Playing from the inside: holistic villages as a paradigm (part II)

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ABSTRACT

In 1958, Corbu advocated a ‘new architecture’ for a ‘new man.’ The omnipresence of the architect creating spaces to model a society led to architects building many sins. After that the influence of architecture in the lives of its inhabitants began to be a subject ignored. A lot of contemporary architecture limited itself to the production of design or service to capital of the day.

In 1958, Yona Friedman fought for a mobile architecture in his visionary manifestos, in which megastructures over existing cities allowed citizens to reconfigure their lives. The development of utopias that decided to act from ‘outside’ of or ‘above’ the societies led architecture to lose their focus and social responsibility. We now find this position in the nostalgia for designs that could only be built by robots.

It was also in 1958 that Tomás Maldonado defended new developments in training designers from the spoon to the city. The breadth of his scientific focus distanced many generations from the social problems of design, remaining in the dichotomy between functionalism-aestheticism that could only be improved by a solid methodological base. Today we would call it parametric.

Exactly half a century later, after winning the competition for the Vienna University of Economics I was conscious that none of the extreme abovementioned positions were going to give me the answers I needed for the integral project that I knew we had to develop. This is the Holistic History of an Urban Miracle and the Holistic Villages as a New Paradigm.

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PROJECT REVIEW

Rethinking society in a city where children don’t play in the street

IS ARCHITECTURE SHAPING SOCIETY?

What is totally different is that I arrive directly from the campus garage, I get out of my car and find myself in the middle of the action. And I always come across different people. Simply for this reason I am in a very good mood when I get to my office. Basically, there is much better communication.

Regina Preehofer – WU – Vice-rector of Infrastructure (2013)

In 1958, the year of my birth, Le Corbusier advocated a ‘new architecture’ for a ‘new man.’ The omnipresence of the architect creating in the power of his or her spaces to model a society led to architects
building many sins all over the planet. The pendulum suddenly swung to the other side and the influence of architecture in the lives of its inhabitants began to be a subject ignored and dodged. A lot of contemporary architecture has gone further and limited itself to the production of design or of a service to capital or the public administration of the day.

In that same year, 1958, Yona Friedman fought for a mobile architecture in his visionary manifestos, in which megastructures over existing cities allowed citizens to flexibly reconfigure their future lives. The development of utopias that decided to act from ‘outside’ of or ‘above’ the societies for which they were conceived led architecture and urbanism to lose their disciplinary focus and their social responsibility. We now find this position in the nostalgia for designs that could only be built by robots.

It was also in 1958 that Tomás Maldonado defended new developments in industry and in training designers of objects from the spoon to the city. The breadth of his scientific focus distanced many generations of creatives from the social problems of design, remaining in the dichotomy between functionalism and aestheticism that could only be improved by a solid methodological base. Today we would call it parametric.

Exactly half a century later, after winning the competition for the new Vienna University of Economics I felt that I had been training all my life to resolve the task I would soon have to tackle.

And obviously, I was conscious that none of the extreme abovementioned positions were going to give me the answers I needed for the integral project that I knew we had to develop. The first questions we asked ourselves concerned the corporate social responsibility of both our companies BUSarchitektur and BOA and of the ‘corporation’ of the WU, BIG and the City of Vienna. That is, the first step to attain the strategic alliances needed to begin work was undoubtedly ideological and philosophical and was included among the contract documents with a preferential hierarchy.

The social corporate responsibility of the WU was understood as an approach that promotes ‘in their decision-making process the evaluation of the impact of their actions on the communities, workers and environment, and effectively incorporates their interests in their processes and results’. This influenced the decision to accept not only our project but also the methodology proposed. It was clear from the beginning that this active contribution to social, economic and environmental improvement coming from economists had to also have something to do

1- Wikipedia, corporate social responsibility
Image 19: Masterplan defining the programming of contextual, functional and social interaction

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with what had been said about rethinking the economy with the goal of improving their global ranking, their categorization of academic excellence and their added value in evaluations and certifications.

The Masterplan set out the principles and major features of the construction as the determination of constructable plots, the placement of the buildings and the open spaces, forming the basic scaffolding for the architectural projects and making recommendations for building design. An integral process was sought for planning and implementing the Campus WU, which had to provide the possibility of satisfying the needs of an emotional transformation, a transformation of identity and do justice to the complex logic of its development and implementation. The moderation of the stakeholders under our direction then harmonized construction proposals with social, economic and contextual goals and requisites.

In this sense, at no time was it suggested that the creation of an educational landscape for freedom was going to be regulated, or that architects’ freedom to design would be restricted. Nor did the University limit our creative work in any of the seven fields of action relating to the goals set:
- A masterplan to define the system on absolutely all levels until the end of construction work.
- Overall Executive Project to allow the contracted work to be completed in a timely manner.
- Architecture of the Auditorium Centre as spaces for students
- Architecture of garage as parallel worlds underground
- Landscaping of public university park open 24/7
- Documentation of the whole project from the beginning until after appropriation
- Communication of the project to all social, cultural and political levels of the city.

Last but not least, an eighth field of action was added to the list which was the design of the public space of the immediate surrounding area.

