2010

Andrejsala is not an Island - Joined-up approaches to the layered city

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http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/19495

Architecture and Planning - The Scientific Journal of

ANDREJSALA IS NOT AN ISLAND – JOINED UP APPROACHES TO THE LAYERED CITY

ANDREJSALA IR NE SALU – PIEBLIEDROJAS AUGSTAK PIEEJAS PIE SLANAINAS PILSETAS

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Key Words: global city, palimpsest, joined-up thinking

Introduction

Andrejsala is, of course, not an island; true, this port and industrial area of Riga, and most recently the locus of a massive mixed-use regeneration proposal of housing, offices, retail, leisure and cultural facilities, was once the site of a shifting sandbar in the Daugava River. Since at least the late 1800s it has however been connected to the mainland, forming part of the river's eastern bank.

In many other respects however Andrejsala is an island. Economically, it is one of a number of industrialised spaces which have historically fragmented the city's physical fabric. Simultaneously, projected on to it have been the objectives and ideologies of the various political powers that have ruled over the city; these projections have been conveyed through not only the ownership of the site and activities that have been prioritised or restricted, but equally through the area's perceived accessibility. This disparateness has been accentuated by the presence of a broad width of busy roadway and railroad tracks, which together have acted to distance Andrejsala despite its proximity to the city centre.

Today this sense of isolation continues, represented in the master plan prepared by the architectural office of OMA. Imposed on the 'island' within its urban syntax, the proposition's self-isolation is founded upon various theoretical, economic, political values.

In opposition to the singular thinking which underpins the scheme, this paper will explore approaches to the regeneration of Andrejsala based on the principle of joined-up thinking; intrinsic to such an agenda is an understanding of Andrejsala not as an isolated element, but instead as a contiguous part of both the Daugava River and the city of Riga. In doing so it will critique the existing master plan by examining the concept of the global city, and intrinsic constructs of economics, culture and image, which underpin the OMA proposition; concurrently discussed will be the failings of spatial representations of the global city. This paper will put forward in place of such thinking a proposition grounded in an understanding of the city as a palimpsest. The joined-up thinking which informs this approach will be illustrated by recent design studio work carried out by University of Plymouth Master of Architecture students.

A critique of the current situation

The 'global city' has in recent years become intrinsic to the language of urbanism. They exist primarily as places of business, tied into a global network of exchange, not only of goods, but ever-increasingly (and significantly) as the locus of a concentration of financial capital. Operating at a transnational scale, they act as strategic places in the world economy. [1]

Yet they are not only about the exchange of finance, services and goods, but also the exchange of ideas. Embedded within this context is an economy of culture which plays a significant role in the conceptualisation, self-identification, and formation of these urban constructions. As Zukin notes, '*Global cities share...a common cultural strategy that imposes a new way of seeing landscape; internationalizing it, abstracting legible image from the service economy, connecting it to consumption rather than production.* [2]

Intrinsic to this shift is the appeal that the global city makes to tourists. [3] One only need look at cities which have recently sought to place themselves firmly on the world stage to see evidence of how they have used culture as a form of capital to generate economic activity and investment; modelling themselves on the "Bilbao effect", they place centre stage a proposal for a major cultural institution, not only as a panacea for driving forward regeneration, but as an immediately recognisable icon through which the city might

project an image of being cosmopolitan, cultured, sophisticated and educated – all of which are attributes that might stimulate both cultural tourism and business investment.

What contemporary art that is to go there is typically not defined until the institution is already fixed in the master plan, not that it matters. The primary aim of this pre-requisite component of the global city is to act as a generator of economic activity through the sale of culture-related merchandise and the eating and drinking to be enjoyed in cafes and restaurants within the arts venue; equally, its intention is to serve as a symbol to project a sense of culture [1] and so encourage potential investors and tourists of the worthiness of investing in and visiting the city.

