



POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
Repository ISTITUZIONALE

The role of production spaces in a post-carbon vision

*Original*

The role of production spaces in a post-carbon vision / Protti, Emanuele. - In: NEWDIST. - ISSN 2283-8791. - ELETTRONICO. - vol. Special Issue July 2016(2016), pp. 194-200. ((Intervento presentato al convegno TOWARDS POST-CARBON CITIES tenutosi a Torino nel 18-19 February 2016.

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2675946 since: 2017-07-07T11:47:17Z

*Publisher:*

DIST, Politecnico e Università di Torino

*Published*

DOI:

*Terms of use:*

openAccess

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

*Publisher copyright*

(Article begins on next page)

## THE ROLE OF PRODUCTION SPACES IN A POST-CARBON VISION

### Author

Emanuele PROTTI

### Keywords

factory

city

third industrial revolution

new production spaces

digitalization

industrialization

### Abstract

*Heading to a post-carbon future requires a profound redefinition of the imaginary of the city and its places. The contemporary city is the result of a continuous override of spaces that are no more useful and abandoned, but today a post-carbon vision must be able to define how to use these spaces discarded by economic and political flows of our cities. Industrial districts, warehouses, factories, work spaces disseminated on urban conglomerates, are the picture of what is being left behind by our carbon based culture.*

*A post-carbon city has an absolute need to define a new relationship between factory (production) and the city itself.*

*The emerging of digital fabrication technologies, DIY online communities, local cluster and new production processes are the key points to analyse the changing way of production. Different examples from GMDC of New York, The Green Garage in Detroit, the Silicon Roundabout in London or the Fab Labs scattered all over the world are some of the realities that seek to integrate the reuse of urban production spaces with renewable energy and activities that create social, economic and technological values in the districts in which they are inserted.*

*The analysis covers the evolution of production by studying its characteristics at the urban scale, defining what is the contemporary production space and how a manufacturing processes is evolving in relation with the environment; in order to start regeneration policies that create value and became engines of real practices and experiments towards the city that we want to build.*

### 1\_Text

Today, there is a broad consensus that the world in which we are projected will be radically different from what we have known in the past. In our history there is no historical period comparable to the era that humanity is going to address. The various revolutions that have marked our history didn't possess the same charge of dangers and possibilities but also they didn't have the same amount of simultaneous and radical changes, converging one towards the other, for which we are called to respond now.

The climate change and the emergence of a global growth increasingly unsustainable in terms of population and in terms of exploitation and consumption of natural resources are creating a widespread pollution, driven by an economic output that is subject to distorted parameters that prevent us to see the destructive consequences in pursuing this attitude.

This conflicted reality and its stratification find in the city their images and representations. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution the city was the theatre and the space for the experimentation of the economic stimulus, of the scientific and technical process and the belief in progress. The city of the nineteenth and twentieth century was casted and built around the industrial process, accepting the dogmas and shaping itself around this new dominant sphere. Factories become the place par excellence for human life by absorbing the daily life with working shifts that alternate themselves day and night without stopping. Roads increase in size in order to support a new structure for transportation, the only element of distinction between the

productive space and residential complexes, new dormitory suburbs arise denouncing a complete lack of services and new materials and prefabrication process became fundamental for rapid construction and urban development. The industrial city has assumed strongly different characters from the historical city. This is evident from the human point of view where there is a clear change of spatial perception of the surroundings as imaginary and sensations, but also from the point of view of city planning with an urban fabric that counterpose the organicity of historic urban settlement with a rational allotment according to specific guidelines, which often collide with the main transport routes. As for the historical city, the industrial fabric assumes internally different contradictions, overlaps and stratifications that are the necessary consequence of a continuous evolution from proto-industry of the early nineteenth century (1) to the full mechanization of mid-twentieth century (2).

