

URBAN LANDSCAPE STUDIES
EUPHORIGENIC LANDSCAPES

Euphorigenic Landscapes – issue 1.0

Sören Schöbel, Daniel Czechowski (Ed.)

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LAREG

Urban landscape is a relatively young but (widespread) common technical term meaning various space-describing and space planning disciplines such as geography, sociology of space, urban studies / urban development, architecture and landscape architecture. By that term different phenomena, previously known by the terms 'suburban area,' 'Zwischenstadt' ('City without City' or 'In-Between City'), 'city landscape,' 'city region,' 'sprawl,' 'periphery,' 'commuter belt,' 'urbanization' etc. are summed up in a general category of space (in the plural mostly: urban landscapes).

On the one hand, it describes the complete urbanization of space analytically (i.e. the overall expansion of urban designs, infrastructure and lifestyles). On the other, however, he programmatically describes experiments to detect and design new relations in fragmented areas which are neither city nor country. The first fundamentals of understanding urban landscapes were conceived by Henri Lefèbvre in the 1970s:

"Urbanization (the urbanized area, the urban landscape) is not visible, we do not see it yet. Is that simply because our eyes have been shaped (or

spoiled) by the previous landscape and cannot recognize new space?"¹

In German-language areas, research was intensified in the course of the debate about Thomas Sievert's 'Zwischenstadt' and the Ladenburg Research Kolleg of the same name "to describe the urbanized landscape".

The scientific debate is currently characterized by the struggle between urban architecture schools about whether urban landscapes should be considered as 'featureless' ('generic') areas (see 'The Generic City' by Rem Koolhaas), or indeed as specifically describable landscapes as well (see Switzerland – A Portrait of Urban Planning, by Studio Basel of the ETH Zurich by architects Herzog & de Meuron). Urban landscape was also the theme of the official German contribution to the 9th Architecture Biennale in Venice in 2004 – ("Epicenters of the Periphery").

¹ Lefèbvre, H. (2003). The Urban Revolution [La Révolution urbaine, 1970]

This text is an English translation from German Wikipedia. The article on Urban Landscapes [Urbane Landschaften] was written by Sören Schöbel

INTRODUCTION — MEDIATING LANDSCAPES

Sören Schöbel

Some of the fastest growing regions in the world are regarded as particularly attractive landscapes. Here not only residents and guests, but also people's representatives and regional market-ing enthuse about the beauty and grandeur of the natural or historic cultural landscape and often also attribute the extraordinary qualities of life and the economic success of the region to those qualities. Landscape is often almost celebrated as a major location factor for a city or region.

Simultaneously, it is just these growing regions where the existing qualities of the landscape are most ruthlessly dealt with. This is due first to the pressure for growth itself that, through more buildings, triggers accelerated use of space, density and urban sprawl. It repeals existing rules, conventions and responsibilities of care for space and, by this, leads to new unprotected area types between city and country, which are correctly described as 'urban landscapes' (see page 5).

Maybe the recklessness also comes from a certain carelessness, because strong beauty of landscape is subconsciously

associated with invulnerability. Both are linked together in the concept of euphoria: the "upscale lifestyle of greatest well-being, with increased vitality and reduced inhibitions" (Wikipedia). The term 'euphorogenic landscape' therefore supposes a locally typical behaviour, a specific 'regional habitus', which tends toward elation and at the same time to disinhibition against one's own landscape.

This book tries, by exploring very different regions in Asia, Europe, and Africa to define by way of example which natural, morphological and cultural factors lead to the conclusion that a landscape can be considered as socially and economically 'euphorogenic'.

The contributions are no empirical geographic or socio-cultural considerations. They were results of parts of a research project in landscape architecture, and took an interest, therefore, in influencing the processes, i.e. in the shaping of space. Methodologically they are Cultural Landscape Studies. They undertake research on landscape in an open perspective as a phenomenon of everyday life and also feel obliged to design possible and better developments.

Cultural Studies are also called 'dense descriptions'. They are subjective perceptions and theories. They should,

however, be made understandable by arguments. Like any form of qualitative research these studies do not claim conclusiveness, but still a right to depict reality.

The selection of the regions is a mere coincidence. It was based on the simple situation that from 2010 to 2012, at the Department of Landscape Architecture of Regional Open Spaces at the Technical University of Munich, a group of doctoral candidates from Germany, China, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, and Ghana had come together.

Given the incomparable rates of growth of Asian and European regions, each attempt to develop common methodological approaches means quite a risk. But still the wish to better understand each other and to learn from each other is stronger. So not simply twelve different essays have been tied together, but were created in a joint project step by step. In intensive workshops the purpose, levels and the resulting texts were discussed mutually. Parallel to this all the participants discussed the theses of Henri Lefèbvre.

