Graduation Plan: Urbanism
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In Favour of Spontaneous Urban Growth
A regeneration strategy for a sustainable urban transformation in Turin, Italy

Problem Statement

After the end of the industrial era in the Western World and followed social, economic, political and technological restructuring since the last decade of 20th century the cities has encounter in a fierce global competition between them. This has encouraged them to work hard for enhancing their attractiveness in a new post-industrial perspective (Couch & Fraser, 2003). Therefore, urban governments all around the world have developed a considerable number of regeneration programs aiming to improve the quality of the urban environment and promote a positive image as a basis for further metropolitan growth. In recent decades the urban regeneration seems to be utilized by cities as a prominent tool to enhance and maintain certain level of economic competitiveness. Although the approach used to be popular and widely appreciated in urban theory (Roberts & Sykes, 2000; Couch & Fraser, 2003) the very nature of the adopted approaches towards the revitalisation of urban areas has led to certain notions of criticism and inefficiency.

The ‘traditional’ criticism of the urban regeneration addresses the issue of social-spatial justice. Urban geographers such as David Harvey (2012) and Neil Smith (1996, 2002) provide a well-synthesized arguments that criticise the impact of the regeneration programs in the global cities within the contemporary neo-liberal agenda. According to them the economic goals behind the revitalisation policies are dominant and the implemented physical transformations often seek to promote an influx of middle class residents, new commercial and public activates. These actions result in a displacement of the lower-income population and a deprivation of the urban landscapes’ authenticity. Another discussable issue concerning the urban redevelopment processes is their general emphasis on the physical ‘solutions’ to complex problems (Shaw & Robinson, 2010; Hoskins & Tallon, 2003). Although there is a certain improvement in this aspect in respect to the redevelopment projects from the previous decades i.e. 1950s’
reconstructions and 1970s’ renewals (Roberts, 2000:19) the contemporary schemes do still rely significantly on physical transformations (Shaw & Robinson, 2010:138). The physical removal of the ‘undesirable’ elements such as urban fabric or existing communities instead of fitting them into a new context could be considered as an inevitable design solution as well as an inability of facilitating the urban transformations in planning terms (Orueta, 2007:188).

However, this graduation project does not argue whether the application of regeneration programs is necessary within urban areas. Despite the criticism regarding these projects they have certainly brought an improvement of the urban quality of life, economic and environmental prosperity (Shaw & Robinson, 2010:141). More precisely, this study questions the implementation approaches which the dominant urban revitalisation schemes adopt and their resilient capabilities within the dynamic context of modern cities. Most of the contemporary regeneration projects require serious efforts often involving large-scale interventions that not always lead to sufficient results in practice. A substantial regeneration programs have been developed via top-down utilitarian philosophy (although some are implemented bottom-up) depending on one or few major central driving forces (Shaw & Robinson, 2010:135). Today we have reached a stage, especially in the Western World, when there is neither an available financial capital nor political urgency to support these developments. This left numerous urban areas and physical fabric under the label ‘to be redeveloped’ for a decade or two. This is particularly the case in South European countries where the global recession from 2008 let to substantial economic, social and political issues which have underlined the crucial necessity to deal with other elements of the city leaving the urban regeneration on side for a while. This has resulted in freezing of most regeneration projects leaving vast physical areas as spatial voids within the city.

These arguments imply a certain notion that the existing approaches towards urban regeneration do not seem to fundamentally successful means for achieving sustainable urban development. There is necessity for formulating new, innovative, highly flexible modes of urban transformations. This discussion leads us to the major problem statement of this graduation project:

**After two decades of intensive urban regeneration process today, mainly in Europe, there is an urgent necessity for innovative modes of sustainable urban transformation which are able to utilise the ever-changing driving forces of development within cities.**

*Figure 1: Conceptual problem of the graduation project.*

![Diagram](image.png)
**Design Research**

In order to search for an alternative approach towards urban transformation and following personal design fascination of *irregular urban* forms a literature design study has been conducted. The latter adopts a morphological perspective towards urban space where different types of urban forms has been analysed and compared seeking to answer the following explorative question: *How irregular urban form principles and patterns can contribute to the (spatial) development of modern cities?*

