Introductory Report of Workshop 1A:
A Keen Eye: Visioning and Design

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Workshop Focus: Visioning and Design

The reports in this workshop offer a framework for visioning and design. The authors are primarily from Europe and the Americas. They describe a variety of actors involved in visioning, what the objectives and aims of visioning are, the nature of visioning, the meaning of strategic projects, and the need for contextual design in architecture and planning projects.

The papers were classified in accordance with the following criteria:
  a) theoretical or case-study approaches
  b) level of thematic integration of the visioning and design process
  c) order of magnitude of the implicated visioning and design process

Issues to be addressed in this Workshop relate to the following:
  a) the actors involved in visioning and the patterns in which they behave
  b) the objectives of visioning and contextual design processes
  c) the nature of the visioning processes
  d) the meaning of visioning and design processes, particularly of strategic projects.

Preliminary Findings

Together, the authors of this workshop promote a knowledge of visioning and contextual design. They clarify techniques on how to achieve them. Some cases relate the process of visioning within the trialogue setting, which consists of engaging the opinions of the public sector, the private sector, and planning professionals involved.

The cases of visioning processes and of the design of strategic projects could also be grouped by the following order of actions:

  a) The formation of a vision
  b) The organization of a vision
  c) The designs of a vision
  d) The time for a revision or redesign

The formation of a vision

This workshop discusses a range of possibilities for forming a vision. The broad spectrum of vision possibilities includes: metropolitan visions, physical visions, imposed visions, integrated visions, strategic visions, subjective visions, future visions, unified visions, economic visions, conjugated visions, long term visions, autonomous visions, as well as visions of autonomy, visions of economy, visions of image, and visioning the invisible.
The sets of *actors* involved in planning-related visioning can generally be characterized alluding to their very high levels of *structural diversity*.

The *objectives* and *aims* involved in the vision deserve careful attention: who of the extensive set of actors should become involved in their identification, value-setting and eventual adoption?

In relation with *visioning*, the issue offers several well diverse facets of interest. To begin with, visioning- either explicit or implicit- becomes central in every kind of scientific and artistic endeavor. In the former case, and particularly within the planning field, it becomes central during several stages of the planning process: early at its very beginning, under the format of hypotheses-generation, ideally configuring systemic complexes, aimed at the characterization of the contexts under consideration and their real or potential shortcomings, or, on the opposite, at identifying untapped present or future opportunities, thus adopting a descriptive and interpretive character. Later on, and most prominently, through the identification / pre-figuration of sets of alternative proposals of intervention, and in (tentatively at least) establishing the character of the relative multisectorial capacities, externalities and impacts of each of them, thus adopting a propositive and evaluative nature. Finally, and not less intensively, in conceiving the, again, alternative multisectorial patterns of implementation of the adopted proposals.

Planning-related visions can arrive from many directions, including top down and bottom up. What is important is integration. The authors contend that to have a vision requires knowing how to dream, to hope, to abstract. Cases show how visions are be possible, by invoking dream scenarios or by designing visionary variant concepts. Through visioning, the physical and invisible worlds are explored. However, for a vision to stick, it needs story telling, prophecy, perspective, or imagination. It also requires a technical methodology, with focusing stages, design compositions, and plan revisions. Successful visions and contextual designs require public participation and visibility.

The organization of a vision

The reports discuss many tools for managing and implementing a vision. One tool is that the analysis of the vision should be organized, regularized, or institutionalized. The institutionalization of the vision could be perfected through the trialogue process. The trialogue is shown as a rational tool, which strengthens the vision's capacity building and manages the conflicts of dichotomous interests. The trialogue is a symbol of strength and integrity and acts as an engagement of the various realities.

Workshop authors show that historically, the industrial revolution had necessitated a planning dialogue. With de-industrialization, the necessity has been made for a planning trialogue, with its organic thought processes and sustainability metrics.

An institution created for a vision should house the vision's underlining values, which are socially formed and institutionally important. They are rooted in the locality, and upon a concept of the local philosophy. The values of the vision are socially regularized through an alliance of the subjecting hearts and minds.