LEVELS

The French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefèbvre (1901-1991), whose theory of social production of space

for several years has been experiencing a remarkable Renaissance in European space science distinguished, for the understanding of the general urbanization process, three levels on which social reality develops spatially (is produced): the private level P of everyday life, the G level of global systems and, in between, the mediating level M, the actual city which develops from the urban fabric, the 'tissue urbaine'.

To that it must be said that Lefèbvre, despite this concept, does not regard the city as a constructed form, but as a 'pure', i.e. a social form, as it appears in terms like overlapping, repetition and difference. Therefore Lefèbvre does not deal with the city built, and still less is he committed to landscape. The dissolution of the cities into suburbs he sees as a paradox that has come into existence by the predominance of individual levels (P or G), and the replacement of the level M by the mere consumption of space.¹

Since the 1960s urbanists, architects, urban sociologists, geographers, human biologists, psychologists and philosophers have been discussing world-wide the knowledge that city is a structure which provides not only economic but also social and ecological potentials. Personalities such as Jane Jacobs, Hans Paul Bahrtdt, Aldo Rossi, Richard Sen-

nett and many others have renewed general appreciation for urbanity. This process has highlighted in the programs for the critical reconstruction of the European city since the 1980s. Today that ideal of urbanity undisputedly serves as an urban paradigm for Europe and partly for America - against the progression of the industrial dissolution of the city. But they have also made clear that the architecture and texture of the town as a built form has been inseparably connected to its 'pure' qualities.

In the current debate on urbanization, learning from old city structures, based on this model, in order to optimise especially social and ecological conditions in contemporary cities, is increasingly being demanded for the recently developing Arab and Chinese types of cities. At the same time it has become clear that the social reality of the formation of a new urban type of space, i.e. the 'In-Between City' [Zwischenstadt] cannot be denied any longer and needs urban practice.

However, that classification of urban discourses, which is based on profound exploration and critique of urban structure, has not yet been transferred to landscape as a socially produced space type. At the same time general urbanization, at least beyond the highly condensed nuclei of future major cities up

to megacities, already even exceeds the term of 'Zwischenstadt' and arises in the form of urban landscapes (see above). That phenomenon expresses the need for an extension of such a term.

In this book it is argued that beside the intermediary level of the city there can be marked a tissue in the landscape, too. Lefèbvre calls it 'tissue paysage', which exists between the level of everyday life and that of the systems.

Beyond this extension of Lefèbvre's mediating level it is made clear in the discussion here presented of the phenomenon of 'euphorogenic landscapes' that there is another level that contributes to the production of space significantly. This level is the morphology of natural landscape. It precedes the social and thus historical levels, but also penetrates into them again and again and influences the production of space either insidiously or with sudden violence.

Mountains, rivers, coasts, and even the climatic characteristics of a region appear formative wherever it is not only industrial logic that dominates the space development - particularly where it finds its limitations. All the old urban structures and cultural landscapes can, in their uniqueness or typologically, be attributed to certain natural conditions. And those old structures are still part of the urban present.

Although the processes are very slow, take decades or even thousands of years and also run both with and without human intervention, they are a historical force for the production of space. Plate tectonics and climatic changes secretly affect what is going on in towns. Nevertheless the foundation of more than 90% of today's existing towns in a relatively short period of time in Germany can be put down to climatic changes. And sudden disasters, storms, inundations, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes have largely influenced the development of urban cultures and will continue to do so. However, it is important for us to show the existence of this level of social production of space between the extremes.

Lefèbvre describes that level as the 'primordial nature' onto which the city of glass and stone has been established as a 'second nature' of man. The two levels do not hit each other, are no part of social reality. By incorporating this relation of (primal) nature and city, and using a fourth level in our reflections, landscape appears before our eyes as a category of social production of space. So, in addition to the mediatory level M of town and landscape texture situated between the global systems and everyday life, there arises another comprehensive level N of natural morphologies.

Thus the four levels of 'production of landscape' now envisaged by us, which serve all the texts in this book as an open experimental model, are:

- 1 The Level of Natural Morphologies**
- 2 The Level of Everyday Life**
- 3 The Level of Global Systems**
- 4 The Mediating Level,
the Fabric of the City and the
Palimpsest of the Landscape**

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. Lefèbvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space* [Production de l'espace, 1974]

Henri Lefèbvre already developed the levels P, G, M as a preliminary work to *The Production of Space* in:

Lefèbvre, H. (2003). *The Urban Revolution* [La Révolution urbaine, 1970]