

Workshop 01 The City as a Stage: Urban Entertainment

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THE NEW ECONOMY AND THE CITY IMAGE

The environments of the new economy

We live in a rapidly changing technology environment - amidst the third industrial revolution whose speed and ultimate configuration are hard to predict. In this process of ever-faster change, the built environment has had to adapt to ongoing growth and change that are quick and often uncontrolled. The old urban fabric is being renewed at a growing pace. Also the symbols of cities are being reformed and revised. The motors of the economy - the biocities and the technology parks and centres - have taken the place of town halls and cultural centres in building and development in recent years. But above all the new economy means global competition, involving regions and areas in relation to desired companies, firms, labour and residents. This is all reflected in the competitiveness of areas. Clusters and concentrations of skill and achievement will emerge.

According to the report issued by UNICE – the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe – the competitive ability of the new economy particularly depends on four factors. 1) A strong entrepreneurial spirit, which is the key to growth; this entails, among other factors, how private enterprise and its opportunities are supported socially and regionally. 2) The second factor is a competitive environment, i.e. with labour market and the market for goods and services sufficiently flexible for change. 3) The third factor is a world-standard infrastructure of skills, meaning, among other things, that researchers have strong incentives to seek new knowledge and to give it commercial applications. 4) The fourth factor consists of societies able to support change in better ways, i.e. the ability of individuals to adapt to technological development, which means that states and

governments should encourage private individuals to try out new technologies, products and services.

The desired state of society is also reflected in planning, decisions and realization concerning the physical, built environment. In view of this environment, the competitive factors of the new economy could also mean the following. Entrepreneurship can also be reinforced by giving an area an image as the concentration of a certain sector of industry. The result will be information concentrations of specific fields, which will attract new firms and companies into the area.

A competitive environment is also a "home base" for companies, in broader terms the basis of good operations as well as quality of life. Competitive companies must also be able to offer their employees a high-class living environment and services. A skills infrastructure of world class requires, among other things, a functioning relationship among universities, institutes of learning and local firms and companies; in the future interaction between research and practical operations will gain even greater emphasis. A society supporting that ability of the individual to change in turn requires the individual to have an opportunity to have local influence on the environment and its development.

How can the physical environment respond to these challenges of the new economy? Production is no longer dependent on local environmental conditions, such as raw materials, water or physical communications; the localization of firms and companies is now dictated by immaterial local properties such as general operating circumstance, the level of innovation, the image of the area etc. The attractiveness of an area in the eyes of industry and local residents is an increasingly abstract concept that can be explicitly controlled to a certain extent.

At the level of the individual, change in society means wider and better availability of information, a greater range of available goods and services, and lower prices. It also means work of a more independent nature, but also greater responsibility and authority to make decisions. Moreover, the boundaries between work and leisure, home and the workplace, and public and private will be blurred, leading to changes in lifestyles. On the one hand, people will become increasingly dependent on their physical dwelling environment if they are engaged in tele-work. But on the other hand, it will be easier than before to choose jobs, and people will change homes and places of employment more often. In the future the attractiveness of residential areas and public spaces will become a regional competitive factor of growing importance.

Local advantages and strengths must be the starting points for competitiveness. Decision-makers must know the history, narratives and stories of an area, and they must reinforce their visibility. It is also necessary to attend to and take care of diverse, modern public

services, which also means the public spaces and areas of cities. Residential areas must quickly respond to different, changing lifestyles and ensure both privacy and communality to a sufficient degree. The individual's opportunities to develop himself and to influence his environment are to be given support via the environment: there must be sufficient and diverse cultural and pastime facilities, and there has to be easy access to sports and exercise facilities. There must also be support for the participation and influence of residents in local decision making.

The image of the competitive environment of the new economy is strong and distinctive; it is also a positive one in relation to the individual, entrepreneurs and the business community. All these aspects can be influenced through the physical environment and the regional image based on it. Previously, there was talk of the "image of a city", the physical townscape in the minds of its inhabitants. But today, experts speak of the concept of the "city image", containing not only the physical environment but also the properties and aspects of function, image and association. The city image steers regional desirability and thereby its welfare and further development.