Unlike its counterpart, the mechanized city never developed a process, a “digestive system”, necessary for the assimilation of the changes, especially at the urban scale: the time. The great progress that humanity has embraced with a growing enthusiasm, because it finally broke the chains that bound man to natural processes, was the overthrow by the industrial process of the conception of time and space. They were cancelled by the introduction of new forms of energy and of a technological process that makes possible communications and travels faster and faster

In this way the time of man business become detached from the time that marked the natural processes, defining one of the causes of climate and energy issues. We are no longer able to understand the consequences of our actions compared to the time that the environment needs to assimilate them, due to the lacking of a direct perception of these actions and thanks to persevering in the use of an economic process that doesn't take into account the cost inflicted on the planet. Proceeding in this direction is impossible to counter the dominant attitude. This approach is also reflected in the relationship with the industrial city, where new buildings, warehouses and roads join a steady increase number of empty spaces, abandoned at the end of their vital purpose, crushed by economic interests, constantly changing, and not re-included in the design process of the city.

Sometimes, the market economy has been so influential to undermine entire cities, bringing them almost to the disappearance. The case of Detroit is a good example of how a city defined by an industrial monoculture, following a situation of severe crisis, could literally disappear with a reduction of the population of 1 million (3) inhabitants since the early sixties of the twentieth century, with 36% of homes abandoned or foreclosed and an administration that doesn't have the resources to maintain the public space (4). A reality that has entered a deep crisis, threatening sometimes even to disappear (5) when the economic and social system which was developed has reached the stage of decline.

Inside the contemporary city heading towards a post-carbon future requires a profound redefinition of the imaginary of the city and its places. The projection of the values of a digitized manufacturing towards urban space can become the vehicle for a redevelopment of the heritage of an industrial and carbon culture.

A vision for a post carbon city must be able to define how to use the spaces discarded, abandoned by economic and political flows, redefining the relationship between the production space and the city itself. Different examples from GMDC of New York, The Green Garage in Detroit, the Silicon Roundabout in London or the FabLab movement, scattered all over the world, are some of the realities that seek to integrate the reuse of urban spaces for production with renewable energy and activities leading social, economic and technological value to the districts in which they are inserted.

The contemporary city, a habitat for more than 54% (6) of the world's population is the result of a continuous override that like never before have to face a discussion about what to do with the "waste" it produces. Often the type of building in question does not develop a particularly important or valuable characteristics: they are standardized buildings, warehouses, abandoned offices, which come together in a multitude of generic spaces (7) within our cities. Private and public action may be able to use these scraps thanks to a renewed relationship between the space of production and the city itself.

Private actions such as the one made by GreenPoint Manufacturing and Design Center, a non-profit industrial developer in the city of New York has allowed the redevelopment of five industrial buildings, the relocation of production space for small and medium-sized companies, where they can find the habitat for developing their business and the use of LEED certification as a strategy for energy development.

Especially the building at 1102 of Atlantic Avenue, in Brooklyn, has provided space to 14 different business and 76 employees with an average salary of around 47,000 \$, which is 58% higher than both the food and retail sector average salaries in New York City(8). Additionally, 1102 Atlantic Avenue have a negligible carbon footprint and stand as a model for green development in a traditionally industrial neighbourhood. This project includes a 58kW solar array on the roof, and is expected to achieve LEED Silver Certification for its efforts in reducing waste and minimizing harmful emissions, a welcome departure from the industry of the past (9).

In Detroit, Green Garage, a business incubator following strategies triple-bottom line, has included in the design for the renovation of its spaces the construction of a hybrid energy system for heating and cooling that integrates passive and highly efficient active systems to create an ultra-efficient HVAC system that integrates mechanical ventilation components with a moisture control to create an healthy system, a building process that foresaw the reuse 90% of all non-toxic deconstructed materials and the integration of a new insulation of the existing building to lower the regime of consumption to at least at 70% of the previous state (10).

In addition, the re-use of 'buildings located at the 4444 in Second Avenue led to the improvement of the urban environment with the creation of the Green Alley, designed and built by volunteers and the beginning of a new project for the construction of a passive hotel in an abandoned residential building named "El Moore" built in 1898, in West Alexandrine Street (11).