A companion element of culture is the exchange centred on leisure. Nourished in recent years by increased disposal income (at least for that segment of society which has benefitted from the growth experienced in the economy of the global city), this cosmopolitan lifestyle is lived out in an abundance of museum and gallery-going, dining and drinking, and mass-spectator sporting and cultural events. As Zukin [4] suggests, this economy of culture is utilised as a form of capital, acting as '...*a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity.*' The overall effect is one of 'transforming themselves into museal environments for an increasingly globalized cultural tourism.' [5]

Image 1 City as image and site as tabula rasa
(C. Lingham image)

[1] The effectiveness of this projection draws on a definition of culture as *'enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training, acquaintance with and taste in fine arts, humanities, and broad aspects of science...'* [6]

The intertwined primacy of economic and cultural capital that underpins the global city is grounded in a new landscape which projects a privileged view of the city as a place of cultural and economic vitality. The image of the global city is bold, dynamic and most of all new. Casting off any remaining vestiges of a rusting, decaying fabric associated with an industrial past, however re-useable it may be, the global city offers us the most-up-to-date branded version of urbanity as envisioned by one of the more fashionable (and sellable) star-architects. Central to this attitude is a tendency to look forward to a new and better life enabled by innovative forms of architecture, representing the city and the life it will structure as they presumably ought to be. (Lost in this of course is the irony that these innovative urban forms tend to look alike.)

This approach to the landscape of the global city is dependent upon a *tabula rasa*; i.e., a sterilized site free of the limitations imposed by the actual conditions of existing places and acts of inhabitation. Within this purified ground the global cities' proponents can then '…write in cement the composition created in the laboratory…' [7] In place of the existing environment they seek to impose an image; not an actual milieu with all its workings, but rather an 'objectified scene' [8]; what is generated is an aesthetic reflecting the prevailing interests and values of those who have economic, political and social power. [9]

What they most want is to attract economic activity, in terms of investment and touristic activity. Within this model consumption, whether as physical objects or events, is prioritized. In practise however this emphasis is not able to tolerate other discourses – notably cultural, ecological, political and social ambiguities and complexities which might conflict with and/or compromise economic aims which have been granted primacy.

This prioritisation is manifested in dialectics of extremes in the city's formation and appropriation, including: the global / local, empowered / disenfranchised, modern / traditional, corporate / immigrant, and transitory / embedded. [10] Too often absent from discussion is consideration of alternative values (and those who hold them and the settings in which they are emplaced), typically those marginalized from the prevailing and

hegemonic cultural establishment. The corollary is that intrinsic to the global city is a focus on a particular socio-economic group – i.e., those who can afford it and are deemed 'cultured-enough' to partake in it.

An underlying though critical question is what happens not only to those existing spaces, but equally what has occurred there? Indeed, the vision that politicians and society prioritise is that of new buildings and modern construction, which it is argued represent progress and an advanced economy, while other forms of space and economic activity are relegated. [11]

This inability to deal with the reality of the condition, to overlook the complexity of life and to instead conceive of cities as works of art is, as Jacobs and Sennett have noted, a failure of idealised cities. [12] What is emphasised is the city not as lived space, but as image; this image prioritises formal composition – i.e., an absolute, Cartesian space [13] which projects a privileged view of the city as a place of cultural and economic vitality. They are as Kahn suggests homogenized, totalizing city representations which offer an aestheticized simulacrum of the city. [14] As de Certeau further argues, these utopias produce their own space in their own time, repressing the spatial and temporal-based actions carried out by their users. This negation means that these places are both no-where and no-when; i.e., unconnected with the context within which they sit and the real lives of their inhabitants. [15]

Further integral to the global city's composition is the role that the private sector plays in not only its formation, but equally in the definition of its space. As cities struggle with their finances, they have progressively turned to the private sector to help finance not only new initiatives, but equally day-to-day operations of the delivery of essential services and management of infrastructure. Included in this has increasingly been a tendency to hand over land that was once in the public domain. What we are seeing is a loss of conventional notions of public space, a shift from civic to commercial 'public' space. Though the gated community or the shopping mall are two familiar examples, increasingly it is the domain of the street and square that is now under private management. [16]

