EMERGING CENTERS
Emerging centers
In 2011, CITIES was approached by a consortium of partners from the European Project In.flow.ence to act as think tank for the issue of polycentricity, namely urban spatial agglomerations which develop around multiple centers, as opposed to urban sprawls. As think tank, we wanted to translate the knowledge collected to a more accessible level and share it with the wider public. As CITIES has grown accustomed in working with people and problematize urban issues, the urban user is our content producer and our target group. We have already been working on a pilot publication on the theme of Industrial Renewal. With this issue, we look at how a center can be created, in practice, policy or just spontaneously.

By the end of 2011, CITIES had analyzed several case studies from all over the world, focusing on the key themes of governance, democracy and economic/spatial development. But our concern grew deeper, realizing the potential of these specific research areas to question autonomy in making cities and the tipping balance in terms of urban generation. Therefore, apart from analyzing global patterns, CITIES approached the theme of (multi-)center development from the user’s point of view. The first experiment was made in the streets, asking urbanites in a festive context, WHAT IS A CENTER?
The short intervention defines centers as points in which an activity or quality is at its most intense form and from which it spreads, or the point on which an activity or process is focused. What interested us was the relationship between center development and civic involvement. While urban planners and designers can position a center by aggregating several urban functions in order to optimize access to transport and services (for instance), the feeling of a "center" can be described as a shared and deeply social urban experience, which is not always the outcome of a planned urban typology. "Pop-up", "temporary", "hybrid", "unsolicited", "encountering" "crowdsourcing", "individualistic" and its opposite, "collective", are just a few alternative ways to re-define today's citizens spontaneous actions in the urban space. This terminology pinpoints the fact that independent urban initiatives break the rules of representation, and pave way to urbanity in the age of the "commons". The contributions that follow reunite both points of views, bringing together both concerns over policies and citizens interpretations of urban processes of center creations.

Out interest in the connection between citizens and their surroundings does not stand-alone. There are numerous initiatives that try to grasp the continuously enlarging urban buzz that is creating new centers of aggregation or attention in our cities. The past exhibition "hands on urbanism" meant people offering active participation in urban areas in different moments of time. More specifically, Re-architecture was working in multidisciplinary teams in order to carry out experiments on cities that reinvent everyday reality for fellow citizens. Several books deal with the same issue: The Naked City and Urban Constellations. Together with The Spontaneous City, For the People by the People, Volume, in issue 26 takes into consideration the relationship in between global centers and peripheries, expanding the analysis to the global level. While for example, Monocle Magazine has a special radio program dedicated to building today's cities – restoring new historical identities in which urban attractively is discussed.

Finally, one word goes to the context of such interventions. Recently, urban research and explorations have shifted attention to "bottom-up" initiatives mitigating the impacts of "top-down" approaches in urban development. This focus is enriching the dynamic nature of private property and means of sharing. Although "bottom-up" mobilization sometimes coincides with "top-down" initiatives, each belongs to different social actors.
Therefore, the second issue of CITIES addresses the challenges of the autonomous initiatives of the civil society, where the challenges of density of the urban context, rather than mere form, are the central focus. While the outcome is to be determined, CITIES issue 2 inevitably investigates the potential of what Buckminster Fuller called at the beginning of the century "emergence by emergency", trying to find solutions to implement when the unpredictable happens. If indeed we are already witnessing to a global context of economic emergency, CITIES investigates the mechanism of cities to cope with this new sense of a now shared urgency.

Francesca Miazzo, Anna Hult and Dana Dolghin
13th November 2012
Polycentricity in Europe: Political Standpoints and Social Action
Polycentric policy analysis

Centers from Above: Planners’ Visions
Artistic contribution

What Constitutes a Place?
What Makes a Region Integrated?
Polycentric policy analysis

PB43: Emerging Cultural Cluster in Copenhagen
Centers in cities

Dutch Spatial Planning Policies and the Need to Reconnect with Social Issues
Polycentric policy analysis

Changing Patterns of Planning in the Netherlands and Belgium
Polycentric policy analysis
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All that Glitters: Silicon Valley Corporate Campus' Social Devolution
Centers in cities

Credits and call for contributions