

# Reflection and Limitations

The relation between research and design

All of my designs were inspired and informed by two sources: Leipzig and its region and my research. My thesis was entirely in the speculative, nevertheless possible if not even inevitable, realm beyond capitalism. Therefore, all my spatial responses to post-capitalistic socio-economic developments were based on my understanding of capitalism, its spatial implications, its ramifications, its systematic errors and its inevitable failure, the threats, which would come with such a development, and ideas or practice examples for alternative forms of socio-economic organization.

The other way around, the design helped me to understand what I have learned from the literature. Especially the analysis of Leipzig's spatial structures in accordance to the capitalistic cycles, the tracing through time and the observation of the changes, was revealing the spatial outcomes of the complex processes, which I was reading about. This knowledge again brought me to the understanding of the city, and its separation from its hinterland, as a product of the mutual relation of economic and spatial development.

The design itself also became a source of knowledge regarding a post-capitalistic economy. Illustrating and visualizing the spatial demands of a post-capitalistic economy, and the region's transition towards that, helped to identify the strategic locations and infrastructure. Further, the design showed that a European region could establish a self-sufficient and less environmentally harmful agriculture, by changing the production paradigm and reorganizing the spatial structures. Therefore, the design is also a form of communication for the research I have done.

The relation to the research studio and the master program

In different stages of my thesis I felt like going back through the quarters of the urbanism master track: I applied analysis and design methods from Q1 to my project. I tried to continue my visualization experiments from Q2 and I could confront myself with my personal regional-planning issue – the suspicion that regional planning in a neoliberal context will always serve economic interest first, while other societal and environmental benefits remain side products –, which remained unsolved after Q3. Going through those phases I realized the questions I left open and aspect I did not consider back then, but which I could reconsider from a new – one year later – perspective.

During my master thesis I also came closer to my personal understanding of the city, my subject of study and habitat of many people around the world. The understanding of how economic development, the techosphere, power and spatial development are linked, and how out of this nexus the development of a city can be explained, added a whole new dimension to my understanding of the city in general. I understood the previous development of Leipzig, the importance of its supergrid – backbone of Leipzig’s development – and the inherent relation between the city and its hinterland; and how they got disconnected. But I also realised, that this distinct settlement type, the current city, is part and manifestation of the problem we are facing: destructive neoliberal capitalism, which is founded on structural inequality.

For me, an urban planner and designer must be committed to the common good. This position has been established during my entire studies, but culminated in my thesis. A true commitment to the common good, is the unrestricted com-

mitment to the good of people and the environment, as the basis for all life. As such, it must be the task of a planner and designer to search for resilient alternatives for the current destructive form of human being, and hence contribute to pass something on to the next generation: a future.

#### Elaboration on research methodology and approach

Looking back, I would say that my entire thesis rests on the approach to understand and explain the current city and its structure through a historical and economical perspective. Understanding the becoming of my subject of my studies might prepare me to design its future development. The structured analysis of Leipzig's spatial development in relation to capitalism's cyclic development helped to realize the powers, which were at force in the back. The changes in Leipzig's infrastructural network, its morphology and typology illustrated the spatial adaptations to the city, which each new capitalistic cycle provoked. I would say, that the set of methods I choose to study the mutual relation between spatial and economic development were appropriate to give me an understanding. They could be applied to other case studies. Especially the analysis of the infrastructure network helped me to understand the supergrid as the consistent backbone of the city. Restricting, I need to say that the set of methods I applied were not paying respect to micro-economic process and their changing spatial manifestations through time. Further, even though the supergrid analysis was an excellent method to analyse and understand the changes in Leipzig's infrastructural network, a more extensive space syntax analysis could have been applied, in order to reveal small-scale changes due to the networks adaptation.

I also consider the normative-narrative scenario technique to

be an appropriate method to explore a highly complex and speculative future and to design in it. Creating this detailed normative state of the future, which is rooted in the literature research, helped to give my design a direction and frame. At the same time, the feasibility of the resulting design ideas restricted the scenario. Apart from the use of the normative-narrative scenario in the design process, it also helped to explain the final design, to put it into a greater picture and to illustrate the possibilities, which the contingency plan contains.

At this moment, I would like to point out how important I consider it to study the socio-economic history and its affects on the spatial environment. I would also like to stress the relevance of a clear theoretic perspective and a philosophic location. Abstracting helps to handle the size and complexity of the issues we are confronted with and to understand the relations between the different parts within a system. Further, I think it is very important to become aware of the ideas, which stand behind one's own thoughts. Getting into ideas and thoughts of Streeck, Stiegler, Marx and many others challenged my own thought concepts and broadened my horizon concerning the conception of causal relations. This helped to argue for certain aspects of my work, which otherwise might seem unrealistic. But this is precisely the point from which I think we can benefit: dealing with such meta concepts helps us to explore alternatives and stress their feasibility.

