



Interview:

Stefan Carsten

“Planning the Unknown”

of appreciation that will be changed through usage, creation and perception. This not only changed the view of the stakeholder that are involved in architectural processes, rather Baukultur is embedded in a holistic, processoriented context.

In terms of findings we had three major topics that we call paradigms. The first paradigm could be adressed as a new agenda for decentralized production regimes.. We think that large industrial clusters and large industrial agglomerations might look completely different or no longer exist in future. Much more decentralized production schemes will come up – a maker economy- and will completely reorganize the way of how we produce and how we consume goods.

The second paradigm is a new understanding of how we create wealth in the future. The current paradigm is more or less framed by the mere focus on economic growth. We understand that there are alternative modes of “wealth-creation” to consider. We need to have a closer look at them and ask ourself “How do we perceive wealth? What is quality of life beyond these models? And how do we organize a transformation from one mode to the other?” All of theses questions will gain much more focus in the future. We are not sure whether they will succeed, but they will gain more relevance in the public discourse and their impact on how we organize cities, urban life and economics.

The third paradigm is “What kind of energy infrastructure are we facing?”, basically, how will new energy landscapes look like. It is dealing with the discussion that we are facing since three or four years. “How will energy be produced? Where will it be produced? How will it come from the source to the consumer?”, and what does it mean for urban and rural spaces: Is there a new agenda of spatial inclusion?

So, what are the scenarios for this development? Is it obvious what will happen?

We based our findings on three scenarios, which are completely different from each other. These scenarios act as our future reference system that enables

to draw consequences for the present. When we deal with the year 2050, there is obviously no idea of how future will look like. It is not possible to have a clear understanding how the year 2050 in Germany, Europe or in the US will look like. We have to gain an entirely different methodological understanding of how we deal with futures. We no longer take trends or prognosis from historical data and transfer or expand them into the future. We have to incorporate speculations.

We have to gain an entirely different methodological understanding of how we deal with futures.

All of them can occur to the same likelihood. And we have to ask ourselves “While we have these alternative futures, what does it mean for the present?How can we deal with all three scenarios and what are robust paths and successful paths for all three scenarios to overcome today's obstacles?” It is interesting to observe that even for very diverse and very speculative scenarios, there are always robust requirements, paths and projects on how to continue. Moreover, we have to implement a very systemic understanding of what the future might be. Only then we are able to de-write our consequences in the present. Future speculations are a great way to learn a lot about the present.

Are these three outcomes, those robust requirements the decentralized production and so on?

Exactly. We are not saying that decentralized production, new energy landscapes and alternative wealth-creation-models are the very same in every scenarios. They have different outcomes and

PROF. DR. STEFAN CARSTEN

Born 1973; Doctorate in geography; from 1997 to 2013 Member of the Daimler Society and Technology Research Group in Berlin; since 2010 Member of raumtaktik - office from a better future.; key activities in the fields of social science research, urban and mobility research, and social transformation research

they have specifications. However, in our process it became more and more clear to all participants that these paradigms are robust paths in the future.

Can I go a bit deeper into the decentralized production part? What is the reason for this certainty? What is the disadvantage of centralized production? Do economies of scale not matter anymore?

Well, this is the world where information rather than goods are shipped. Production is organized locally, using local resources and digital technologies. There are new mobility services such as smartphones and cloud-sofwares where all the datas are being stored. You have information everywhere and you get new production technology like 3D printing. The idea of “Make Yourself” is becoming more popular, local energy production, solar energy and all kinds of renewable energies are gaining more and more relevance. And all these issues are forming the outcomes of a decentralized production regime.

If I would compare that to the beginning of the Internet hype, everybody said “You can live everywhere in the world and work from everywhere?” But what we see in the end is actually that there is even more centralization happening.

There is no contradiction, because this is a scenario where cities are a thriving power. People go to cities, because here are

social networks, here they can be innovative and have an access or share 3D printing or other kinds of technologies like vehicles or food production. Decentralized production is not only working in or for cities. It will be found in scenarios where cities are not the main driver, as well. But I am not saying that it is just a trend that is occurring. It is rather an outcome of all kinds future speculations. It could have different notions or different perceptions in other scenarios.

How can we contribute as a spatial discipline to make this scenario happen, or to strengthen this?

I think we need a completely different understanding of who are the players and what kind of spatial entities play a role in these processes ?

The interdisciplinary approach, is very relevant to understand the complexity of our environment.

What I already mentioned was the interdisciplinary approach, which is very relevant to understand the complexity of our environment. Next to the interdisciplinarity it is the notion of inter-regionality. That means, that we do not have to face these issues from the perspective of one city like Hamburg. We have

Can you give a short discription of your practice “raumtaktik” and the content of recent research projects mainly “The Baukulturatlas Germany 2030/2050”?

“raumtaktik” is currently dealing with a project on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB). It is called “Baukulturatlas 2030/2050 in Germany”. It dealt with current and future challenges in terms of new energy structures, the re-thinking social and physical infrastructures and the socio-economic agenda for the coming years. These transition effects will affect land use and will derogate landscape to a high degree.

The face of Germany will change significantly in coming decades.

