

Debating residential subdivisions

Which actors, which forms, which uses?



“A demand and an offer impose their presence on us” (Bauer, 1979, p. 12)

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Keywords: suburban retrofitting, collective capacities, location-based experiential learning methods, participation, capacity building

Abstract:

Within the framework of the research program CAPA.CITY¹, a PhD workshop is organized around the question of suburban retrofitting. The workshop will notably question the capacities that need to be mobilized and associated, or even hybridized, in order to transform existing residential subdivisions. The originality of this approach lies in the interrogation of creating negotiation spaces between individual, collective and common interests, so that collective capacities could be built between the different actors (inhabitants, professionals, institutions) implicated in the transformation of residential subdivisions.

Subject:

It has been recognized that the question of suburbanization, specifically the increasing development of residential subdivisions, is at the heart of numerous debates of scientific nature (Vanier 2009; Dodier, 2012; PUCA 2011-2013, 2015) as much of political nature (in France : law “SRU”, 2000; law “ALUR”, 2014; law “CAP”, 2016). This questioning, far from being a French specificity, is shared by several European countries that are also marked by an increasing urban sprawl, provoking controversy. Among the critiques that have been made, the waste of land, the artificialization of ground, the high cost of infrastructures and networks, the intensification of motorized travel, the individualism or even the absence of social diversity are the most emblematic (Charmes, 2013; Ministeriet for By, Bolig og Landdistrikter 2013; Van de Weijer & Van Cleempoel, 2015; Deilmann & alii., 2016). Therefore, the diffused city has often been opposed to the model of the compact city and has been the focus of much criticism (Bourne, 1992; Newman & Kenworthy, 1999; Hillman, 2010; Ubels & al., 2010; Pinson, 2017). This criticism has contributed to highlighting the struggle against urban sprawl, and the necessity of suburban densification, as flagship objectives of sustainable urban development in Europe. On the other hand, there are researchers and professionals of the urban revealing the qualities of this emerging city (Dubois-Taine & Chalas, 1997) and its potentials on the ecological (Frileux, 2013), social (Dodier, 2012; Lambert, 2015), architectural and urban level (Bonnet, 2014).

¹ <https://www.capa-city-ensuf.eu/>. This research program is financed by ENSUF (<http://ipi-urbaneurope.eu/calls/ensuf-call/>)

In order to further develop the debate, JPI Urban Europe² (through the call for proposals ENSUF³) has chosen to finance the research program CAPA.CITY⁴, that focuses on suburban retrofitting. The objective is to identify the conditions of transformation of residential subdivisions, equipping them with services, infrastructures, public spaces, etc. (Masbounji & al., 2008). The hypothesis is that one of the essential conditions for envisaging such transformations rests on the building of collective capacities (Ubels & al., 2010; Elbakidze & al., 2015), shared between institutional, professional and civil actors of the suburban.

Within the framework of this European research, the scientific team proposes a PhD workshop centered on the capacities that need to be mobilized and associated, or even hybridized, in order to transform existing residential subdivisions. The originality of this approach lies in the interrogation of creating negotiation spaces and of collective learning (Callon & al., 2001) between individual, collective and common interests (Zask, 2011), so that the capacities of the different actors (inhabitants, professionals, institutions), individual or collective, are identified, recognized and made available to one another (de Certeau, 1980 ; Berry-Chikhaoui & Deboulet, 2000 ; Nez, 2015).

In the continuity of research considering residential subdivisions as “laboratory-spaces” (Dodier, 2012; PUCA, 2011-2013), this program questions ways of dealing with the existing, searching for adjustments and rebalancing in order to (re)compose the cities of the future (Bonnet, 2014). Within the perspective of complementing previous researches concerning the process of suburban densification (Miet & Lefol, 2013; PUCA, 2015), this program aims to develop a reflection on the intersection of three subjects: the participation of different actors in transforming residential subdivisions, the architectural and urban forms produced and the intensification of uses that could be induced in such processes.

The final objective is to reveal a “middle way”,
an alternative to the usual production of residential subdivisions
and an urban sprawl that never ceases to intensify (Piron, 2011).

² <http://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/calls/ensuf-call/>

³ “ENSUF is supported by the European Commission and funded under the Horizon 2020 ERA-NET Cofund scheme.”, *ibid.*

⁴ Coordinated by Hasselt University (Be) and in cooperation with two other universities – Roskilde University (Dk) and the École Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture de Marseille (Fr) – and three professional structures – Infrastructures (Be), Givrum (Dk) and In Vivo (Fr) – this project puts three contexts into perspective with one another (Belgium, Denmark, France) : <https://www.capa-city-ensuf.eu/>

Axis 1: Which actors for which processes?

