properly solved at the regional level. The future power of European cities lies on the ability to promote issues and strategies that have a regional added value. «The aim of the National Urban Development Policy is to create projects and schemes that establish regional partnerships in urban

development and encourage people to explore new forms of cooperation that are of practical relevance, thereby identifying the factors that will lead to successful and **sustainable regionalization**» (NUDP).

To achieve **regional sustainability**, Germany is recently focusing on enhancing regional ecological systems in order to bring an added value to the territory as a whole. Two main examples are the Emscher river conversion and the Green Metropolis project. Both of them involve large territories and aim to solve ecological and sustainable issues by strengthening cooperation and networking at the scale of the region. Clearly, this represents a mutual advantage both for cities, communities and the landscape framework they are connected with.

Moreover the issue of **resilience** has acquired an increasingly critical role within this debate. As highlighted by **E. Sommariva** in his contribution *“Exploring Urban Resilience”*, «the term *resilience*, associated with the urban planning disciplines and territorial governance, [is referred] to the issues of sustainable development, the prevention of environmental risks, as well as the adaptive capacity of the territories».

This approach to design is outlined in Ferretti’s article. In an utopian way, the Hannover Region is imagined as a **rural metropolis** whose sustainable foodshed is developed and strengthened at a local level. Hannover would thus become a **resilient region** able to adapt to the instable conditions of a changing context, yet so largely dependent from a globalized system of distribution and so little prepared to respond to the food demand with the supply of local markets. At a neighborhood scale the same concept is applied to Munich, with the *Agropolis* project (see Hartig’s contribution). Landraum, a multidisciplinary group of designers, planners and landscape architects, propose to temporarily occupy one of the western future development areas of the city with an **agricultural park**. This idea is currently being implemented by the City Government who also contributed to workshops, open-air meetings and seminars on the topic of harvesting and producing local food and on how this can affect the urban space. These events put together local stakeholders, associations and residents.

The city of Munich is also the main focus of Richter’s contribution, where the regional perspective is once again crucial. It describes a design study entitled “Vision for the periphery”, highlighting how the development of a new housing quarter, located in the city’s western border, couldn’t be tackled only at the urban scale, but implied an enlarged point of view on the territory and in particular on the **interlaced relationships between city and landscape**.

On the other hand, Kumberger’s paper zooms really into the neighbourhood scale. The “Kreativquartier München”, awarded with the first prize in an international ideas competition promoted by the City of Munich in 2013, is designed as a creative sustainable neighbourhood that introduces further interesting topics: mixité, slow mobility, importance of identity and *genius loci* in design processes. But what deserves a special attention here is the issue of **temporary uses**. The quartier was a former military site later occupied by commercial and industrial buildings. After the interruption of these activities, the area was spontaneously and illegally occupied by activists and private associations that found here space for their creativity. Instead of erasing this “layer”, “Kreativquartier” builds its imaginary around this topic. In particular a laboratory for art production, a cultural centre and other hybrid forms of co-working and creative productions are proposed as basic elements of the development strategy. The temporary uses can be later integrated as permanent ones.

Indeed, as claimed by Haid, pioneer activities are becoming more and more central in the current urban praxis but also within the scientific debate. Berlin is the clearest example to show this trend. After the first decade following reunification, the poor international investments forced the City Government to retarget its focus from “Berlin World City” to the **“creative city”** agenda. This shift, though, led to a difficult and ambiguous process of integration of informal uses into formal planning. As clearly exemplified by the former Tempelhof airport, an icon of pioneer urbanism, the expected high transformative potential of temporary uses for future city development has been fairly unsatisfying. But at the same time not to recognize these bottom-up interventions as relevant phenomena of the current processes of urban transformation, would mean to misunderstand reality. Indeed, although small and punctual, these actions are often motor of change of new urban dynamics.

A cross-scalar approach is thus a necessary premise of successful transformation strategies, claims Hartmann in her essay. This gets back to the need of analysing contexts with a comprehensive look including territories, landscapes, settlements and buildings in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the spatial implications of design. Reading and transforming the **Alpine space** entails for Hartmann the capacity to analyse a whole region and contemporarily deepen architectural aspects or even investigate traditional building materials. With specific regard to this enlarged context, there is a common identity layer based on typological elements that crosses all these scales. This cross-cutting project is one of the key topics that this issue of EcoWebTown aims to outline.

Also Mlecek underlines that regional city is the interpretative key through which looking at contexts with the goal of creating sustainable and resilient territories. She focuses on large suburban areas at the outskirts of major cities embedding great transformational potentials but also stuck in a sort of oblivion. These areas should become the targets of future development for a better quality of living, for a rediscovered regional and local identity. With new visions and ideas, this hybrid space between city and countryside could become a catalyst for branding concepts. These fringe areas, such as the Brandenburg Region around Berlin, could host exemplary housing models that can be transmitted to other similar peripheral areas. They could be experimental laboratories for new forms of dwellings and for testing new mobility systems. They could pass from being only the Berlin's periphery to become a space for innovation.

A similar inclusive approach is at the basis of Lüder's contribution that tells about the North Sea territory. For the resident population, social and spatial segregation are among the main concerns. Moreover, despite its attractive factors, such as the beautiful marshlands that draw mass tourism, the region is witnessing a relevant demographic shrinkage. Especially young generations are suffering the lack of professional perspectives and also the economic crisis contributed significantly to the emigration phenomenon. With participatory planning, the design tries to create synergies between the different elements characterizing this cultural landscape and to recover the sometimes-lost identity of this place. The main goal is to envisage a new urban-rural territory able to offer a high quality of living space without losing, from one side, its touristic character and, from the other, its productive vocation in agriculture and energy.

Liebig's contribution suggests a singular interpretation of sustainability as related to humans' physical and psychological wellness. The neighbourhood of Husarenhof, in the western part of Hamburg (-town), is brought as an example of sustainability (eco-) because here new networks (web-) of relationships are created among inhabitants through the realization of spaces of social interaction and thus of human well-being.

Finally, this issue of Ecowebtown aims to describe the current urban design approaches towards sustainability in Germany and to look above, across and inside this territory with a changed perspective. This point of view includes both an enlarged view on territorial and spatial dynamics of change and a closer look to peculiar realities. With this look, "*Back to territory. Positions and forms of sustainability in Germany*" intends not only to sketch a general overview of German urbanism but also to position itself within the current scientific debate concerning urban disciplines and to express the need of an integrated and sustainable approach in the design of cities and landscapes.

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