Implicating Sustainable Lifestyles:
The Reality and Impact of Urban Form

Cameron Kraus

Instructor

Werner Lang
Implicating Sustainable Lifestyles

Cameron Kraus

Technically this is all possible; culturally we have to be curators and artists, and treat urban planning like an art form, creating new realities, shaping visions of the future that people can be involved in with their hearts and souls.¹

Raoul Bunschoten

With increasing attention given towards the somewhat indefinable ideal of sustainability, it is obvious that urban planning can engender structures that facilitate sustainable consumption. However, in this pursuit it is vital to acknowledge the extent to which these structures also serve to orient inhabitants to their environment both physically and psychologically; more than knowledge or awareness, the actions induced by the architectural fabric become the internalized values and desires of the inhabitants. In looking towards sustainable practices for the built environment, it is likewise necessary to consider those actions and the values they reflect. Realizing built environments that are ecologically sustainable must at their core facilitate sustainable human life patterns.

THE IMPLICATION OF REALITY

The reality of built form is at once obvious and subliminal. Architecture simultaneously presents a constructed reality and a specific view therein. It is clear to see this relationship between the reality of object and the implicated reality of reference in the art world that has, throughout its history, grappled with this understanding. A painting may be constructed of elemental features of canvas and paint and framing basically, but it can refer to far more than these through its arrangement. The extent to which this reference is made and the object is acknowledged is an ongoing theme in art and has a strong, though often overlooked, connection in architecture. This simultaneity is crucial to the topic of sustainable planning as the objects themselves must not at one point supersede the cultures they facilitate and the values they reflect.

Even the most contemporary painting exhibitions document this link between value systems, image and lifestyle. Neo Rauch’s work serves as a link here for imbued in it is consciousness of the duality of
the physical painting and image, reality and surrealism, and the social implication of its existence. Drawing on social themes of Realism with expressive power, Rauch’s style uniquely expresses a visually a hybrid graphic, chaotic at times, that encapsulates, as so few can, the complexities of modern existence. This graphically poignant reconstruction of reality has a depth available only its referential and symbolic qualities, graphic imagery and social commentary. The parallel between artistic and architectural reconstructions and critiques of reality are apparent in that they create powerful images of reality through relatively meager means.

THE REALITY OF AND BY BUILT FORM

When looking at sustainable development, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between constructed forms and the images they suggest. Though simplistic, the urban structure facilitates lifestyle - prescribes it even. Urban structure dictates the where and when and if of activities - from the most monumental to the most quotidian of occasions. Where one works and lives is mapped out in this structure as well as where one eats and shops and relaxes. Likewise, these structures have induced schedules both in the distances and forms of transportation between the ‘where’ of these activities. The schedules of course engender the ‘if’. The structure cannot simply arrange the ‘where’ of activities but must also facilitate them in real time serving to connect and enrich the interaction therein.

The reality of the built environment sometimes brutally informs us of the operating ideologies, the economic condition and the social relations. Thus it is clear that the built environment and human life patterns are integrally connected just as the application of paint on a canvas is integral to the referential image created. Though not imperious in doing so, the urban structure itself dictates the patterns of its inhabitants by suggestion. And yet the multiplicity of concerns of a society can complicate its functional capability - essentially its livability. Immediate concerns or a narrow examination can produce structures that do not facilitate livability and may not even reflect the desired values of that society. The power of the built environment to communicate and determine value systems is inherent - largely unavoidable. Thus urban structures that do not reflect the values, or desired values, of a society will be a perpetual detriment to the society as people internalize the latent values therein.

The range of values and their architectural or urban facilitation
If we don’t see the garbage of our culture both literally and metaphorically, then we are not confronting the reality of what garbage actually says about us.³
Mohsen Mostafavi

The prescription is: there cannot be a going back (towards the traditional city), nor a headlong flight, towards a colossal and shapeless agglomeration... the past, the present, the possible cannot be separated.⁴
Henri Lefebvre 23

is vast. Economic, political and social systems are expressed in the planning and constructing of these environments and so expressed also in the created environment. Quantifiable understanding of land use and its relationship to economic, social and political factors is clearly defined by laws and precedents and regulation; and yet these systems are often ignorant to the socializing cycles of their existence and their consequences. Thus in terms of even ecological sustainability, it cannot be enough to reduce or find renewable energy to power the very built structures that have perpetuated systems that require such patterns of consumption. Increasing energy consumption marks not, primarily, the need of a society for alternative energy, but instead marks the need of a society for redefinition towards the environment.

**LIVABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT RESPONSIBILITY**

In some ways this is a return to earlier models of human existence. Pre-industrialized settlement was largely subservient to environmental conditions while maximizing the level of human comfort possible. Economic and political needs were tied to these resource limitations and cycles which came as a result of the obviousness of resource scarcity - the same appearance that exists today. And yet much of the world now inhabits systems that do not recognize or advertise this scarcity. The capability of societies to dominate the environment, at least in the short term, has led to an ignorance towards the reality of resource scarcity, which has engendered profligate energy consumption. The only factor that suggests otherwise in our society is economics. Energy shortage is conveyed to people through increased prices, and is not effective in increasing the value of sustainable living as the wealth remains an image of human success and security. At the core of many earlier models for the built environment was not economics related to energy and resource, but quality of life related to existence and survival.

Defining sustainability in terms of human livability and environmental responsibility is of primary importance. Humans do not only impact their environments, they are key elements of it, and while the domination of any species over the balance of an ecosystem is detrimental, the human presence is irreversible. That is to say, humanity is a product of and an integral part of the ecosystems in which they are involved - not only in terms of resource consumption, but also in terms of the life patterns to which they are tied. Man’s relationship to his environment is tied to existence, and as such there is an essential quality to those life patterns that directly relate to this environmental connection. The actions that are most essential for maintaining a healthy human existence are inherently sustainable since they are intrinsically tied to their parent environments. Structures that deviate too far from those parent environments or are resultant of systems that deviate, will pose problems to humans who are born of and thus tied to those natural systems. Though even with this assertion, it is clear that the requirements of contemporary society cannot be ignored. The complexity of global economic,
political and social systems must be balanced against the essential qualities of human existence. Without such a focus, the built environment risks becoming an isolated system, a machine for living that is by very definition unlivable.

**URBAN PLANNING AND LIFESTYLE**

If urban planning must mediate the complexity of contemporary society, it must recognize those actions that are essential to human sustainability. The realities engendered in the construction of human settlement must take into account the essential qualities of the human. Drawing again from the parallel to painting the degree to which the materials themselves are understood and respected are key to the reference itself. The paint must be respected as such in order to understand the possibilities for paint. The realities created through art and those through architecture, require a fundamental understanding of the systems and individual elements with which they work. For architecture, this understanding should be even more intimate as the realities created are not only presented but inhabited. Thus a sustainable lifestyle is one that relies on the inherent qualities of human existence and considers carefully mediates desires external to that existence.

The implication in discussing the essential, of course, is reduction. Debate as to the extent to which man must change in seeking sustainable futures will be key to further discussion in planning and in general. Though change at an individual level, as proposed by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk is an increasingly powerful force, the sustainability of such change rests on the structures of the society. To “adopt daily practices/disciplines of good habits of our communal survival” requires that alternatives are suggested and available on the scale of the everyday. So much is possible in the planning of the city itself to engender this reorientation. Humanizing the city is the prerogative of an age where the limitations of resources require a reinvestigation of the essential. The planning of cities has long been at the core of creating livable and valuable built environments; ability to understand and facilitate the historical value of the past, the technologies brought about by industry, and the self-awareness of a contemporary, global society will be crucial in creating environments that are sustainable on the broader spectrum.

**CASE STUDY: MUNICH**

This is what makes Munich in particular so interesting an example; for it successfully expresses the value of human livability in an array of building and planning typologies throughout its history. Contemporary political bodies unique to Munich tap into the concerns of the citizens themselves allowing planning to be even more responsive to these livability factors than other systems. But this legacy of human livability has pervaded Munich’s development from its early appointment as the King’s residence and has remained even through its postwar reconstruction and later modernization. More recently coined ‘the Munich perspective’ the city seeks to be a livable environment...
while maintaining its position as a powerful economic, social and cultural center.\textsuperscript{5}

This perspective was apparent in the postwar decision to conservatively restore the city center, a decision that acknowledged the value of the city’s history in a time where it could have instead been evaded. Opportunities to adapt to modern needs were evaluated, rather than simply assumed and though the development of more outlying areas evolved in a more modern way, the city center today remains a rich and living example of sustainable settlement patterns, at least in terms of human existence. Largely reconstructed to the prewar model, the center reflects on Munich’s history as a trading center and a king’s residence, and yet is still able to function as a modern metropolis. Thus the structure of the urban form itself, its resilience amidst change, war and modernization, suggests something of the essential in its plan.

