

Summary

This PhD thesis examines the concept of the urban site in relation to polarised spatial development in Denmark. At the core of this research project is a design based investigation that tests site based approaches in two study areas in East and North Jutland. Together with – and directly related to the design study – an investigation of the theoretical and methodological foundations of contemporary urban design practice is undertaken.

The phenomenon of polarisation is a pertinent starting point to identify challenges and potentials of contemporary urban design. Polarised spatial development reflects a radical urbanisation process that challenges the domain and the procedures of urban design. Key words are regionalisation, dissolution of the city/countryside dichotomy, and regional, national and transnational networks. At the same time, the discourse on polarisation marks a shift from an ideal of spatial equality throughout Denmark to an ideal of balanced development. This shift dates back to the 1980s but has gained new topicality in light of increased spatial inequality. Current Danish spatial policy targets the two large city regions around Copenhagen and in East Jutland as the engines of national economic growth. At the same time, the development of different local qualities is claimed. In short, current Danish spatial policy focuses on strategic site based approaches to spatial development. In this context, design based procedures could come to play an important role. My argument is that design can generate situational, action-oriented knowledge. This, however, requires that we leave behind ideal models of the city and the countryside. Instead, urban designers have to proceed in explorative ways and develop each individual site as a dynamic network of physical, social, and cultural relationships.

This research project frames urban design as a practice of continuous transformation that requires and generates transdisciplinary

knowledge. In this connection, site survey is emphasized as the key to design strategies. Furthermore, the communicability and connectivity of urban design procedures both with regard to an academic research context and with regard to the context of urban development practice is stressed. Based on actor-network-theory (ANT), it is outlined how site knowledge and site knowledge production can be understood and further articulated with regard to a transdisciplinary sphere of action.

The research points towards what I will call an ›urbanism of entanglement‹. An urbanism of entanglement continuously reassembles the city. A city which on closer inspection is constituted by **shifting alliances** of multiple heterogeneous actors – people, things, ideas, etc. In short, a space of potential in which development can neither be fully predicted nor controlled by design. In this context, urban design is fundamentally reconceived as a relational practice that mediates processes of continuous transformation.

Urban design works thus through entanglement of existing material conditions, discursive and spatial practices. To this end urban design must constantly weave back and forth between observation and design, reading and writing of urban sites and situations. This means that urban design is simultaneously a practice form and a form of knowledge production. And further, rather than being an autonomous field of work urban design is a transdisciplinary field that connects multiple practice and knowledge forms. Finally, an urbanism of entanglement brings about design interventions which stress performativity and connectivity.

An urbanism of entanglement proposes new perspectives on polarised urban development in Denmark. Starting from a dynamic relational concept of the city, East and North Jutland can be perceived as different regional situations within a potentially unlimited networked urban landscape. At the same time, the enhancement of active site relationships comes into focus. This offers among others new vistas to work comprehensively across urban and rural zones without necessarily abandoning different planning frameworks.

Starting from a dynamic relational concept of the city not only the city/countryside dichotomy is abandoned. A whole set of dichotomies such as local/global; subjective/objective; culture/nature are simply set aside as irrelevant to the task. In a relational perspective each locus is understood as framing and summing up of multiple site relationships that define different margins of interaction. It thus becomes possible to study and develop a given urban site across multiple scales. This seems particularly relevant when considering that polarised development is

not a phenomenon that can be allocated on a certain scale. In extensive networked urban landscapes centrality and peripherality cannot be grasped in terms of hierarchic urban systems based on a stable notion of the urban geography.

An urbanism of entanglement focuses on local potentials and problems in a relational perspective. As such, it provides approaches to grasp and unfold aesthetic qualities and to continuously adapt the performance of dynamic urban situations. By means of relational site construction urban designers bring about situational, action-oriented knowledge that can enable or contribute to critical debate between planners, experts and citizens and thus qualify a local course of action.