

Can Landscape Urbanism Help to Plan in ‘Territories-in-Between’

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Europe is an urbanized continent. It is largely made of “middle landscapes”, or “hybrid geographies”. “Urban” areas can be found in rather rural landscapes (urban sprawl in major metropolis, large food processing districts, and clusters...), while “rural” areas can be found within urban environments. (Mcrit 2010)

Harmers (in Andexlinger 2005) calls these areas Shadowland. He sees them as areas forgotten and neglected by planners and policy makers. ‘Planners, designers and administrators often lack a sufficient insight into what goes on in areas that cannot be pinned down in conventional categories. They deny the conditions in which such areas emerged, ... who is active in them...’. Similar conclusions to Harmer’s for the Dutch case, can be found across Europe.

Despite the dominance in Europe of territories that blend both urban and rural characteristics, there is widespread agreement that public policy continues mainly to divide the world into simple ‘urban’ or ‘rural’ categories (Healy 2007; Haughton et al. 2009; Shane 2005; Weber 2010). In other words, the problem we are faced with is the struggle of planners and policy makers to understand and act in areas that are in a transitional state away from an urban rural dichotomy.

Overcoming the urban rural dichotomy

It is important to emphasise that these areas, which I call Territories-in-between (TiB), cannot solely be explained as an intensification of urban functions in the rural environment. TiB are areas where new functions, uses and lifestyles arise as a result of the on-going interaction of urban and rural elements (Garreau 1991; Viganò 2001; Sieverts & Bölling 2004).

TiB have been described in Europe since nearly a century now, but they didn’t find their way into mainstream spatial planning and policies yet. Geographer Friedrich Leyden (Sieverts & Bölling 2004) stated as early as in 1933, that in Berlin the areas outside of the Berliner Ringbahn developed beyond a tangible spatial organisation. He describes the for TiB characterising intermingling of urban and rural land uses and lifestyles, of city and landscape.

Nevertheless several projects and studies focused on TiB. Zwischenstadt (Sieverts, 2001), Tussenland (Frijters and Ruimtelijk Plan-

bureau, 2004), City Fringe (Louis, 1936), Città Diffusa (Secchi, 1997), territories of a new modernity (Viganò, 2001), Stadtlandschaft (Passarge, 1968), Shadowland (Hamers, 2005), Spread City (Webber, 1998) and Annähernd Perfekte Peripherie (Campi et al., 2000) are a selection of names given to this spatial phenomenon across Europe. All of this project have the understanding of the ‘urban landscape as a large interlocking system rather than as set of discrete cities surrounded by countryside’ (Bruegmann 2005) in common. This understanding comes often with giving a higher priority to landscape features than to the build environment in the process of planning and design. Which in my understanding is the simplest way of defining the concept of landscape urbanism.

TiB across Europe

Before investigating what the concept of landscape urbanism is and how it can contribute to reduce the above described struggle, I want to focus more on TiB. Three aspect were specifically striking for me after analysing TiB across Europe in the first year of my PhD.

The first is the sheer amount of territories-in-between in Europe. It is important to understand that they are not a marginal phenomenon, neither spatially nor concerning the amount of people living in and the land TiB are covering. The second is how divers TiB across Europe are, although having very similar spatial characteristics. The third is how little is known about the sustainability of these areas.

Over the last decades, continuous urban expansion at rates much higher than population growth has resulted in a massive extension of the urban footprint on Europe. Kasanko et al. (2006) stated that ‘in half of the studied cities over 90% of all new housing areas built after the mid-1950s are discontinuous urban developments. When putting these findings into the context of stable or decreasing urban population, it is clear that the structure of European cities has become

