

The return to urban design

Manuel C. Teixeira

Centro de Estudos Urbanos – CEURBAN, ceurban@ceurban.com

Phone 933145175

In western urbanism there is a moment of rupture with the modern movement. Its precepts, although theoretically formulated in the first decades of the twentieth century, were mainly put in practice in the 1950s and the 1960s, after the Second World War. Up to that moment, independently of the changes in the functions and the morphologies of the cities, urban spaces were organised in a traditional way, by means of streets, squares and blocks, and the unbuilt urban spaces were also designed, and an essential component of the design of the city. With Modernism, this city is replaced by a city functionally segregated, in which the streets are no longer streets but parts of a road network, the urban blocks no longer exist, and the urban spaces are replaced by a shapeless continuum in which the buildings are implanted isolated. The urban spaces – the “voids”- which up to then were also designed, and were privileged scenarios of urban life, disappear. Instead of them, we have now interstitial spaces between the constructions, which are not designed and which are, for the most part, residual spaces.

The legislation has accompanied and supported these transformations. In the last decades the largescale planning instruments have replaced, in practice, the detailed plans meant to define the form and structure of the city. Concrete plans were progressively rejected in favour of all-embracing plans, while regulations prevail over the plan’s design. The form and the chronology of execution of the plan, as well as the design of public spaces are in most cases left to the hazard or solved casuistically, without a guiding coherent design, resulting in the actual negation of the city. The return to urban design is a fundamental condition to bring the city back into planning.

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