Reality is nothing fixed, static or universal. Reality has different integrated scales and their reproduction is depended on our individual and collective actions and conceptions. Thus, reality is only what we as individuals and as collectives consider possible. The possible, in turn, could be misunderstood as the simple feasibility of desires, but in fact the possible is less dependent on the human then one could think. The pos-

sible is in a dynamic relation with larger systems, such as the natural environment, which are only driven by natural laws and forces. Therefore, the possible and with it reality, are tied to the most fundamental principle of nature: change as the only, inevitable constant. From this perspective, the feasibility of alternatives cannot be limited by reality, since it is embedded in larger systems and a subject of change.

This broader thinking also helped me to get closer to the bottom and limitations of my own thought patters. Dealing more extensively with Marx, I discovered how much I am influenced by and attracted to Hegel's systematic thinking, which is in fact the core of my entire argumentation. Looking from that distant abstraction, it becomes obvious that current production and consumption patterns and their spatial expressions, which are the concentrated city separated from its hinterland, are at the heart of the problem: the strive for endless profits no matter the costs.

The relation to the wider social, professional and scientific framework

Personally, I consider my project to be fully integrated into a larger socio-economic context: it concerned the spatial and socio-economic conditions of a future after capitalism. I think as researchers, professionals, societies and individuals, we have to take care of our future. It is our responsibility to pass this future on to next generations. Therefore, we must search for alternatives to the current destructive system. In my eyes, it is not enough anymore to describe, explain, categorize and criticize. As professionals, as scientists, as societies and individuals we need to actively search for alternatives, show possibilities and their qualities, and find ways to practice those. Especially the science must have the duty to show

practical ways out of the misery, because it is still the most free, liberal and progressive institution, which could deliver holistic and practical solutions on how to organize societies and space differently. Creating and applying such solutions would also contribute to what is missing a lot in this world: hope for a better future. In that sense, I hope that my thesis and its ideas about the spatial organization of Leipzig in a post-capitalist economy was a contribution to my own claims to science and our profession.

Because of the historical and economical perspective I took, my project has been driven by its own local context – Leipzig and its region. Furthermore, my entire perspective on the issue, as well as my site of study itself, is fully embedded in a Western European context. Especially regarding the socio-economic development, my work is strongly tied to Europe's specific context and its central position in the development of global capitalism. The same applies to the specific German context. Its diverse history – which in the case of Leipzig included a socialist period – has created the unique context and the spatial structures, on which my whole project was based. Further, one needs to consider that my proposals were made in one of the – in a Western understanding – most developed, wealthy and economically successful nations in the world. This state of development needs to be understood as an important condition for my proposal. In the end, all of my proposals were built on the existing structures and resources, the region's capacities and limitations. Therefore, the concrete transformations and adaptations I proposed cannot simply be transferred to any other context.

Nevertheless, I certainly consider my approach, to challenge the separation of the city and its hinterland through processes of decentralization and the establishment of a self-sufficient

regional agriculture, to be transferable. The idea to implement a contingency plan, which works within existing structures and resources and which respects local particularities, could be an interesting approach for other cities and their hinterlands. The quite simple idea behind is to supply basic human needs; even if global supply chains fail. Those seemingly unremarkable supplies fundamentally include fresh and healthy food. This requires an intact natural environment, which can only be achieved within natural limitations and through a balanced relation with the natural environment. But even this is not enough. Since everything in nature changes constantly, the creation of resilient socio-economic and spatial system, which can adapt to changing conditions without compromising their functionality, is a fundamental necessity. Therefore, the approach to tackle those issues by a new relation between city and hinterland, based on the existing, can be transferred.

But above that, considering an economic system, which respects particularities and diversity and which exclusively serves the common good, offers so many possibilities and solutions to problems, which otherwise might appear too big. It could mean the liberation from constraints of the capitalistic performance societies; a real approach towards equality and the promise for unimpeded human development. Considering post-capitalistic forms of socio-economic organization and their spatial requirements also contains the relocation of the common good in our value systems. Further, it offers a holistic and feasible approach to achieve a balanced relationship with the natural environment; maintaining its intactness as the basis of life. The idea of a regionally specific contingency plan, which is based on an ideally self-sufficient agriculture, could be applied everywhere.