The face of Germany will change significantly in coming decades. One interesting finding was, that we shouldn't focus on “Baukultur” as a built environment. The “Baukulturatlas Deutschland 2030/2050” attempts to extend this definition of “Baukultur” to be understood not only as built, but as “lived-in environment”. This broader understanding of Baukultur as the lived-in environment refers to processes

to face the same issue from a perspective of a rural area, maybe of an area with a lot of natural resources or from a perspective of a village located in the suburbs. These issues get different outcomes and consequences from every spatial entity you look at. Asking ourselves about planning issues: “Do I only need geographer, urban developer and architects for these kinds of issues?” – No, I need experts from all kinds of social science; I need experts from biology, space science and local experts from the cities, local experts from the rural areas, from the suburbs, the villages and so on.

What we need is the input from all kinds of different fields.

What we need is obviously the input from all kinds of different fields. In the end we can overlay everything to roughly understand what is going on. This would be a completely new planning paradigm.

It is interesting in what you are saying, that this is much more about understanding a situation than projecting a situation, or putting some kind of blueprint onto something. What is so crucial in understanding the situation? If I want to start a small business with 3D printers in Gütersloh, I can do that the same as in Hamburg. What are the crucial factors in an environment that makes it successful or not? Is it that somehow the development fits? That you made the right choices or...?

I am not sure whether I can answer the question on such a detailed level. What I would say – which is maybe a bit disappointing for a designer is that for sure we have to accept diversity- in every respect in every planning. We

would like to better understand the present, but we are not able at all to fully understand the situation, because it is so complex and it is changing in every moment. We have to accept diversity and, thus, uncertainty within these processes and at the same time we have to communicate these uncertainties.

We are also interested in the triangle space / economy / governance. How do you influence this kind of processes on a governance level? For sure you cannot decide things top down anymore, you have to start a dialogue. Do you have any vision on how you move forward with this kind of uncertainties?

In our processes we derive scenarios as a future reference for our todays acting. Then, we localize our scenarios in cities, regions or neighborhoods. By doing so, we invite policy-makers, scientist, entrepreneurs and/or citizens to our processes to discuss local consequences that can be found in the scenarios.

Planning is able to integrate the triangle space, economy and governance.

This approach perfectly shows how planning is able to integrate the triangle space, economy and governance. As I was saying, the uncertainty is in dealing with the future. But out of these uncertainties you can derive very clear and very specific consequences and implications. And these consequences and implications should lead to projects or to the definition and planning of projects that will be more successful than others

I wrote my thesis on the “Zukunftsfähigkeit von Stadtregionen” (Sustainability of urban/city regions). So it was exactly the

question you were addressing: “How can we actually integrate a goal for cities that we will achieve upon?” So how can we really get sustainable urban entities? We need goals that need to be addressed, that need to be put on a common ground by all kinds of interdisciplinary groups and all kinds of stakeholders that are involved on the bases of alternative futures.

This is what you see a lot in regional politics, that you try to organize these kinds of multi-stakeholders processes. I think where it becomes critical is if you have conflictuous situations. Let’s say for example the region Rhein Neckar does not really has a problem in defining a common goal for the region, because they have four big industrial players, which do not compete with each others. But the Ruhr area has a much bigger problem, because they have competing entities.

Yes. What is interesting would be your experiences from the Randstad-Region, because the Randstad-Region has a long tradition in implementing and addressing scenarios in these kinds of spatial planning procedures. And how are they overcoming these industrial conflicts? Whenever we are sitting together with diverse players, at some point of these processes they fully understand that they are all sitting together and they all have no clue of how the future will look like. This is the best discussion- they all start thinking in futures.

Basically accepting that you do not know, try to get a grip on it first and if the problem is so complex, you actually cannot be tactical anymore or try to defend your own interest, because you are just trying to understand the situation. That is very much open source thinking, right?

Yes, definitely. But it is not happening from one day to another.

Even in these planning processes we are thinking in time-frames to re-shape thinking and planning. It is something that needs trust. Trust is not coming instantly. And this is what we see when we were working with companies and political institutions.

We try to change the way people think.

We try to change the way people think. And they only do so, when they trust in our work. Only then, people change their perspectives on reading newspapers, articles, or papers. We are just changing their perspective on all kind of issues, facts and data. And this is always a good start.

How do you translate that into policy? And what is the role of governments? Because one of the problems with this kinds of processes is that this is of course not a majority based process, where majority decides. But it is a kind of a dialogue, where you often keep the relevant stakeholders on the table - you have to leave the result open, some people might say “I am not participating, if this is one of the options.” Talking about energy in the Ruhr area for example. I do not know if you have any experience on that? What is the role of government in your vision? Are they organizing these kinds of processes and how can that be translated into policy?

To answer the first question: To get policies out of it, is comparably easy. It is a definition of the question that you put on the table and it is the mixture of people involved.

To answer the second question: I think these kinds of processes are to some extend new for governments, because the outcome is not known. “I do not know what the outcome might be, but I will face it. And I face the consequences in a way I am responsible for the next step that comes out of it.” And yes, this is quite complicated.

These kinds of processes are to some extend new for governments, because the outcome is not known.

Because it is something different than a referendum that you have in mind. So it needs a complex communication and dialog and not just a simple question that’s answered in a polemical and populist way.

I am pretty sure you should put a lot of focus on your issues that you are having in the Randstad area, because this is an area with a lot of history and very diverse planning procedures. With “raumtaktik” we are integrating visual outcomes: factors, visualization of talks and discussions, visualizations of outcomes. To make these very complex issues a little bit easier to understand or to shed a different light and perspective on these very complex issues. And the visuals make it somehow easier obviously.

Interview

Conducted by Martin Sobota

Rotterdam & Berlin

11. June 2014