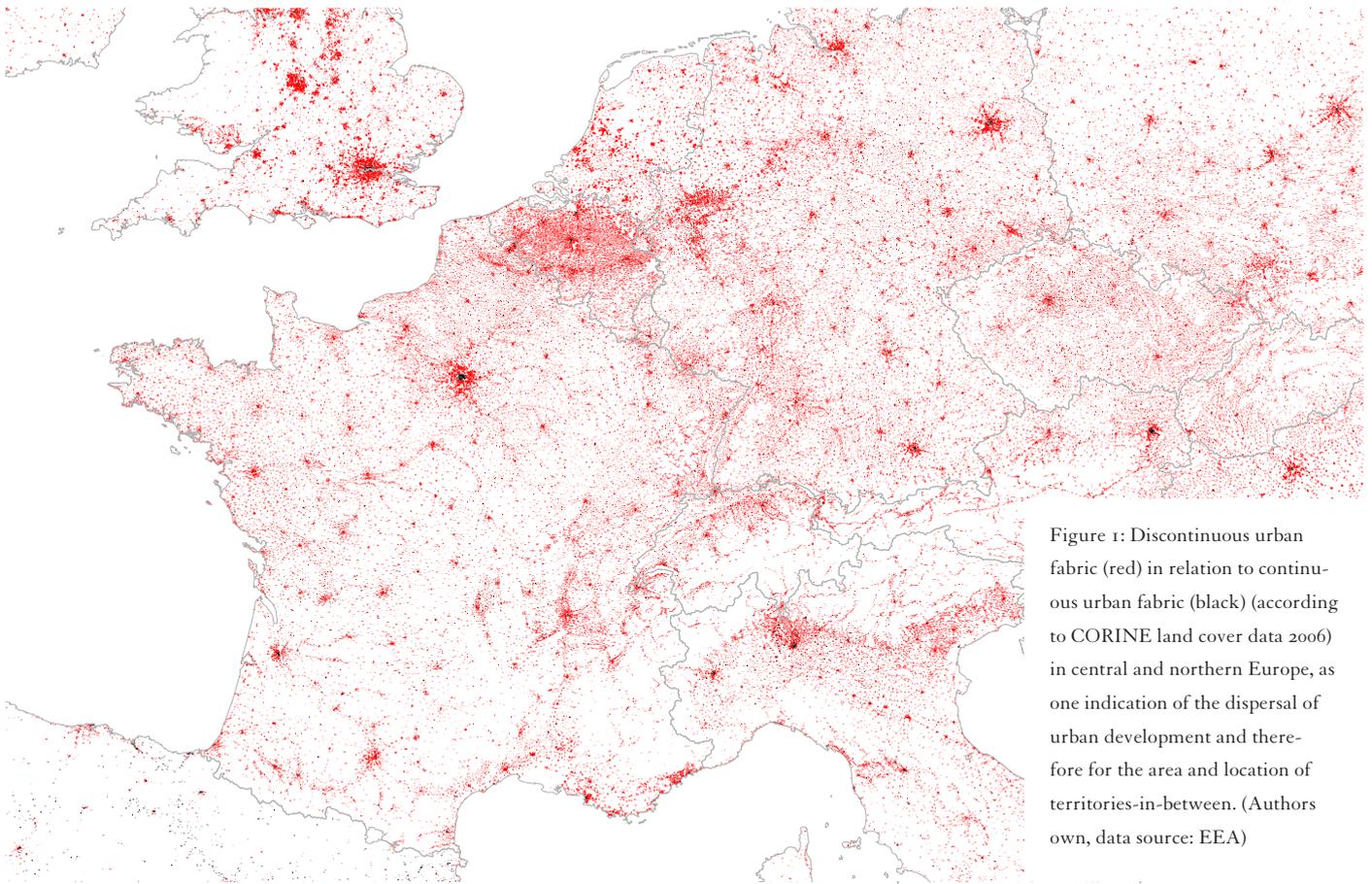


Figure 1: Discontinuous urban fabric (red) in relation to continuous urban fabric (black) (according to CORINE land cover data 2006) in central and northern Europe, as one indication of the dispersal of urban development and therefore for the area and location of territories-in-between. (Authors own, data source: EEA)

less compact. In most cases it is mere a question of taste whether to call it urban sprawl or urban dispersion.’ His study reported on large and mid-size urban areas in Europe, but a quick glance at Figure 1, showing the relation of discontinuous to continuous urban areas in Europe, illustrates that dispersion took also place outside of these large urban areas and that it is actually a cross European phenomenon. One could concluded that the borders between city and countryside blur (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows examples of TiB across Europe, although very different on first sight all of them show similar spatial properties:

- Infrastructure in its furthest meaning is a dominant feature.
- Intensive intermingling of built and unbuilt,
- An accumulation of ‘big box’ uses like business parks, water treatment plants, shopping centres which are not found in cities itself.
- A high spatial fragmentation of different uses and functions often as result of the intense infrastructure.
- Local and global orientated uses are often located next to each other but have hardly any relation with each other.

