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Abstract

Europe's cities are changing. Though not as breathtaking and overwhelming as elsewhere in this world, the transformation of its urban areas clearly points to forces that are as fundamental and irrevocable, in Europe as well as elsewhere. Its extensive local tradition of state-induced planning has increasingly come under stress through liberal reforms compounding with the forces of capital and globalization – forces which it seeks to benefit of as well as compensate for. In urban design, the question of who produces the city and its environment, has therefore become more than just a marginal issue. As the production of urban physical space increasingly takes shape through an interplay (a so-called co-production) of many actors and agents, urban design is increasingly having to face up to this challenge.

The paper focuses on issues of urban design within a larger urban territory, situated on a regional scale. It draws on research carried out in and around the city of Amsterdam (Holland), and focuses on the urban disciplines' changing position within this particular European context. Starting from current practices covering Amsterdam's urban fringe, it will try to contextualize these efforts, putting them into perspective to the development of what essentially still is *peri-urban* space: a regional territory in between urban centers that defies clear representation and delineation. The question will be raised how and to what extent the urban disciplines (urban design and urbanism) can be seen to contribute to this elusive territory. Starting from a range of interpretive maps and schemes, this text will try to define an alternative approach. It redefines the territory as a feasible field for design interventions, thereby assessing design's agency in terms of the shared interests and possibilities that it might allow to open up.

Peri-urban developments epitomize, to a certain extent, the current state of urban planning in Holland. Operating in the periphery of central city developments, its piecemeal and rather discontinuous development comes about in spite of the country's extensive tradition in planning and collective scheme-making. For many decades, city planners have been working hard to contain Amsterdam as a city within clear formal bounds. However, the plans that try to keep the city's wider regional territory to an order currently seem driven rather by failure of containment and control than by adaptation to development forces. This current paradox in planning lies at the heart of developments in the urban fringe. As the region becomes a growing arena of planning aspirations - market forces and institutional forces of all sorts and sizes - these developments also question the urbanist *métier* itself, casting doubt on its devices and their remaining agency. This paper, therefore, goes by the assumption, that as the 'overall plan' becomes more and more implicated, there will be a growing need for urban design to explicitly mediate and reclaim its position within a growing field of multiple actors. Rather than any defined or demarcated physical entity, this very field of enterprises (past and present) defines the current object of urban design. It is the material terrain for both urbanism and this paper to be working on.