The environmental responsibility of the city

There is growing current discussion and debate on the social and ethical values of companies and especially their responsibility towards society in terms of economy, environment and people. The corporate citizenship entails economic, environmental and social responsibility.

Traditionally, environmental responsibility has mainly encompassed the dimension of sustainable development. In the future the importance of responsibility for the environment will, however, be seen in broader and more diverse terms than previously. Alongside sustainable development and environmental conservation values of equal importance are welfare of people and their well being in relation to the environment, and the development of the regional image in a positive and affirmative vein. The "friendly community" and the "walkable community" are keywords in developing the environment. One of the main environmental criteria of the new economy after the "event cities" concept will be the "ecocity" properties of the area. Security, cleanliness, scale, sustainable development and even an organic society are objectives with which the environment is evaluated and marketed.

In discussing the values of a city it is necessary to take into account an interpretation of environmental responsibility that is broader than previous ones. By making the whole built and natural environment a qualitative competitive factor and an important functional and social value, it is possible to create in a genuine sense a city image that is attractive and easy to market even at the international level. In speaking of the environmental responsibility of the city, its main criteria

are the quantity and quality of public space, the comforts of residential areas and the standard of their physical communications, the range of business and services, the state of the natural environment and access to recreational areas, and the spirit of the area and region itself— the genius loci.

There is never a good image without due grounds for it. Even good marketing will not save a poor product, while a good product will often sell even without major marketing efforts. The content of the city image is largely composed on concrete factors: the purity of the environment, security, comforts, the range and level of services, special local features and history. On the other hand, the image also entails factors that cannot be predicted, such as personal feelings, desires and events, and values.

In practice, environmental responsibility is also realized through the genuine interaction of residents with their environment. Active neighbourhood committees and civic organizations can play a key role in creating a network of opportunities to influence things at the grass-roots level. Care for their own immediate surroundings will permit residents to make a commitment to the environment and also to take responsibility for it.

The urban genius loci

Throughout the centuries our image of the city has been marked by the history of cities: important historical figures, locations and related events of the past. These aspects are underscored with monuments, squares, parks and buildings. The tales and narratives of history have created the content and richness of the city, and the attendant framework has been in keeping with these tales. The stratification of the urban fabric has also kept continuity from one generation to another.

There can be no real city without history. It is from history that the stories and tales of the city arise, the content that is read and interpreted by its inhabitants. History creates stratified narratives in which urban identity is created to find concrete expression in the physical, built environment. Narratives evoke emotions and experiences together with the environment.

Nor can there be a city without a centre. It is from its centre that a city begins. The centre is its deepest and most significant narrative, and often its most stratified part in terms of history. The centre is the heart of the city and the basis of its identity. Despite regional scope or diffusion the city image is largely articulated through the nature of the centre.

In "The Seduction of Place" Joseph Rykwert reminds his readers that the city is steered by other forces than rational-economic ones alone. Conceptions and ideas, emotions and desires have steered and will steer the objectives of those who build cities. Thus, the city is not developed according to quasi-laws of nature as taught by economists, but, as Rykwert underlines it is always an artefact of expressing will and a human construction, in which conscious and unconscious factors play a role.

Rykwert also points out that the modern city is contradictory, containing many cultures and its image can thus not be explicit and coherent. Its diversity should rather be seen as a positive factor and an asset. The "urban image" of the contemporary city is inevitably multicultural and multi-faceted, and continuously changing. The changing of images can, however, be guided and controlled through the urban fabric.

At the end of his book Rykwert summarizes that instead of the process of making space that has continued for long we should focus on creating places in cities. Places are the fixed points of inhabitants and the true materials of the city image. They are the nodes of history and are full of narratives and tales.

The genius loci cannot be constructed but it can be supported. By underlining the stratified nature of history and by increasing the natural interaction of residents with their environment conditions can be created for the existence of a genius loci. The home, locality and the importance of place have not disappeared in our global world. On the contrary, they often provide identity and strength in a changing world.