The findings of the study have brought some major notions regarding the irregular urban forms and their impact on the urban processes. More importantly, the research itself has delivered the statement that a city itself is a complex system which generates morphology, self-reproduces its form and constantly reacts on the various spatial interventions within its environment. This position is supported by Mathieu Helie (2009:75) who argues that urban design morphology does not seem to be determinative element for the quality of urban life and sustainability of a city on the contrary to the urban process through which urban areas have grown; the latter he considers as the relevant determinant. This refers to the idea of spontaneous city growth as a necessary condition for sustainable spatial development of cities where a crucial attention should be paid on time-complexity of the urban form (Helie, 2009:84).

*Figure 2: Research framework of the literature design study.*
Research Questions

On the basis of these research findings the notions of spontaneous urban growth and temporary urbanism has been outlined and combined with the aforementioned problem statement to form the conceptual model of this graduation project (see Figure 3) and the following main explorative research question that should be answered in this graduation project:

‘How a sustainable urban regeneration approach can be developed on the basis of spontaneous growth and temporal utilisation of urban space while being practically applicable in the case of Turin, Italy?’

In order to obtain relevant causal arguments regarding this question aiming to apply them in a selected case it is necessary to pose main sub questions. By answering these sub-questions the study would be developed in an efficient manner and provide more
comprehensive outcomes and design assumptions which could be further utilised in a experimental spatial project.

First of all, the research will look at the specific context and the recent developments concerning the urban transformation within the selected case e.g. Turin. The first sub question is, therefore, a descriptive one: *How can we describe the development of the urban regeneration policies and programs in Turin during the last two decades concerning their functional and socio-spatial impact?* This question aims to draw a substantial background regarding the case of Turin in order to outline the major challenges and potentials of the city.

Secondly, the research will try to explore the spatial context in further detail focusing of the specific study area: *What are the current activity patterns that characterise the physical and functional tissue of the study area?* During this part, the research analyses the state of the existing urban tissue concerning the study area.

The third sub – question focuses on the essence of the temporary urbanism concept which will be utilised as a means of delivering the project design: *What urban conditions create favourable opportunities for temporary urbanism and how the latter can contribute to the process of urban regeneration?* In particular, this question looks at the very nature of the temporary urbanism and explores its potential contribution to the urban regeneration process.

The forth sub – question employ impact analysis. It investigates the spontaneous urban growth concept in terms of its operationalization and application to urban design projects: *Which aspects of spontaneous urban growth concept can be successfully utilised as supporting elements regarding a design project development?*

**Research Methods, Aims and Ambition**

*Method Description*

In order to explore and seek scientific answers of the defined research questions above an execution method for this graduation project. It is developed on the basis of the afore-described design research and a literature study elaborating on the relevant theory regarding the subjects of interest. The method includes five main steps combining them into one approach for implementing a regeneration design experiment in the case of Turin, Italy (see Figure 4).

The method of implantation employed for the development of this graduation project is consisted of four main dimensions which aim to build a consistent approach towards the experimental design. These dimensions are linked with the answers that are seeked by the aforementioned research questions. Few investigation methods are going to be utilized in order to explore these project's dimensions. The theoretical and design dimensions are established on the basis of literature and design case studies. On the other hand, the background and spatial dimensions refer the contextual research of Turin. They are built upon: (1) web data exploration, traditional mapping, documents review to define the project background and (2) picturesque study (Cullen, 1961) and urban activities patterns and environmental observations (Lynch, 1960) aiming to observe the spatial
dimension of the research. The goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ‘natural’ organization of the selected study area within the context of Turin and combining this knowledge with the existing body of literature and translating it in an experimental design project.

