IN FAVOUR OF SPONTANEOUS URBAN GROWTH
A regeneration strategy for a sustainable urban transformation in Turin (Italy)

1. RESEARCH EVALUATION

The starting point of this research project was the fascination of exploring irregular (unplanned) urban forms, understanding their principles and try to apply them within the contemporary context. This inspiration combined with the contextual overview of the current urban (re)development, outlining urgency for new modes of urban regeneration, resulted in a formation of more structured design assumption and respectively formulation of major (explorative) research question of this graduation projects:

“How an 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?”

From the executed research and design experiment it was noted that the key for a successful establishment of urban regeneration approach on the basis of spontaneous growth and temporary urbanism is in the balance between individual development freedom and the common objectives values. The design proposition translated this notion in an approach which distinguishes urban tissues and urban structures. The latter provides a rigid framework for (re)development while the former promotes a vision of spontaneously growing urban form within the pre-determined framework. The employment of temporary urbanism concept as an expression of the spontaneous urban order seems to be relevant since both notions share a vision to take the existing urban qualities as a starting point of design process characterised by minimalistic approach resulting in short-term interventions.

From the study analysis it can be stated that the context of Turin needs an urgent innovation in the field of urban regeneration. Nevertheless, the practices of public participation within the city is not deeply embedded in the typical planning approaches despite that there are quite some examples of co-investment prior to the Olympics 2006. In order to practically approach the design proposition an extra effort to mobilise the local
communities is needed in reality. This can be achieved by extra development freedom in the initial stage of the process of area’s revitalisation.

**Raise new questions**

Looking back at the elaborated research and the outcomes a general direction for further investigations that refers to the balance of the “Framework-Freedom” relationship can be drafted. It seems to be defined by an operational complexity which demands a constant monitoring. During the design process simulation a general trend has been noted that if starting and maintaining the same frame rules they have been gradually neglected by the “developers”. On the other hand, in a real situation the investment scarcity can results in lack of entrepreneurs which suggests a hypothetical loosening of the framework in order to attract developers. Based on these assumptions further examination of the fluctuating balance between framework and development freedom seems to be crucial for providing a better understanding in regards to the effective utilisation of the proposed design approach.

**2. DESIGN REFLECTION**

Based on the executed design experiment some major lines of reflection thoughts can be classified and summarised.

**Reflection on context**

The proposed approach originates partly from the current condition of Turin. The existing untapped potentials have been used as a starting point of the elaborated design interventions. Considering this focus the proposed design really can become a prominent example of how interim activities can be utilised as a tool for urban regeneration. Innovative low-cost methods to revitalise Turin are from great usefulness due to the substantial amount of the abandoned location in the city. Thus, a successful regeneration project located somewhere around Turin can have a high degree of applicability around the city. What is more, the promoted resilience to change and the small scale of interventions suggests that proposed design approach on the basis of spontaneous urban growth and temporary urbanism can be effectively translated to other cities mainly within the context of Europe and North America.

**Reflection on concept and principles**

As it was outlined multiple times in this report the elaborated project suggests an alternative perspective towards the (re)production of the urban environment. The major emphasis is put on the design process in comparison with the spatial result as such. The executed design experiment proposes a more user-orientated, balanced, resilient to change approach. Nevertheless, all of these notions can be interpreted in numerous ways. We can assume that in a realistic situation the different stakeholders can speculate with the provided framework and possible developments. Therefore, at least a modest top-down impact on the (re)development is required to prevent the situations. In fact, this argument addresses some of the reviewed scholars who deny the involvement of the top-down actors (Helié, 2009; Urbahn Urban Design, 2010). In any case, the topic of balancing the dynamic relationship “Framework-Freedom” seems to be relevant for further research as noted already.
Reflection on design itself

The produced spatial environment through the proposed strategy and site design aims to optimise the potential of the study area by working with the abandoned and underutilised places. There are two major notions which can be outlined as potential threads for the spatial qualities that can be developed by this approach. The first one is conflict between the establishment of the urban hardware (e.g. roads, paths, service infrastructure including electricity, gas, water etc.) and the urban software – freedom of shaping the urban tissue. The second issue relates to the examination made during the executed design workshop which occasionally revealed lack of respect to the spatial solutions of the nearby settled developers. Both of these issues require a higher interrelation between the involved actors and the formal authorities. Aiming to resolve these problems an urban designer need to act as a negotiator and content manager.

Another worth-evaluating theme regarding the proposed interventions is the aspect of scale. In order to be an effective tool of urban regeneration the diverse location of temporary interventions should be interrelated within a strategic framework which concerns the large-scale network of the (re)development process. Then the spontaneous growth of the targeted locations can be stimulated. Interestingly enough, looking at the urban form of Turin the vacant spaces are defined by distinctive spatial characteristics, either in terms of spatial scale of form. As such with the employment of spontaneous growth concept the design approach allows experimental possibilities for the special adjustments of these space within the urban morphology.

3. ROLE OF THE PLANNING PROFESSIONALS

The research and design outcomes of this graduation project support the belief that the role of the planning professionals and their relation with the process of the urban environment (re)production needs to be reinvented. It is our responsibility as designers to adapt to the conditions of “liquid modernity”, defined by Bauman (2000 & 2007), and establish new approaches to the deal with urban transformations. Accepting the role of “heroic form giver” seems to pre-determine to deliver design results which are not appropriate in 21st century. On the contrary, urban planners and designers have to accept the additional roles of negotiator, manager, initiator and draughtsman next to their traditional responsibilities. It can be stated that within the modern context the major object of interest for the planning professionals is shifting from spatial forms to the design processes of (re)producing them.