This shift in spatial operations and definition has helped cities overcome budgetary constraints; moreover, the conceptualisation and physical formation of the city as a singular representation is reflective of much prevailing discourse on the city. Massey notes how such singular definitions of space have historically been positioned as a way of taming the spatial, a way of handling 'out there'. [17] Lefebvre further notes a tendency of hegemonic forces to bestow a cohesive totality, and to evince a desire for a unitary theory. [18]

The recent economic crisis has clearly demonstrated however that a singular approach to the making and governance of the city founded on a capitalistic model of continual inward investment and surplus production is vulnerable. Lacking the presence of any parallel alternatives, a singular approach is limited in what it can offer in the face of less than buoyant economic conditions.

What is necessary is to, as Massey suggests, expose and thus undermine singular geographies which would exclude other considerations. [19] This critique is not however to be pursued purely within its own self-referential framework; it must engage explicitly with those forces which it sets out to critique. What is similarly necessary is to understand that the city is not a singular thing. Instead, readings of the city must recognise the multiplicity of conditions and forces at play.

Palimpsest as an alternative discourse and agenda for the city

What is proposed is a metaphorical reading of the contemporary city as palimpsest[2], a proposition which understands the city as a multi-layered representation, including: cultural, ecological, economic, political and social conditions and agendas. In positing the city as palimpsest it is important to emphasise that this reading should not be limited to its representation in the physical fabric of the city;

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[2] Palimpsest has its roots in the ancient use of parchments for writing; too valuable to be discarded, they were re-used, with previous writing scraped / rubbed-out and new writing written on top of the still-faintly visible previous writing. The use of the word here draws upon its figurative definition: 'something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form'. [20]

rather this conceptualisation is grounded in a much broader understanding of the city as being composed of various layers including cultural, ecological, economic, political and social. Moreover, we need to understand that these layers are not separate and fixed strata, but rather are in a continuous state of flux. In this condition occur both overlaps and gaps, and equally connections, conflicts, merging and flows between the various layers. Together they provide opportunity for interventions in and connections between the convergences and divergences of these layers.
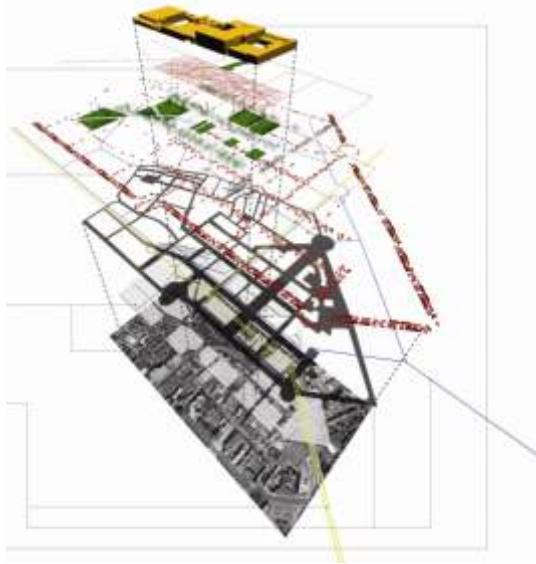

Image 2 City as palimpsest (J. Pickford + J. Poland image)

Translating the reading of the city as palimpsest to an agenda for its formation, what is proposed is a joined-up approach that aims to both work off existing conditions and generate new possibilities within that context. Feeding off of, as well as literally building off of, existing frameworks and previous successes, later projects assimilate lessons generated through the planning, implementation and use and operation of previous projects. Equally significant, projects grounded in a joined-up approach are easier and less costly to put in place. [21]

