A Four-pages Saga. An Attempt at Graphical Analysis of the Transformation of les Halles in the Late 20th Century, with Some Implications.

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Unlike the many magazines that revolve around the architectural world, Ardeth concerns neither with outcomes (architecture) nor with the authors (architects). Ardeth concerns instead with their operational work, i.e. projects. The shift from subjects (their good intentions, as taught in Universities and reclaimed in the profession) to objects (the products of design, at work within the social system that contains them) engenders an analytical and falsifiable elaboration of the complex mechanisms that an open practice such as design involves. Through a process of disciplinary redefinition, Ardeth explores the falsifiability of design hypotheses as the object that allows the project to scientifically confront errors and approximations.
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Is it possible to represent exhaustively the design scales (Revel, 2006) of a thirty-years long urban transformation in just one scheme? Is it possible to consider such a thick description (Geertz, 1973) as autonomous and analytically useful? The following scheme is an attempt to explore the answers at these questions through an overview of the Paris's les Halles saga during the Seventies and the Eighties, as a result of a three-year research. Even if the scheme may appear obscure to those who are not familiar with the les Halles saga it is meant to give an idea of the path traced by documents and material effects among different social entities, as policies, projects, conflicts and physical transformations. The arrows show the cause-effect relationship between events and mirror the continuous redefinition of strategic decisions, and the superposition of material effects. Almost every event has effects, which can shape the physical space (through building sites), the socio-technical space (through projects) and the social space (through negotiations and policies). Exploring this path, is at least possible to highlight two elements:
One is that les Halles saga is an over-stratified process, in which different urban paradigms overlap and superpose themselves going up and down between policies and material effects.

Another is the role of intermediate entities, as public bureaucracies (Myses 1944) – namely The Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR) – which appears to be the translator of policies in plans and projects, through conflicts and negotiations.

The question if such a tool can be used not just to build up a rough “urban history” (Roncayolo 1976), but rather to picture an ongoing project, remains an open issue: the same energy which is more conventionally spent to communicate a design could, perhaps, be redeployed to design a process.

References
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