

A MANIFESTO

Giulia Maci, Seppe de Blust, Clenn Kustermans

We must re-evaluate traditional concepts of planning. As planners and human beings we are used to growth. Growth seems (or seemed) to be natural, because there is coherence with our own lives: you are born, you grow, you sustain, you shrink, you die. But in urban terms today de-growth or shrinking does not necessarily mean decline or dying. We need to accept the fact that cities cannot and will not grow like they used to do. Moreover, in times of scarcity and shrinkage we can (at last!) focus on the parts that already exist.

We must react to rapid urban transformation. It seems necessary to go beyond theories and try practical actions to address concrete urban issues. It is time to get out our laid-backed offices and to leave our desks, digital aerial maps and other tools. Monitoring and evaluating real daily life are fundamental in our job to learn from the experiences and to *readjust* theories and strategies. An urban planner experiences local struggles personally. In East Germany, for example, a vast amount of cities is shrinking. Instead of trying to find ideas for new growth in the East, there is rather a need to fulfil local needs. And instead of building new suburban neighbourhoods (market-based thinking) and breaking down high-rise areas, planners could focus on *reshaping* the high-rise areas into positive and well-used places by new concepts. Enter the area, experience it melancholically and do something with it.

We must relocate urban functions and reorganize the metropolitan area as a network of autonomous centres. We cannot stick to our grandfathers' ideas of mono-centred cities. Many cities have grown from a core city to a core city with dead and depressing suburbs. Local centres become more important if people are working long days in another place or at home. It is time to focus on outlying neighbourhoods where most people live nowadays. For example, Berlin, London and Rotterdam are not just cities, but accumulations of different social worlds. To react on people's needs and to act democratically, a city must accept its polycentric form and attitude.

We must reuse and revitalize traditional city places adapting the spaces to old and new needs, uses and meanings. In this process it is important to identify and include all the different identities that constitute the city. What we do is not for ourselves, planners, but primarily about the other people shaping the city: plumbers, postmen, poets et cetera.

This also means that old-fashioned state tax systems should rather be reorganized: instead of luring cities and towns into growth-based income, a new concept can be introduced. As an alternative to growing and with more demographic, political and financial power, cities can be financed by other aspects (for example by stimulating projects that take away social struggles). In Belfast and Derry, for example, or in today's policy of building new Israeli settlements, there is an urgent need to answer local calls. Instead of continuing separate growth, many cities could focus on social integration of the people who already live there and not just on political or military strength.

We must redefine planning priorities and a new ethic for our profession and redistribute responsibilities for city development among different actors. The role of planner has to be redefined as a mediator who is able to listen to people's needs and expectations and translate them into right answers. This seems to be an old-fashioned phrase, and actually it is. But nonetheless it is still current. It must be understood that we can't manage a city by ourselves. It is like a dance floor. Space is limited, but people are free to dance. You can be timid and some basic steps, but you can also swing round boldly. The floor is made for people to communicate and dance or play together, not to curtail someone else. It is a collective individual happening in search of some happiness. The spatial planner is a background musician, bringing the beat and defining the pace. Just a face in a music-making crowd. Mediating such a process needs communication and ethics that do not judge the opinion or acts of the participants, but give space to their stories to become part of a bigger picture.

We must reduce and redistribute the ecological footprint of cities, plan compact cities, improve the efficiency of waste management, promote sustainable mobility and energy independence and to bring social justice to cities. One of the main qualities of the future city is climate resilience. Of course, today no one can deny it. But well-known examples of sustainable cities or neighbourhoods are out-dated. They are already in need of restoration. Moreover, sustainability nowadays is worn out by the bad examples representing it. Focussing on existing urban areas instead of growth brings a whole new dimension to sustainability. Especially in times of scarcity, social sustainability is a key issue. In Antwerp, for example, there is a huge need for improvement of social and ecological factors. Multiculturalism and transport have boosted the city since its early stages, but are now left unimportant.

We must re-imagine, too. If we want to take our responsibilities serious – solve global economic, social, ecological, spatial, political, philosophical problems – and accept that we can't do it alone; if we want to combine the ever-present utopia with concrete interventions; if we want to give space to collaboration and not get caught by ambiguity... then we will need to claim a non-contested position, the neutrality of the expert. Few people know what an urban planner is. Let us change that! It's the planner's expertise to re-imagine space, it's our first task to make this clear, communicate it, brand it and make it incontestable.

And, due to rapidly changing conditions, we must rewrite the Manifesto every year.