This approach to city-making recognises that the city's formation is the result of the interaction of an infinite number of factors – including representations and perceptions as well as the actual physical context. [22] It equally reflects existing discourse that critiques narrow readings of the city and the related processes by which the built environment is generated. As Cuff and Gutman point out, it is vital to recognise the multiplicity inherent in the nature of putting in place the built environment – notably, economics, means of production including both the range of processes and contributors to these processes, and political considerations (both legislation and power relationships). [23] This argument is further extended in Heynen's stance that architecture (i.e., the making of the built environment) is not an autonomous act, but rather is linked to a range of economic, political and social forces. [24]

Joined-up propositions for the city as palimpsest

The construct of the city as palimpsest has been the subject of an extended inquiry over the last few years in the Master of Architecture design studio at the University of Plymouth. This inquiry has been pushed via two related components of the same trajectory; the first consists of both individual and group investigations of the city, drawing on the students' experience of both familiar and previously unknown environments. In these investigations students have explored themes including the city as image, home and the city, the hidden city and spatial narratives. Integral to each has also been a testing of the means by which we represent the city.

The second and primary component of this agenda has been the main design project of the year, set in the context of a live regeneration programmes in the UK and continental Europe. The work includes the generation of both an urban strategy and a building proposition in the context of that urban strategy. These design propositions are supported by various studies and include context analysis, dialogue with the local community, the identification and development of project briefs and the identification of a specific site for their project. Within this format and the context of working in Riga students took the OMA master plan for Andrejsala as a prompt for their project work. Prompted by the construct of the city as

palimpsest, students have pursued joined-up approaches to Andrejsala's regeneration, with several of these are outlined in the discussion below.[3]
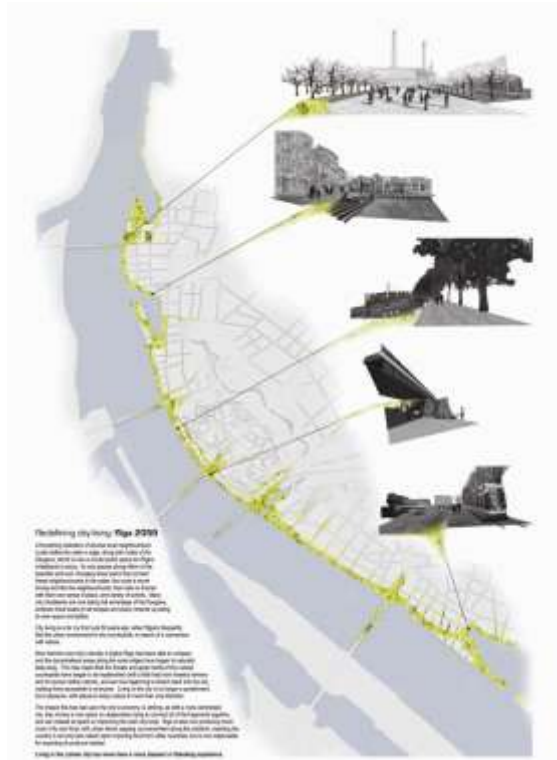

Image 3 Proposition for a connected riverbank (K. Parsons + P. Woodford image)

K. Parson's and P. Woodford's proposal for a 'connected riverbank' both connects the eastern bank of the Daugava River to the fabric of the city, and simultaneously manipulates this edge to weave this fabric together. Their proposal recalls Riga's history and development along the river. In so doing, it recognises that this edge was artificially cut off from the city for political reasons during the Soviet occupation; this, in conjunction with a restriction on private boat ownership, ensured the disconnection of the river's edge from the city. Their proposal reconciles this condition through the articulation of development corridors which build off existing streets and key nodal points of activity within the city fabric. These moves

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[3] The work discussed and illustrated here draws upon urban strategy work already completed; the students' proposals for an individual building were still in progress at the time of finalising this paper.

