

Issue #03 Delta Challenges under Nature-Based Solutions Perspectives

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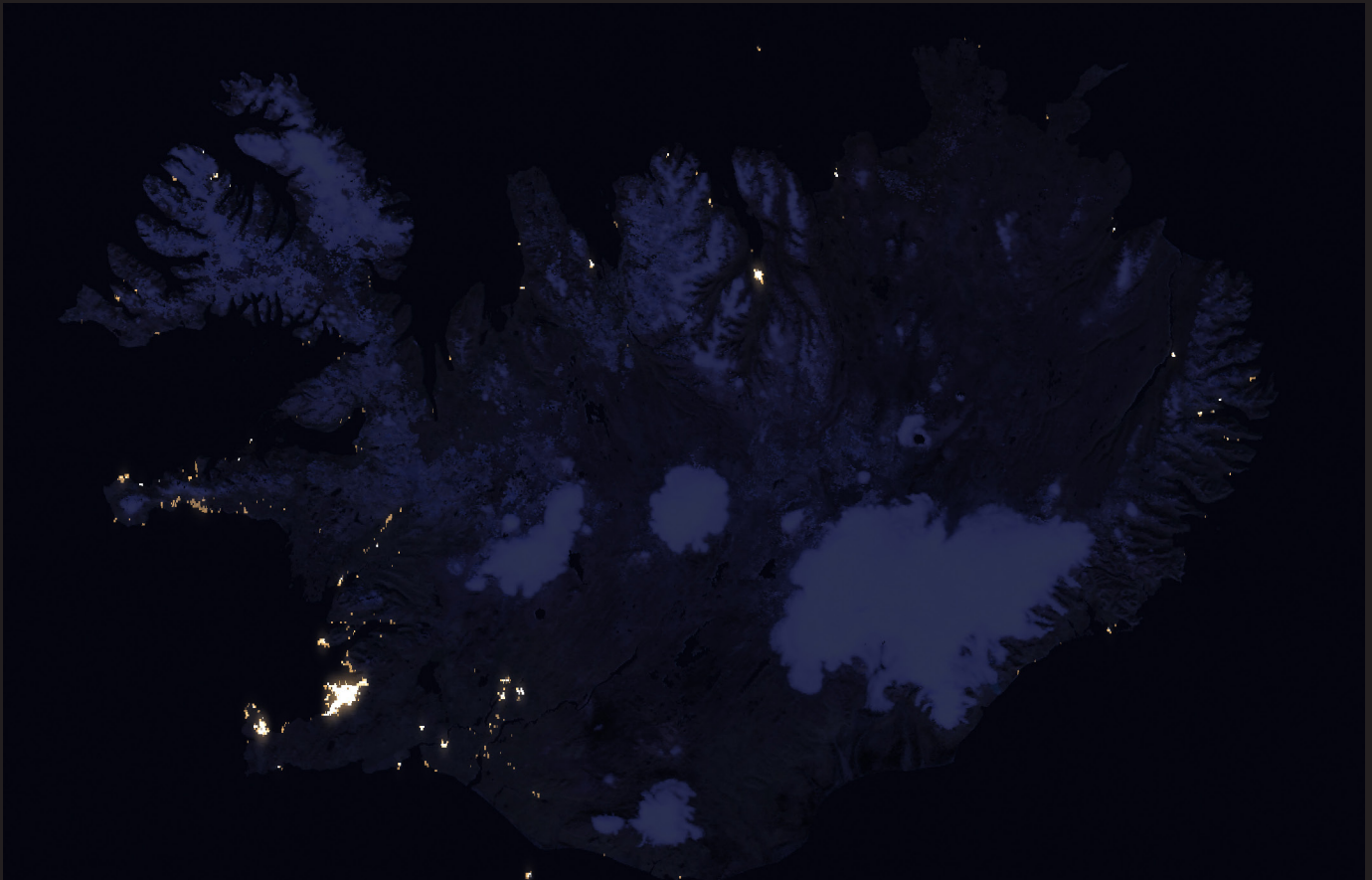
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Urbanism



Nighttime lights show how the Icelandic landscape influences where people live. Image by NASA, May, 2017.