## Ethical issues and dilemmas

Thinking about alternatives for capitalism is necessarily a call for equality and justice. Post-capitalism is an attempt to liberate the majority of people, which – consciously or not – are oppressed by and suffer from capitalism. A self-determined, meaningful and free life in community and in balance with the natural environment is an altruistic approach in opposition to the egocentrism of capitalism's reality. From this perspective, means such as dispossession appear reasonable. But even though the altruistic approach is ethically and morally unobjectionable, the transition from an egocentric to an altruistic approach raises the question what will happen to the current few profiteers; the one percent? Is it morally right to dispossess, to take away private land? Theoretically the answer is clear: private land must have been violently appropriated from the community in the first place. Therefore, its private possession is unjustly and ethically not right. If the dispossession serves the common good and the dispossessed receives compensation, I do not see any further ethical constraints. But is this argumentation practical? Can I use the same line of argumentation and reason to dispossess someone, who worked her entire life to call her little house and plot her own? Would that still be ethically right? This ethical dilemma arises from the unintended or unconscious participation of the individual in a larger system that is the problem itself. For me personally, a white male who comes from a middle-class background but who never owned property, the common good matters more than particular interests. But this is just my personal subjective view. However, also objectivity, which is collective subjectivity, can and must inevitably change. So, if we as a society would relearn to trust the community and not our individual transient success, there would be no more need for private property. If land would be a common and



the cultivation and management of it would define a use-right, I would not hesitate impose the common good. If one uses the property and takes care of it, one should call it his or her own. Thereby a temporal dimension is added to the possession of common land, which is tied to the actual use and management and not to remote financial power. At the end of the day, no one would loose anything, but everyone would gain all.

Another ethical concern came across my mind, when I imagined the social consequences of my ideas regarding decentralization and regionalisation. Putting myself into an unfamiliar position, my proposal could be misunderstood or purposefully filled with nationalist – or more precise regionalist –, protectionist, chauvinist and fascist ideologies and social organization patterns. On the contrary, my proposal for a EU-wide regionalisation rests entirely on the appreciation of socio-economic, cultural diversity and peaceful. Open exchange and communication between the communities within a region, and between the regions, inalienable condition for the feasibility of my proposal. And even though my whole idea is about self-sufficient and self-determined regions, one should not forget the inalienable dependency of one region on the EU and its peace guaranteeing values, thus all the other regions. Furthermore – and not necessarily coincidental –, I consider the European regions as I proposed them to be unable to establish full autonomy. Due to their size and unequal resource distribution, they need to be open and practice peaceful and mutual benefitting relations to their neighbours. Especially in the case of Leipzig, the size is optimal to provide a self-sufficient agricultural production and to practice new forms of political participation and governance. But at the same time the region is too small to concentrate power to an extent that the region would become hegemonic,

oppressive and imperialistic. It is simply too small to cause serious threats and damage to others.

In the end, I would say that my approach and my methodology worked out in so far, that I was able to do exactly what I wanted to do: even though I did not consider the complications that came along and I was unable to predict my final findings and outcomes for a long time, I was able to explore post-capitalism and its spatial implications for Leipzig and its region. In my eyes, the methods I choose during the analytical part were appropriate to explain my argumentation that the city is a product of the mutual relation between spatial and economic development. Even though the methods I applied were by far not complete to explain this complex argumentation to its full extend, I still consider it to be sufficient to explain Leipzig's spatial becoming within the capitalistic development. The supergid analysis has been shown to be an excellent method to understand the city's continuing structure that constitutes Leipzig's current form, organization and function. In relation to the economic development of the city, it provided a new understanding of the city to me. Furthermore, I consider the literature studies as absolutely essential for my thesis. I gained knowledge about economy and its relation to space, and in particular capitalism and its impacts on Leipzig, that showed me a new approach to the city.

My mentors were an important foundation of my thesis. Looking back, I found myself quite often in unfamiliar research territories, so I was in need of their guidance and experience. It should also be said, that I often felt like a swinging pendulum between two poles. Certainly, I was not able to fulfil both expectations. But the attempt to combine the theoretical and the design perspectives to the project supported and strongly

contributed to my work. The feedback I received was always more like a conversation on eye level. Fair and open, I felt confident to share my thoughts and develop them together with my mentors. Generally, all thoughts were inspired by the exchange with my mentors, teachers and colleagues. Especially the literature advices, but also the informal exchange of input and thoughts were very beneficial to my thesis. Even though I am sure that none of us knew where exactly my work would lead, both my mentors accompanied and guided me on my endeavour, which brought me closer to understand my subjects of studies; space and the city.