are strengthened by reinforcing these corridors as places of movement, focusing on enhancing public transportation while not excluding the use of car. Central to their proposal is recognition of the value the Latvian people place on a sense of connection to the landscape, and re-envisions the water's edge as a shared space which enables a connection to the landscape of the river, notably through leisure and recreation. Their proposal equally recognises the more recent history of the city, and posits the river's edge as communal ground to link together different areas and ethnic groups within the city. While operating at a socio-cultural and physical level, these moves also act economically; along with opening up the riverbank for redevelopment, the connectivity of the river's edge with key nodal points via development corridors will enhance the perceived accessibility and consequently activity at these locations.
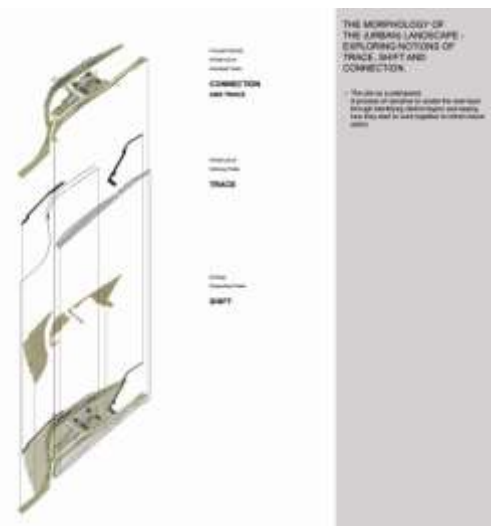

Image 4 Proposition for an ecosystem (P. Clark + R. Simmonds image)

P. Clark's and R. Simmonds' proposal embraces the Daugava River as an ecosystem, and Andrejsala's role within this. This approach evokes precedents in which ecological and economic initiatives operate across international boundaries, enabled by political recognition of the benefits of such cooperation. Central to their proposition is an understanding of Andrejsala's past as represented in the built environment; it equally recognises this history is marked in the geotechnical formation of the riverbanks and

surrounding land, as various layers built-up and eroded through natural occurrence and man-made interventions. Their proposal respects this history through a simultaneous revealing of and addition to these layers. This approach is mirrored in a regeneration of both prior and current economic activity, and through new interventions, that understand the river as an ecosystem; initiatives include fish farming and aquatic and land-based agricultural production, both supported by and in turn informing ecological research embedded in Riga's major universities. Their proposal builds off an awareness of Riga as a centre for education, and ties into existing European Union funding programmes for ecological, economic and educational development. This approach of working-off existing frameworks is echoed physically in their adaptive re-use of existing buildings, infrastructure elements and underlying ground conditions. Overlapping their proposal for a reinvigorated economic utilisation of the site is an appropriation of open spaces within working areas for simultaneous recreational use.
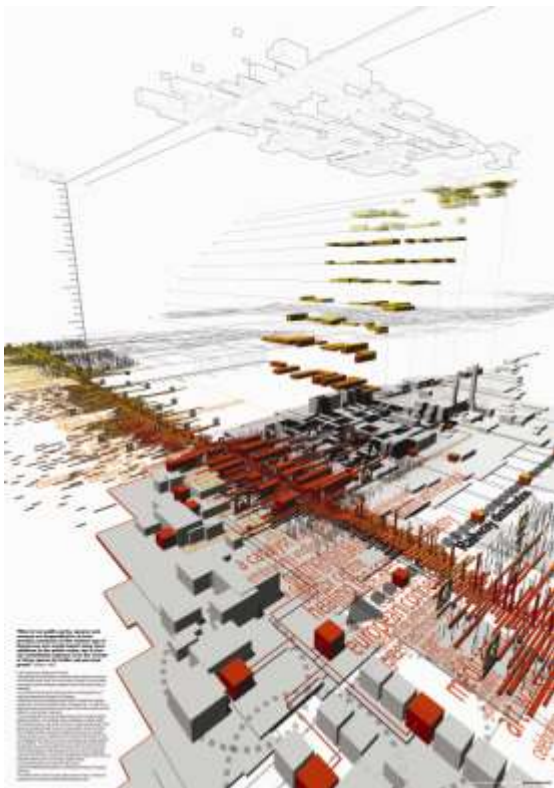