**Figure 4: Development model of the graduation project**

**Aims and Ambition**

This graduation project is both a research vehicle and design laboratory aiming to seek for an innovative urban regeneration approach relying on morphogenesis approach, spontaneous urban growth and temporary land-uses. The objective is to understand the qualities of the spontaneous urban growth, operationalise them and develop an experimental design project within the context of Turin. The ambition is to achieve this urban redevelopment with strategic and temporary urban design interventions rather than part of a large urban development project. The final products of this graduation project will be:
I. Development Planning Strategy for the study area

Considering the background of Turin and based on the major contextual problems and opportunities a strategic plan will be developed in order to fit the general ambitions of the city as well as set up a fundamental framework for the site area’s masterplan.

II. Temporary Masterplan for the site area

Based on the executed theoretical and contextual research a masterplan design including temporary structures and uses will be developed as an assumption for further spontaneous growth of the site area.

Research Cycle

To conclude, this resume aims to describe the major phenomenon of interest, the relevant theoretical framework regarding the subject and link them as a comprehensive research project. This plan also tries to outline an approach for developing a design experiment in systematical and efficient manner. As it is aforementioned the project is consisted from two parts: research and design. A crucial importance concerning the two parts has the theoretical, conceptual and practical relevance of the produced work. Thus, the context of Italy and, more precisely, the city of Turin seems to be highly suitable in order to achieve better theoretical and design outcomes regarding the topic of interest. However, the generalizeability of the project is still not well-defined and throughout the development of the graduation project its applicability can be extended to a broader scientific population (e.g. other cases).
Relevant Body of Literature


Relevance

Academic Relevance

The fundamental objective of this graduation project is to contribute to the body of knowledge of the contemporary urbanism. As it was mentioned during the conceptualisation of the problem statement this study intends to address the theoretical discourse of urban regeneration. The rather unique perspective of employing the concept of the spontaneous urban growth within the framework of a strategic urban redevelopment project seems to provide a promising output for the academic field. In particular, the ideology behind the utilisation of the spontaneous urban growth within the urban development is contradictory to the most of the design approaches which are adopted in the current practices of urbanism (Helie, 2009). Indeed, the experimental design project which will be the final result of this graduation thesis will seek for a practical implantation of the concept. On the basis of the theoretical framework and operational approach an ambitious statement can be made that independently from the result of this explorative study, it will certainty contribute to the existing body of knowledge of (sustainable) spatial transformation of cities.

Societal Relevance

After many years during the 20th century when Turin has followed the development path of a ‘Fordist City’ the city has recently experienced substantial urban transformations since late 1980s until today. However, the vast industrial heritage from the previous era of urban development has challenged the capabilities of the city to recover (see figure 6). In order to succeed in achieving a new post-industrial image many professionals have projected holistic strategies and plans seeking for physical restructuring of Turin. Nonetheless, considerable amount of areas which were labelled as ‘to be redeveloped’ have not been revitalised and still represent spatial voids within city.

Whereas the dominant redevelopment approach in the last two decades was inspired by the ideas of a city, of structure, the mighty urban scale such as “the three axial centralities” 1995 town plan of Gregotti (see figure 7), the stage is now also trodden by the images – the characters and the modes – of the transformation wrought by architectural worksites, by social projects or by urban marketing strategies (De Rossi & Durbiano, 2008:9). Indeed, this calls for an urgent necessity of innovative and sustainable modes of urban transformation since the available financial resources are limited in the today’s context of Italy after 2008.

This graduation project seeks for such a strategy by employing the concepts of spontaneous urban growth and temporary urbanism in order to develop an approach which can facilitate the future vision of Turin on the basis of the provided potentials of the past and the driving forces of today. The fundamental goal of the project is to reinforce the current urban tissue and improve the spatial quality of study area.
Figure 6: Abounded industrial sites in 1989.

Figure 7: The three axial centralities plan for urban redevelopment of Turin by Gregotti (1995).
Work Plan

The work plan for the execution of this graduation project is divided in different time spans respectively based on the official presentation moments (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5). Another important aspect of this plan the specification of the timing for the five development steps of the already defined experimental design approach. In addition, the major activities regarding the graduation projects such as fieldworks and self-evaluation are marked as well as the timing for the submissions of the eight main deliverable products (see figure 8).

Figure 8: Time-scheduled working plan regarding the development of the graduation project.