It may be that the new Vienna University of Economics and Business becomes the place where globalization listens to the European voice. ‘I think that the word bravery is the right one to define the work that has been done on the Campus WU. To get the success that was sought, it was first necessary to overcome a very Austrian characteristic of always finding a solution by consensus when faced with a conflict. From the students up to the University directors, all the representatives of different interest groups were integrated in order to prevent the emergence of a Frankenstein’s monster that no one would identify with. Despite the participation of lazy commitments, this didn’t happen. The result shows us probably the most radical position ever seen in the history of education in Austria without having clipped the wings of absolutely any architects.’

It is likely that the pluralism proposed in the project, as well as the trust placed in architecture to achieve

2-Kagerer, Johannes (2014). Der Masterplan zum modernsten Campus Europas. In STEIL, Students’ Centre Magazine, Vienna University of Economics.
Image 21: Interaction with the community as a driving force in the redefinition of the economies

Image 22: The raised Relax square, a meeting place for sharing dialogues

Image 23: The definition of edges and interstitial spaces to central areas
a permanent change of perspective in the everyday life of students and teachers of the WU through spaces for education lead me to think that what economics students the world over are demanding from their Institutions of Higher Education is already underway in Vienna and obviously already driven by architecture…

'It is not only the world economy that is in crisis. The teaching of economics is in crisis too, and this crisis has consequences far beyond the university walls. What is taught shapes the minds of the next generation of policymakers, and therefore shapes the societies we live in. We, over 65 associations of economics students from over 30 different countries, believe it is time to reconsider the way economics is taught. We are dissatisfied with the dramatic narrowing of the curriculum that has taken place over the last couple of decades. This lack of intellectual diversity does not only restrain education and research. It limits our ability to contend with the multidimensional challenges of the 21st century - from financial stability, to food security and climate change. The real world should be brought back into the classroom, as well as debate and a pluralism of theories and methods. Such change will help renew the discipline and ultimately create a space in which solutions to society's problems can be generated. It is gratifying with the new millennium beginning to know that the Constitution of Austria (1867) states that both scientific and educational activity are autonomous and consequently the authors of the projects were free in everything they did. The article of the Constitution was incorporated as a legend in the thank you plaque at the entrance to the Central Library with the following words: 'Thank you. The Vienna University of Economics is grateful to the citizens whose contributions made possible the construction of the Campus WU. State funding of the universities is a fundamental condition to experience the right proposed in our constitution: “Science and Education are free.”'

'How and what the WU researches, what the students bring, how the campus is organized, how exchange comes about with society—all this brings consequences. Being conscious of those impacts and acting consequently in a sustained manner is at the core of the social responsibility of every university.'

Rethinking reality from new forms of identity
How to create a feeling of belonging?

If it becomes a normal thing that when one goes out at night one sometimes does it at the campus or if the habitual activities on a Saturday are playing football or basketball in the open air on the campus park, with a mixed team of players made up of people from the social interest housing from the opposite block, a couple of students and perhaps the odd teacher… then this project will truly be a success.

Michael Holoubek – Ex-Vice-Rector of WU Infrastructure (2013)

3- ISIPE (2014) An international student call for pluralism in economics

Our way to play an active role in our daily productive output is to use intellectual curiosity as a journey to discover not-so-obvious game theory applications in architecture. The game played is a game of society since it leads to the socialization of the individual in a virtual community and, as a consequence, to the development of a real community.

Integrating new forms of communication and interaction in the Campus WU implementation process, in a society where there are specialists in coaching, lobbying, publicity, corporate image development, marketing studies, future trends and much more, has meant that the work of the architect who attempts to penetrate those codes is very complex. The credibility we are given in activating our sensitive antennas in the societies in which we act is practically nil. It is as if what Hans Hollein argued in 1996 as his subject for the Venice Biennale ‘Preannouncing the Future – the Architect as Seismograph’ cannot and will not be accepted by the established system. It was no different when this project began. Communication is a subject that comes at the end, not at the start accompanying the whole process – this was the answer to our queries.

We were convinced that the only way to resolve the challenge set by the Vienna University of Economics was to integrate dialogue with the community in the broadest sense from the beginning to allow the appropriation of that new reality from conception. In treating all stakeholders equally, we decided at the BOA to develop new operational instruments. The interactions sought and the operational randomness encouraged proved to be a permanent provocation.

‘BUSarchitektur is guided by the spirit of a viable utopia. Not one shape is clearly defined with dimensions and characteristics that could be identified in advance but rather it possesses certain fertility conditions. This applies to the project and structural works, as well as to the life that the campus accommodates. The Master Plan is conceived as a device for encouraging and containing university life, as a channelling of actions that will continue to be written throughout its occupation and use.\(^5\)

Social games with random tactics let us say that the fiction of a player provides us with a path to recognition of and liberation from the everydayness of production. The random exchange of roles encourages interrelation during the development of projects, creating dynamic simulation systems. The results form an ‘open-thinking’ space, which is seemingly both multi-optional and interactive.