Image 5 Proposition for an armature (J. Pickford and J. Poland image)

J. Pickford's and J. Poland's proposal is for an armature which acts not only physically but also strategically to connect existing and new facilities on both sides of the Daugava. While providing a much needed additional crossing point over the river, equally significant is how their device ties together cultural, economic and social activities, enabling a synergy to develop between them. This works partly through the armature serving as a movement and gathering space. The armature also acts to collect activities occurring alongside it, and serves as base from which to make departures to connect to events and spaces further away; in a similar way the armature acts to generate new activities, serving as framework off which things might be built. Central to their proposition is an intention to reinvigorate the timber industry in Latvia; embedded within the armature will be relevant activities including not only a centre for timber processing and shipping, but also small scale spaces for the production of building components and furniture. Also integral to their proposal are educational facilities to train carpenters and craftsman for these reinvigorated industries. These new skills and technologies would concurrently be employed in the construction of refurbished and new facilities feeding off the armature.

Conclusion

The paradigm of the global city has in recent years come to permeate through discourse on urbanism, and in turn increasingly inform propositions for the making of the cities. Grounded in singular definitions of the city which emphasise economics, the role of other considerations such as culture and place are subsumed within and subservient to image. This vision is intended to portray economic vitality and attract further economic investment in the forms of financial capital and consumption, the latter not only through day-to-day consumer activity but more notably through tourism.

The recent economic crisis has however called into question the validity of this model; the singularity of the approach on which this model is founded is equally open to question for its negation of the multiplicity inherent in

the city. In contrast to the singular approach of the global city what is proposed is a reading of the city as palimpsest, and an agenda for its formation founded on this reading.

Working with the gaps and overlaps between the various layers found within the city, this strategy of palimpsest pursues a joined-up approach to the regeneration of the city. It seeks to enable synergies between cultural, ecological, economic, political and social conditions and activities, and generate a proposition which simultaneously recognises and builds upon the diversity and ambiguities of the city.

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Summary
Robert Brown
Andrejsala is not an island – Joined-up approaches to the layered city
This paper proposes a joined up approach to the making of the city. This attitude is grounded in an understanding of the city as a palimpsest, comprising cultural, ecological, economic, political and social forces. This strategy acts upon the convergences and divergences between these layers, not merely as a formal proposition but equally to develop synergies with the non-physical. This agenda explicitly engages with the multiplicity of the city, and serves as a critique of singular readings of the city as formed in representations of the global city.

Robert Brown
Andrejsala ir ne salu - piebiedrojas-augstāk pieejas pie slāņainās pilsētas
Šajā dokumentā tiek piedāvāts apvienotām pieeju veidošanu pilsētā. Šī attieksme ir balstīta uz izpratni par pilsētas kā palimpsest, kas ietver kultūras, ekoloģisko, ekonomisko, politisko un sociālo spēku. Šī stratēģija darbojas pēc saplūšanas un atšķirības starp šiem slāņiem, ne tikai kā formāls piedāvājums, bet arī veidot sinerģiju ar nemateriālajos. Šī programma nepārprotami iesaistās ar daudzām pilsētas, un kalpo kā kritiku par vienskaitlis rādījumus pilsētas, kā veidojas priekšstati par pasaules pilsētas.

Robert Brown
Andrejsala нет острова - Соединенных-вверх подходов к наслоенному городу

Эта бумага предлагает соединенное вверх по подходу к делать города. Эта ориентация заземлена в вникание города как palimpsest, усилия состоять из культурные, экологические, хозяйственные, политические и социальные. Эта стратегия действует на схождениях и расхождениях между этими слоями, просто как официально предложение но поровну начать синергии с non-physical. Эта повестка дня недвусмысленно включает с разносторонностью города, и служит как рецензия исключительных чтений города как сформировано в представлениях глобального города.