These two buildings are examples of how abandoned industrial buildings thanks to a private process of re-appropriation can become engines for local development and re-appropriation by the community of the spaces in which

the economic system in crisis not see value, transforming them into new production areas according to an upgraded sustainable vision.

But not only the architectural space has the opportunity, through proper design, to return to be part of the urban process, but the same production process undergoes to a transformation that resizes the necessary space, bringing new interest to small urban spaces abandoned within the city.

Realities like Shapeways, which opened in 2012 its first “Factory of the Future” on the suburbs of New York, possess only a 10% of its 2,400 m<sup>2</sup> as a space dedicated to the production, the remaining space is dedicated to its employees, involved in the optimization of 3D projects and products digitized by users and subsequently made by additive printing (12).

The Factory space assumes different connotations from the imaginary of the twentieth century, not the biggest polluting and oversized production plants, but spaces that through the use of digital platform become defined like hybrid places merging workspace, public space and space for the community.

This is the method of the FabLab movement, that has spread around the world and where services of digital fabrication and other semi-automatic machine give a chance to individual users to carry out their projects.

From the compartmentalized characteristics of the places belonging to a Fordist reality where containers defined the spatial and social reality inside them, emerges a reality where industry, start-up and incubator, company space and public urban realm coincide. In this reality was born the Third Industrial Revolution of Jeremy Rifkin, the revolution of the lateral power (13), where a mass society made up of self-employed, micro-entrepreneurs, inventors, makers, constitutes virtual relationships within the world of e-commerce.

At the urban level, the ability to use the industrial space for new production purposes has realized, in the cities of London and Barcelona, the requalification of ample urban sectors that were characterized by low levels of spatial quality. The London case appears around the Old Roundabout, renamed Silicon Roundabout is opposed to the intervention in the district of Sant Marti in Barcelona since the first has spread by small private projects on the same territory while the second is a result of the action of the municipality with the granting of loans by the European Union.

The Silicon Roundabout, also known as East London Tech City is a technology cluster located in the central and east London. It occupies widely the East End of London between Old Street and the Olympic Park in Stratford, with a primary focus in the area of Shoreditch. The Silicon Roundabout is the third largest cluster of technology start-ups after San Francisco and New York, and it was initially developed without government support, around the Old Street Roundabout.

This suburb and degraded area in north of the city of London, historically had rents much lower than the rest of the city, mainly due to the lack of transport infrastructure that would allow quick movements. The urban fabric consists of warehouses and abandoned buildings of industrial character and a public urban degraded environment. Start-ups were encouraged to settle in the area by its low rents produced by the recession of 2008-2009, which caused the closure of many architecture firms, design and artists studios who had



*Figure 1. Building property of GreenPoint Manufacturing and Design Center in 1102 Atlantic Avenue.*

settled in the area, further decreasing rental rates. Ironically in 2009 the Old Street was not even served by fiber optic cables, while a few blocks away, in the City of London, where rents were much higher was already in place an extensive infrastructure. In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron has announced a plan to accelerate the growth of the clusters in the area bringing a frontline interest of the municipalities and the state. Many were against this intervention that led to a high increase in rents that eliminates the smaller companies.

After the recognition of the importance of the area, the strategic action of greater impact for the community, was the creation of an integrated proposal for the management of roads flows with an extensive implementation of pedestrian and cycle facing, reprogramming the public urban spaces that were inadequate. The municipality also build a structure called “Super City connected” in order to link from a digital point of view all the buildings and the realities that define its territory (14).

The 22@ district is also known as the District of innovation. This is the name given to the district for corporate business in the former industrial area of Ploblenou, in Sant Marti, nicknamed “The Catalan Manchester” in the nineteenth century. The purpose of the project is to convert this industrial area into a technology and innovation district for the city, increasing and requalifying the green and the residential spaces. The project, still under construction, is part of one of the largest urban renewal programs in Europe, which began in 2000. The plan covers 115 blocks and 198,26 hectares. Instead of applying a model of territorial specialization, the city of Barcelona has developed a mixed model that promotes social cohesion and a urban and economic development in balanced with a sustainable context. The activities of the

cluster co-exist with the traditional activities of the area by creating a rich and diversified environment. It involves the use of 10% of the land for public use (145,000 m<sup>2</sup>) with the determination of structures that include training, research and the promotion of new technologies. These structures promote synergy with universities, technological and research centers and production activities in the area. At the same time these facilities help to alleviate the shortage of community facilities in the district.