However, the communication and participation strategies sought for the Campus WU had little to do with American happenings or Viennese Actionism of the 1960s. The Austrian avant-garde phenomenon (which also started in 1958, just like Hannah Arendt’s table that we referred to at the start), centred its provocations on the search for an experimental

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Image 26: Temporary installation of a platform raised above the site office

Image 27: Guided visits for the general population throughout the construction period

Image 28: Informative events for all interest groups of the university and society
I would like to quote once again Fernando Diez who with great lucidity and perhaps conceptual range in being both the editor of the Argentine magazines Barzón and SUMMA+ interpreted our work as follows: 'She is not as interested in its specific form as she is in what this urban form will be capable of producing – the outcome is more interesting than from purely formal project management. All these themes reflect a realism that does not idealize the construction itself, so much as the aspiration for a campus that integrates with the city. What she provocatively calls a randomness offensive comprises a form of activism that puts its faith in the potential of catalysts. Dialogue and decision tools seek to extract their best from the different actors as well as create interest in and commitment to the process of moving to the new campus. According to Spinadel, this process must be accompanied by information and monitoring tools since rather than viewing architecture as somehow static she sees it as something that needs to be activated.6

6- Diez, Fernando. (2013). Campus WU. From Utopia to Reality Campus WU. A Holistic History. Vienna, BOA büro für offensive aleatorik

Rethinking the concept of sustainability from public space
Can the landscape produce a quality environment?

Attaining blue building certification for the Campus WU is a great recognition as we are not talking about having met the minimum standards but attaining the best both in the projects and in their implementation and maintenance.

Philipp Kaufmann, Director of the ÖGNI Austrian Sustainable Building Council (2015)

The basic democratic rights pertaining to the built environment are: the right to natural light, the right to visual perception and the right to water. Therefore, the job of an architect nowadays is to find a new balance between ecology and urban planning. Our aim as thinkers and operators should be to once again play an active role in environmental quality optimization by acknowledging the complexity of this process and searching for sustainable changes.

In the case of the project for the new Vienna University of Economics the environment was not an abstract concept for those making the decisions. In the words of Rector Badelt, ecology means quality of life in a broad...
sense: ‘We always had the goal that in creating the new campus it should be more than a place for research and teaching. It had to be constructed in a sustainable way, to give the community spaces for social, cultural and political life.’

It is worth pointing out that speaking of best practices tends to be an economic subject at the time of investment. In building a university with public money, the pressure on the dichotomy previously analysed between art and ecology meant, however, that the subject had to be analysed in great depth throughout the process, in order to help those who had to make the decisions by having all the arguments on the table. It was defined that as those responsible for the masterplan and the overall executive project, we had to permanently update the life cycle and maintenance costs of the whole intervention.

The analysis time was stipulated at twenty-five years in order to define whether the materials and designs to be approved were the correct ones.

The issues explored in the energy masterplan included not only the analysis of resources and demand, but also the optimization of buildings, particularly in relation to their facades in terms of thermal transmission or the maximum surface of windows. The variants were not evaluated based solely on purchase costs, but also taking

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7- Badelt, Cristoph (2015). Press release for awarding of blue building status for Campus WU.
Image 33: Visualization of the geothermal masterplan for the Campus WU
© Infograph BOAnet

Image 34: Ecosystem for flora and fauna on Campus WU
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into account the subsequent costs. Through the analysis of the fictitious value in cash, the higher purchase costs, which have lower subsequent costs, led in some cases to be more logical, economic and ecological solutions.

“The entire low temperature-energy demand can be met through the recommended and achievable groundwater use. In winter warmth is extracted from the groundwater for heating, while in summer cold is extracted for cooling. Over time a balance is struck between the demands for heating and cooling.”

This means that the Campus WU, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations, sought at all

times to produce a sustainable development understood as one ‘that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

In this context, I would like to propose that the work of the architect in order to create sustainable buildings must be redefined. It is not merely a question of materials and facades. An integral approach to the subject must review such things as people’s habits, analyze pedestrian flows and introduce elements that motivate other types of mobilities inside and outside buildings.

The BUSarchitektur’s Auditorium Centre was in 2015 selected as a world example of good practices by the ULI Urban Land Institute in its Toolkit to demonstrate healthy buildings and spaces. Among the strategies proposed for promoting health in the constructed environment the project responds to the premise of the concept: ‘Buildings that encourage stair use enhance physical activity opportunities and reinforce environmental sustainability goals through reduced energy expenditure from elevators and escalators.’

The values proposed in the Design Strategies Instrumental Manual were incorporated in many cases into the Campus WU. Physical activity was encouraged through walks and forks throughout the universitypark. Encouraging people to drink pure water during the day was resolved with drinking water fountains every 300 metres in the park. Social comfort was resolved with an interdisciplinary work complex of specialists in security, gastronomy, juvenile delinquency, and lighting to create active urban spaces.

In the words of the new rector Dr. Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger, ‘As a public institution, the WU has taken on a responsibility that is at once economic, ecological and social in building its new campus. The recent distinction awarded in 2015 to the Vienna University of Economics and Business with the blue building certification—defined as integral sustainability throughout the life cycle—shows what we have achieved.’

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