TiB are often neglected in main stream planning and spatial policies. The discussion about the sustainability of dispersed urban development is often reduced to a comparison of the dense city versus sprawl. Where in general sprawl is often seen as less sustainable. This conclusion is often based on American studies. In one of the few European studies on urban sprawl, that go further than comparing land uses, Couch et al. (2007) came to the conclusion that, ‘maybe sprawl is not anything sustainable, but again, it is no more unsustainable than other

types of urban development. Environmental policy for sustainability in sprawling areas of our city case studies was weak or non-existent.’ The next steps in my research are going to address this lack of knowledge further. Landscape urbanism is one of different ways of planning, which I have been investigating for this reason.

The contribution of Landscape urbanism to planning in Territories-in-between

The dissolving of city and landscape as well as the absence of nature in TiB brings the chance to go beyond a pastoral scenic understanding of landscape. Landscape is not defined by the absence of infrastructure, but could be seen as ‘a medium through which all ecological transactions must pass, it is the infrastructure of the future and therefore, of structural rather than (or as well as) scenic significance’ (Weller in Waldheim 2006:73). This way of understanding landscape is the basic fundament of landscape urbanism and a challenge for ‘traditional’ spatial planning and policy making which often operates in an urban rural divide.

Landscape Urbanism is a theory of urbanism that argues that the landscape, rather than buildings are more efficient to organize urban development. Landscape urbanism as a concept was primarily pushed forward by Charles Waldheim and colleagues at the department of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. They did so deliberately in opposition to New Urbanism. While in the States the conflict between Landscape Urbanism and New Urbanism was dominating, the discourse in Europe became more and more influential especially for regional planning and design over the last decades, often not labelled as landscape urbanism though.

Viganò (2011) emphasised two important aspects of landscape urbanism which enriched the debate about city and territory. ‘The first is ... that it tackles and defines possible strategies when the conditions are such to raise doubts about existing design and planning tools.’ Which is as demonstrated above the case in TiB. The second ‘is the role of the open space in the construction of the contemporary city, ... of a diffuse urban condition in which the void, in its various declinations ... becomes part of the design of the new habitat.’ The dominant spatial characteristics of TiB is the intermingling of built and unbuilt therefore, starting from the void offers interesting aspects for planning in TiB.

The term Landscape urbanism is very much related with the renewal of brownfield sites and attempts to an ecological recovery of waste lands. The most known examples so far concentrated on the large scale with so called ‘great projects’ which rose a certain attention and were not involved in the daily administrative routines. Having a closer look at some prominent examples like the International Bau Ausstellung (IBA) Emscherpark in the Ruhrgebiet or the Neue Donau - Donauinsel project in Vienna, allows to draw the conclusion that they are actually not big projects but ‘big plans’ respectively ‘big strategies’.

I want to emphasise the following five aspects:

1. Due to the size of the projects they had not only a high complexity concerning their design and construction but also concerning the political and governance process during their realisation. This led very often to new, respectively locally developed forms of participation and governance.
2. The projects were integrative by definition (see definition of landscape here above) and therefore, provided a framework on the one side for a general development goal but on the other hand for specific projects, which is one way of bridging the gap between planning and design.
3. Crossing (administrative) borders is an essential aspect of this projects which leads to a involvement of more and especially also non-public actors.
4. To understand landscape as infrastructure emphasise the importance of networks for urbanised areas as well the understanding that landscape has to be seen as a multifunctional serving several needs, ecological but also social and economic.
5. The projects contribute to the identity of former non places.

These five aspects are in general important for regional planning and design, but specifically in Territories-in-Between, which are very fragmented in every sense. So an approach that manages to involve actors who don't interact on a regular basis and that crosses borders is essential to achieve a more sustainable spatial development. Landscape features are often the only spatial structures that provide an identity generating character and are therefore, worthwhile as a starting point to engage people and develop a spatial strategy. This is even more true in times where public funding is scarce.



Figure 2. Impressions from TiB across Europe. (Source: Author's own)



Figure 3. Dounauinsel – Neue Donau before, small image, and after the realisation of the project. Planned as a ‘purely’ high water protection project in the 1960's, public opposition led in 1969 to an urban design competition. The result was not one winning project but a group of interdisciplinary experts, which steered over two decades planning and realisation of the spatial development across disciplinary and administrative borders. Today the 21km long and 200m is one of Vienna's most used leisure areas as well as import ecological corridor crossing the city. (Photos: Austria.lexikon.at)

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