The public space, as a supporting element for the urban fabric, for relationships and activities, is one of the guidelines for the project configuration. The structure of green spaces was proposed following a sequence of steps in which wide open spaces will gradually extend to the squares and the smaller streets and houses, becoming a real meeting place for residents. The new infrastructure plan provides an investment of over 180 million € and allows the realization of a modern network of energy, telecommunications, district heating and waste collection. The design of these new networks gives priority to energy efficiency and the responsible management of natural resources (15). The industrial cases analysed thrive into mixed-use neighbourhoods with the reuse of abandoned factories for the emerging producing class. This action preserves the existing housing stock, demonstrating the adaptability of industrial buildings and highlights their suitability for the production of the XXI century.

With the growing ranks of designers and makers who attempt to scale their products to the market, through the tools of open source and crowdsourcing platforms, a small flexible space and a shared knowledge on how to scale production will become more important and will be the guide lines for the definition of the evolution of urban space.

In an urban policy that seeks to stop the use of land in the interior and on the edge, rethink the abandoned spaces or disused takes on a double meaning: bring to light a historical stratification expanding it with additional overwrite and restore urban infrastructure already existing. Reflect on urban production is not only a way to establish trends of the future industrialization, but is mainly a way to reflect on our city. Analyse the tales, re-establish contact, a story, a stratification between the built and urban life.

The venture towards a post-carbon means understanding how trends and capital flows can be conveyed in order to implement strategies that move in this direction. The city as we know it's the image of the structure of our society and it's essential to understand how the actors that take part to it are moving. While the economic case for the return of urban production are mature, spatial strategies to support production are scarce or non existent. In the cities, the production claims the urban field, generates innovation, serves as a strong economic multiplier and provide an economic resilience. The addition of industrial typologies in mixed-use areas therefore increases the quality of the public sector.

If we evaluate the macro-economic factors that allow the return of manufacturing in western cities, the architecture has an opportunity to fully revise the manner in which the production is embedded within the fabric of the city, analysing and aligning an economic process with the needs for the future.

## 2 References

- (1) Singer C. 1954, *A History of Technology*, Vol. 4, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- (2) Ghiedion S. 1948, *Mechanization Takes Command*, Oxford University Press Oxford.
- (3) <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/detroit-population/>.
- (4) <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/special-reports/2015/05/14/detroit-abandoned-homes-volume-terrifying/27237787/>.
- (5) Daskalakis G., Waldheim C. and Young J. 2001, *Stalking Detroit*, ACTAR, Barcelona.
- (6) UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*.
- (7) Koolhaas R. 2006, *Junk Space*, Quodlibet, Macerata.
- (8) [http://ndcacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/1102-Atlantic-Ave.\\_JC1.pdf](http://ndcacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/1102-Atlantic-Ave._JC1.pdf).
- (9) [http://ndcacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/1102-Atlantic-Ave.\\_JC1.pdf](http://ndcacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/1102-Atlantic-Ave._JC1.pdf).
- (10) <http://greengaragedetroit.com/>.
- (11) <http://greengaragedetroit.com/>.
- (12) <https://www.shapeways.com/blog/archives/1692-factory-of-the-future-our-plan-to-3d-print-3-to-5-million-unique-products-per-year-in-nyc.html>.
- (13) Rifkin J. 2011, *The third Industrial Revolution: How Lateral Power Is Transforming Energy, the Economy, and the World*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- (14) *The City Fringe Opportunity Area Planning Framework*, <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/opportunity-areas/opportunity-areas/city-fringe#sthash.vAD1Jvjx.dpuf>.
- (15) <http://www.22barcelona.com>.