A look to the map of Munich’s city center reveals much about the logic of its structure. The city is generously supplied by greenspace and opened up to great plazas, dotted with monuments and stunning churches and concert halls; but in the background there is an element of great significance in its cultural, historical and functional value. Slipped into a multiplicity of conditions and adapted to uses therein, the urban block is the understated, yet brilliant fabric of the city. This form, endemic of pre-industrialized and especially European cities, is key to the appeal of the city as a livable environment.
In terms of scale, relationship to the surrounding city and to itself, the urban block plays an essential role in orienting its inhabitants to their environment, built, natural and in-between.

The block structure is extraordinary varied in time and circumstance. In the very city of Munich simply the size of the urban block radiates outward from small to large (see Fig. 06). In this model, and similarly in others, a focus on centrality of density is clear, though a multiplicity of centers exist. There are obvious exceptions to this fine grain urban centrality especially where parks, open squares and roads open up the block structure. Assumptions as to the relationship of man to the environment are inherent in any approach; the approach Munich proposes, in its historic districts, is a densely inhabited and controlled urban environment that is interfaces with but is held separate from natural form. Much of this position could be linked to Munich’s medieval heritage as a fortified city, requiring this level of density and separation; however, this also opens up the discourse for the spectrum of approaches that man can take towards the environment.

The integration of course and fine-grain urbanism found as a result of Munich’s historical past largely reflects Richard Forman’s optimization of human land use. Whether those assumptions work in every scenario is uncertain, however, the logic remains. The interaction between humans and nature have varying degrees of impact, both positively and negatively, on each other. Seeing the increase in population, exploitation of resources and material waste, Forman is quick to point out that the human

Fig. 07 Urban block structure, Munich
interact with nature is likely the most tenuous, save natural disasters. The dense fortification-style urbanity and specificity in land use, consolidates the human presence, though it is quite apparent, in Munich and minimizes the environmental impact of the region by severely compromising the environment of a only central cores. (Compromising here referring to the degradation of a natural state).

The question of course goes back to scale. Even if high density - high livability cities minimize environmental impact, they operate on the duality of clearing certain lands and preserving other. Looking towards vast population increases, it is quick to see that this level of density must unravel at some point lest entire regions become compromised for the support of human settlement. At the macro scale, it may become more necessary to find ways of integrating livable precedents of centrality and density in a course grain regional urbanity that requires a change of human relation with nature.

THE ARCHAIC TORSO OF THE CITY
But what both the map of Munich and Forman’s assertions intimate is the vitality of the urban block. A more deconstructed label may be appropriate seeing the term’s connotative implications, but the mixed use or high-density terms available belie the richness of the structure given their contemporary distortion of form. It becomes clear that the arrangement of human settlement in a contained and complete way is a primary solution to the issue of environmental sustainability both in relation to land use and its social implications.

In general, the urban block serves as a thesis statement of man’s evolution towards urbanity; In parallel to Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem, Archaic Torso of Apollo, the city block stands as the degraded monument of past form, harkening the modern viewer to reconsider its qualities. In its form is suggested the structure of urban inhabitation and acknowledges underlying themes of sustainability. By mediating human life with that of the environmental, the urban block seeks to align the quotidian interests of man with the long-term welfare of the environment on the scale of the city.

Realizing sustainable lifestyles will be an integration of sustainable forms and personal resolve. Finding ways to infuse sustainable forms with value and ensure livability requires not only study into the ‘archaic torso’ of city structures, such as those in historical Munich, but an eye towards the innovations and adaptation of those forms to suit the same questions of value and livability that defined the former. Using the logic of the historical city, hybrid forms can result to mediate the needs of a modern human society.

It is, nonetheless, absolutely indispensable that we develop new strategies of images: subversive strategies: strategies which contradict the legibility of the everyday.7

Herzog & de Meuron

URBAN BLOCK PROTOTYPES

As an example of block planning that has endured multiple modernizations, the Fünf Höfe poses an interesting dialogue on this elemental urban form and the importance of urban prototypes to instigate sustainable change in the city. The presence of a singular new form, here a modification, works to promote broad spectrum

Fig. 08 Statue of Apollo

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.
Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast’s fur:
would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

7 Herzog & de Meuron

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.
Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast’s fur:
would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

arcs that do not see you. You must change your life.
sustainability in terms of reducing induced energy of transportation as per it mixed use structure, and promoting lasting value that recognizes the past, present and future dynamic of its place in the city.

In the center of historical downtown, the Fünf Höfe is a renovation of an urban block that had been previously closed to the public. This historic block had been home to banking conglomerate Hypo Vereinsbank when in 1994 a competition to reutilize the space envisioned a new direction for the space.

