

Managing uncertainty: transformation process in the post-industrial city

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Abstract

In this paper we focus our research on transformations of the post-industrial city. In these contexts, management can be linked to uncertainty by preserving a variety of options opened while diversifying future possibilities and supporting urban diversity.

1) The issue/research problem;

The post-industrial city has a wider territorial scale and new ways of spatial organization that comprehend economic, social, cultural and urban aspects differs from previous industrial urban models. Urban management is faced with emergent realities, difficult to control and assess. Today it becomes necessary to acknowledge uncertainty as a given part of urban strategies. Management focus in temporal factors of flexibility can perform an important role on planning and project feasibility. Also urban diversity can be used to sustain a multiplicity of structures and processes. To support this idea we shall present a strategic analysis based on a specific case.

In the south bank of Tagus river, a former industrial area in Lisbon's metropolitan systems, we can read a "timeline" of scenarios, possibilities and achievements on its railway network. This analysis together with its relations and implications on urban development can help us reflecting on how uncertainty is present on urban process and how to assess future scenarios. The decommissioning of a railway line and its possible reuse together with a nearby airport planned location gives us the opportunity to reflect on "standards" for mobility, coupled with potential for activity and urban space qualities. Can the "recycling" of an infrastructure based in adding urban diversity with temporary activities represent a potential for urban regeneration?

2) its relevance for the conference theme;

The complexity and instability of today's city, reflects directly in planning instruments which can no longer be closed and rigid, but open ended and flexible. This management of uncertainty by diversity, its players roles and possibilities for action implicates the development of new urban governance strategies.

The discussion we present, conducted by concepts of diversity and transition, target at an evolving vision on urban processes. This vision is less focused on a total substitution of models, and more centred in a potential of gradual transformation, constructed as expectations and emerging possibilities. A "bottom-up" approach – starting from a "basic project" and seeking to generate outputs to the surroundings – focuses effort and attention in localized transformations, rather than in a global model of intervention. Local problems assessment, participation or experimentation are easier to promote and to manage at a small scale with tools and managing strategies in relation with small growth or limited resources cycles by keeping options opened.

3) the background;

The problematic of instability in the contemporary world - in processes of territorial diversification and globalization, social flexibility and individualization – is widely "treated" by many authors (Bauman, 2001), (Harvey, 2004), (Castells, 2003). In contemporary urban theory we find the many aspects of this "new city and its inconstancies". Ascher (1995) explains a vast, heterogeneous, discontinuous and complex city, with new challenges and demands for urban professionals. Resulting from study cases or "general overlooks" some new urban theories - (Busquets, 1992), (Rogers, 1999), (Koolhaas, 2006), (C. Landry, 2000), – outline the plurality of urban growth.

In the attempt to deal with indetermination, making it a part of the transformation process, some authors present possible approaches: saving degrees of freedom between parts of the project (Carmona, 2003), adopt variable regulatory mechanisms (Portas, 2003), set up scenarios (Secchi, 2007), or integrate negotiation and participation in design process (Remesar, 2000).

In the context of the case studied, the growth of metropolitan networks, the development of local and global connections, highlights the arising of diversity and the role of new territorial relations (Salgueiro, 2001) in emerging transformations processes.

4) the methodology;

In the case study, we start to identify uncertainty patterns in recent transformation cases, current players and restrictions or future possibilities assessed at this moment. From this analysis we can set an hypothesis that in particular unstable or low investment contexts, uncertainty can stop decision making. Other approach is needed.

In order to explain the possibilities of transition processes to manage uncertainty, we will use some examples of regeneration projects that manage change in a temporal perspective. Based on the concepts of hardware (physical transformations on space by infrastructure or built environment) and software (interaction promoting cultural and social exchange in activities) linked with high-tech and low-cost options, we can explain two strategies for transformation in a diversity basis:

- one is based in infrastructure – the example is 22@Barcelona project. Where the implementation of basic urban networks (technical services, transports, public space elements) supports the gradual substitution of elements (buildings or blocks) which introduce new uses.
- the other is based in public space low cost operations – regeneration examples (from PPS - Project for Public Spaces): small interventions, many times in a small timespan, mix low investment with creativity and diversity.

With these examples in mind, we can return to the initial case study with a tool for the evaluation of project opportunities. Organized through several public space dimensions - morphologic, perceptual, functional, social and cultural and economic - we can derive a systemization from practical cases with elements or strategies to enable manageable transitions where uncertainty is relevant, promoting a diverse mixtures of possibilities.

5) the key results of the paper.

Following the cases studied we may conclude that uncertainty is a frequent factor of city's transformation process, and its management can assure diversity of options and possibilities. Presented hypothesis point out that choosing to "reserve" spaces, to reuse old meaningful structures or to promote diversity by enabling project reversibility, can be alternative or simultaneous strategies of "temporal management" responding to present and future possibilities and resources.

Keywords: uncertainty, transition, diversity, temporal management