*Giambattista
Zaccariotto*

*Urbanism (noun) /3..bðn.l.zðm/*¹

- the type of life that is typical of cities and towns
 - the process by which more and more people leave the countryside to live in *cities and towns*
-

Effecting city and territory transformation is the restructuring of the economic, social, and environmental systems. And in turn, the modification of city and territory defines physical conditions within which economic, social, and environmental systems can take on virtuous or perverse directions.

The term urbanism indicates a form of knowledge about the intentional construction and modification of the 'physical' city, its form, functioning and significance. Urbanism is the result of centuries-long critical and reflective process through making plans, projects, policies and historiographies. Out of this process, a body of ideas and concepts accumulated.

Over time ideas and concepts have persisted, renewed or innovated as to respond, in context, to changing urban questions. The history of urbanism is not a matter of succession or replacement of one concept by another, rather is a matter of accumulation of variety.

Focusing on the role of the project as a design-based critical and reflective process, five ideas of project emerged from recent and relevant EU experiences: exploration, interaction, integration, strategy, and curatorship.

Exploration

Demonstrated is the value of the project as a fundamental tool for constructing knowledge about the world we live in and not just as a simple vector of existing knowledge. In the context of a critical and reflective design-based process, ways of knowing are linked with modes of work; describing, i.e. classifying, that is about naming variety and change of things and images (ideas). Analyzing, i.e. taking things apart into various kinds of elements, is about specifying the composition of the 'known'; experimenting, putting together elements is about understanding the effects of a new phenomenon. Key are visual forms of communication. Through these concrete operations, abstract concepts are invented or imported; differently from other fields such as literature or music, concepts in urbanism are materialized, i.e. turned into physical spaces that support movement and actions.

Interaction

The designerly exploration and spatial response to complex urban and territorial issues - economic, social and environmental - engages a plurality of actors with their interests, views of the world, values (images) and actions. Contextual knowledge is produced during classifying, analyzing and experimenting. Information about participants' reaction get back to the same participants (feedback), allowing for clarifying conflicting and aligning interests and views. For example, the construction of experimental projects places the different actors in relation to possible consequences of their actions or non-actions. The circularity of the design process as inquiry and sensemaking moves away from the confidence in the 'pre-vision' that defined the modernist, it is a search for what a possible.

Integration

The response to complex urban and territorial issues - economic, social and environmental - through projects in the context of a shared vision, uncertainty needs to be reduced and actions realized within a predictable time and budget. This requires integration. The project links and coordinates actors affiliated with administrative sectors and private organizations with the city playing the role of coordination, selecting strategic areas and strategic projects and their

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- the type of life that is typical of cities and towns

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sequence in time, mobilizing `experts`, resources and promoters, and searching alignments of view, interest, budget and language. The project combines all `materials` - landscape, infrastructure and architecture – in coherent wholes, seeking renewed forms of aesthetic, social, economic and ecological coherence on several scales.

Strategic

The term strategy is composed of two ancient Greek words, `army` and `lead`, `conduct`, origin in the military field of knowledge. Applied to urbanism and construction plans, projects or policies for the city and territory, the term strategy refers to both spatial and temporal dimensions of action. Strategy becomes, then, a matter of selecting certain actions in certain places to modify the city's spatial structure, selecting the timing and sequences for implementing the projects and identifying the kind of spatial relationships that the same projects will establish within their direct context and with a broader urban milieu. Strategic projects aim at transforming selected situations of the city or territory, which interplay serves as levers of a far-reaching renewal of urban or territorial parts. Each of these choices are made within specific economic, social and political conditions that the strategy puts to the test.

Curatorship

Today the cultural context in which the project situates is constituted by many actors with conflicting interests, values and views of the world. This plurality of identities challenges the possibility of urbanism meeting universalistic goals historically associated with it. The question is: how the project can create carrying conditions for both urban and territorial diversity and cohesion? The disciplinary challenge is linked to the more recent idea of the project as the explorative practice of inquiring and hypothesis testing and to a renewed, more articulated role of the architect-urbanist. The prime role of the architect-urbanist / landscape-architect-urbanist is to set out spatial conceptual frameworks and to provide guidance during the selection procedures, searching for coherence among the many actors involved and seeking a shared base of support.

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