While the project may, by description, seem akin to the shopping districts which surrounding it, the approach is remarkably unique. What is extraordinary about the Fünf Höfe project is its recognition, reflection and reinvention of the urban structure that defines its very existence. It is a microcosm of the city itself, on the scale of the urban block, flipping back and forth between the traditional typologies of infrastructure and building. This makes the Fünf Höfe difficult to describe as a building. Perhaps it is easier to categorize it as a place: a grouping of buildings and courtyards, offices and shops - an atom of the city.

But even notions of place fail to describe what is happening at the Fünf Höfe; and this is in part due to the fact that there is always something happening at the Fünf Höfe. It is a transient changing space, a facilitation of people - more like a living idea of urbanity than an image of it. The hybrid qualities of this form allows it to flip between object and reference, interior and exterior.

Programmatically, it encapsulates ideas of high density urban living endemic of the mixed use city block. Shops and cafes line the exterior of the building, as they do in many of Munich’s blocks. The bank now occupies a piece of the block as does a gallery and exhibition space. Residences and offices fill the top
Unique to the project is obviously the cutting of the lower floor to passageways and courts drawing and holding surrounding traffic. The introduction of interior passageways, along with the modification and addition of existing courts, not only facilitates traffic flow to the shops within, it becomes a secondary infrastructure system at the pedestrian scale.

While courtyard schemes are common, even traditional in central Europe, the interiority of these passageways, though they are external, present a questioning of the traditional mode and role of the urban block. The Fünf Höfe introduces an in between realm that evades the polemic definitions of space and form allowing it to be a playful, enchanting place. Even in its innovative view of space and its modern grasp of materials, it remains faithful to the heritage of the site, and the surrounding context. Its complexities and mixed references enhance the value of the space and its distinctively social facilitation makes this value accessible.

The value of this building from the standpoint of sustainability is in both the adherence to a sustainable model of urban mixed use structure and in endowing lasting value, architectural and cultural, in this block for years to come.

The form itself constructs a reality of human facilitation - one where the pedestrian is valued and the connection between people is
layered in a rich facilitation of life patterns. Dinners, shoppers, and passersby are woven within a unique space that is able to accommodate, by way of differing scales and spaces, courtyards and passageways, the variety of its occupants.

There is likewise a human emphasis in the constructing of and detailing of space. Even in the modern facade, the perforated metal holes give a sense of scale that is read in conjunction with the shutter construction. The sense of interiority within the block, in the Salvatorpassage particularly, is enhanced by the dissolution of sky by way of the hanging vines; along with pressed stone floors and transparent glass, the space suggests a haptic experience that merges interior and exterior in a protected hybrid environment.

This haptic suggestion of humane space, from the spatial volumes and enclosures to material detailing, creates a realm that is appealing to the experience of human existence, not exclusively rationale. Thus the project has a certain draw or force to it that is induced by the architecture and form itself; one that serves as an epicenter of urban life.

Though it holds a unique spot in the geography and history of Munich, the Fünf Höfe project is an example of how the assemblies in terms of both planning and architecture can provide sustainable solutions for the urban environment. Its role in centralizing people by way of its mixed-use block structure along with its innovative facilitation of people through space, infuses lasting cultural value that protects the heritage of the block and ensures its appreciation for future generation. This prototype is but one of infinite urban possibilities that can draw on historical knowledge, contemporary concerns and forward thinking to envision realities that promote sustainable patterns of inhabitation.
NOTES


5. Stadt Bau Plan. DVD. (Franz Schiermeier Verlag, München, 2008).


FIGURES

Figure 1: Kunstmuseum Neo Rauch, http://www.wolfsburg.de/news/061023_01006.

Figure 2: Christian W. Thomsen, Gerd Winner Urbane Strukturen (München: Prestal-Verlag, 1998).

Figure 3: Polish Press, http://polishpress.wordpress.com/tag/warsaw.

Figure 4: Polish Press, http://polishpress.wordpress.com/tag/warsaw.

Figure 5: Images of Munich from space, http://www.toytowngermany.com/loi/index.php/t62070.html.

Figure 6: Stadt Bau Plan. DVD. Franz Schiermeier Verlag, München, 2008.

Figure 7: Personal Photo.


Figure 9: Personal vector image based off google map.

Figure 10: Personal vector image based off google map.

Figure 11: Personal vector image based off google map.

Figure 12: Herzog & de Meuron, El Croquis.

Figure 13: Herzog & de Meuron, El Croquis.

Figure 14: Personal Photo.

Figure 15: Foto, http://www.detail.de/Db/DbFiles/galerie_fotos/590/foto.

REFERENCES


Fünf Höfe, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%BCnf_H%C3%B6fe.