Although bottom-up public participation in a planning vision is shown as crucial, a political will is also needed to drive the vision's organization. This organization can be integrated from different policy instruments.

While some cases show that local governments typically accommodate the institutionalization of visions, others show that the vision may take the shape of a non-governmental organization, or a community-based or civil society organization- even a homeowner's association. University laboratories are also discussed as institutionalizing agents in the visioning process. Whatever form the organizing agency may take; it should be

creative and have interpretive flexibility of the plans for the projects. The organization can act as the project coordinator and creative agent.

The organization can also use keen marketing and advertising techniques to help institutionalize and record the vision, and to keep the dream alive.

The designs of a vision

Designs of an organized vision include planning effects such as strategic projects, masterplans, management plans, and policy programs.

Strategic projects, in order to execute the vision, need strategic approaches. Strategic approaches include the trialogue and in utilizing technical tools for quantitative analysis. Workshop examples include Criterion Coefficients, SWOT matrices, or other abstraction tools developed for normative evaluation.

In relation with the *design* of visioning and strategic projects, two different criteria of definition become feasible: (a) a restricted one, concentrated upon the physical / formal / morphological contents of urban environments and their constituent sets of material objects-urban places, buildings, infrastructure, as well as smaller equipment components, and (b) a comprehensive / structural one, with reference to all the formerly mentioned types of components, not only from a physical point of view, but also considering in articulated terms their functional, environmental, social, economic and institutional character. Systemic approaches of planning tend to establish themselves within the latter mentioned criterion.

Workshop cases show that Strategic Projects are often a political reaction to a recession, or an attempt to help recapture populations lost from a decline in industry. Strategic Projects typically intervene with economic development for degraded areas or brownfields. They are key projects, short-term and achievable. They should be integrated, which may occur organizationally, procedurally, functionally, financially, and substantively. Cases show that the more types of integration involved in the visioning and organizational process, the more likely their projects will be a success.

Some strategic projects are shown to secure a competitive advantage, while trying to achieve sustainability. Some case projects involve revitalizing public spaces, integrating an information and communication technology economy, attracting the creative social class, improving the health and fitness of a city, or creating social equity.

A time for revision

With the passage of time, or as a consequence of significant changes in the urban dynamic, a revision of the vision may become necessary. Revisions may be needed when an alteration, imposition, or collision occurs to a previous vision, or it may stem from a lack of vision originally, or from a weakness of vision. Revisions may also occur due to political changes or from other complexities, such as failed implementation or integration.

Revisions can also offer a chance for community renewal and for renewed project capacity building, for the possibility of new instruments, new actors, new images of the city, new visions, new trialogues, and new fashions in architecture and urban design.

Questions for the Workshop

What are the sources of visioning: ideological, theoretical or factual?

Is visioning, as an operation framed within the hypothetical-deductive course of operation, definitely more conducive than the alternative inductive or trial-and-error types of epistemological approaches? Why and how, in that case?

What levels of certitude should be recognized to the outcomes of visioning processes? Should the visioning processes be sectorally restricted, concentrating solely upon physical traits, or instead be of a thematically integrated character, involving professionally diverse human resources?

Should the visioning processes be restricted to members of the planning profession, or be open to the participation of community members, entrepreneurs and politically incumbent parties? In the latter case, should each one of the mentioned sectors be granted particular roles within the process of visioning?

What temporal limits should be considered, if any, regarding visioning processes?

Are visioning processes feasible in reference with diffuse urban regions?

Who within the extensive sets of actors should be in charge of determining design?

Should any particular thematic sector deserve relative priority or autonomy in determining designs?

What should be the design criteria in relation with the spatial delimitation of planning settings: jurisdictional or structural?

How should the local and the global scales become articulated and valued?

Should particular time settings be adopted on a standard basis in relation with design criteria?

Which criteria should govern the conditions of relative articulation between existing, transformed and new urban sectors?

Who should adopt decisions regarding design alternatives and intended outcomes?