The first axis will be focusing on the actors mobilized (or that need to be mobilized) in envisioning the retrofitting of residential subdivisions. The objective is to construct a state of the art of initiatives carried out from private or public actors. Which strategies and which tools are deployed by institutions, inhabitants (grouped in citizen associations or not), and/or professionals of the urban in retrofitting processes of the suburban? Processes that could be interrogated include soft densification processes, spontaneous or framed by public institutions, co-housing initiatives that take place in the suburban, professional initiatives such as BIMBY⁵, or even the actions of social micro-landlords such as SNL⁶. The objective is to reveal the participatory processes that are based on cross-cooperation of actors, through which

innovative projects for the suburban are conceived and constructed (Petitet, 2013; Doberstein & al., 2016). Additionally, historical perspectives on the one hand and European tendencies on the other could serve to illuminate forgotten or little-known practices.



https://twitter.com/capa_city_eu/status/

Axis 2: Which architectural and urban forms for the suburban of the future?

The second axis will be interrogating the different forms that suburban retrofitting could take. Since their appearance, these tissues have been often criticized for their architectural homogeneity, and the urban and environmental problems their mass construction could generate (Bauer, 1979; Duany & al., 2001; Vanier, 2009; Charmes, 2013). The force of these criticisms has often obscured the qualities of these tissues, such as the ecological and social potential of private gardens (Frileux, 2008; Sibilat, 2014-2017; Riboulot-Chetrit, 2015), the appropriations made possible through private property (Lefèbvre in Haumont, 1966; Moley, 2003; Benigni, 2014), as well as the land potential they represent for projects (Charmes, 2006; Miet & Lefol, 2013; Hanrot, 2015). In this perspective, we will be examining the architectural and urban potential of residential subdivisions: how to pass from a territorial planning to an “urbanism for houses” (Bauer, 1979)? How to fill the void of project - political, urban and architectural - that characterizes these territories (Vanier, 2011)? To answer to these questions, a typological analysis of plots, of

⁵ Build In My Backyard : <http://bimby.fr/>

⁶ “Solidarités nouvelles pour le Logement”, which translates to *New solidarities for housing* : <https://www.snl-union.org/>

buildings, of private and public outdoor spaces could contribute to the debate. Moreover, constructing a state of the art of architectural and urban experimentations that have been implemented in Europe – such as experiences in collective housing or intermediary housing within suburban tissues – could begin to outline possible future projects for their retrofitting and the diversification of their typologies (Pinson, 2017).

Axis 3: Towards an intensification of uses?

Residential subdivisions are marked to this day by a number of stereotypes, in particular the “individualism of the petty bourgeois” (Magri, 2008), an introversion (Donzelot, 2009) or a socio-political homogeneity (Rivière, 2013; Berger, 2008; Charmes, 2007). In the 60’s, however, sociologists illustrated that the image of the socially isolated “suburbans” was not true in every case and that, to the contrary, multiple forms of sociability existed (Haumont & al., 1966, p. 16). Since then, different researchers have emphasized the plurality of socio-spatial realities of these tissues, and through different approaches (Hoyaux, 2002; Berger and Jaillet, 2007; Dodier, 2012; Lambert, 2015). Within the same perspective, this third axis will be focusing on the possible changes of use that could be introduced in the transformation of the suburban. Indeed, every action within an inhabited location

necessarily has effects on the initial living conditions, on the spatial practices of the inhabitants, their ways of living, their mobility. Therefore, the intention is to analyze the processes of transformation of the suburban currently implemented, in an effort to decipher the changes of uses, and to surpass the usual division between “pro” and “anti” suburban (Dodier, 2012).



<https://www.flickr.com>

Conditions of submission:

The communication proposals, of 3500 characters maximum (including spaces), must be submitted, in English, until the 22nd of December 2017. They must consist of a title, the name of the PhD candidate, their affiliating university and their full contact details. The axis (one or several) addressed must also be specified. Propositions must be sent to the following email: capacityensam@gmail.com.

Calendar:

Proposition deadline: 22nd of December 2017 the latest

Selection of proposition and informing of PhD candidates: 15th of January 2018

Communication submission (between 15 000 and 30 000 characters): 1st of April 2018

Submitting of slideshows: 5th of April 2018

PhD Workshop: 9 & 10th of April 2018 in Périgueux

Scientific committee:

Oswald Devisch, Hoofddocent - Associate Professor, Faculteit Architectuur & Kunst - Faculty of Architecture & Arts

John Andersen, Professor. PhD in Sociology and Planning, Planning Studies (Plan, By og Proces), Department of Humans and Technology

Majken Toftager Larsen, Urbanist and action researcher, Planning Studies (Plan, By og Proces), Department of Humans and Technology

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