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ID (1285) | SHAPING REGIONAL FUTURES: PERFORMANCE OF REGIONAL DESIGN IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

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1 INTRODUCTION

In metropolitan regions, municipal borders and other administrative boundaries have long since been transcended by spatial patterns of interaction and land use. In the emergence of spatial patterns, multiple spatial scales intertwine – from the neighbourhood up to the functional region and beyond. Governments and their administrations often experience statutory limitations when trying to address these developments. Their territories are fragments of regions; they have difficulties detecting problems that are caused by factors outside of their spheres of influence and feel that addressing them is beyond their competence and political mandate. Planning instruments available to them, along with specific rules and regulations, are often too generic, rigid and defensive to address the specific development potentialities that are the product of intertwined issues and scales. Simultaneously, analytical information about regional spatial development is increasing, thanks to new technologies that can handle (big) data. More information and knowledge on what is going on beyond the horizon of a single city is not unproblematic, though. There is little experience about how to transform the insights and activities of single individuals and organizations into collective knowledge and action on a regional scale.

In response to these deficiencies of statutory planning, politicians, planning authorities and also civil and private organizations in numerous European regions are participating in informal, network typed governance arrangements, in order to coordinate sector issues and issues that play at different levels of scale (see for instance Allmendinger et alia, 2015). They seek, for instance, to integrate economic, transport and housing development, and water management stretching across multiple and multi scalar boundaries. Being voluntary associations with few formal planning instruments available to them, the resulting partnerships collaboratively engage in jointly creating inspiring and encouraging spatial agendas with the help of regional design.

Design is a creative practice, orientated towards finding solutions to problems in the built (and unbuilt) environment. It is a 'conversation with the situation' (Schön, 1983), driven by normative, desirable futures, and also by a wish to understand the 'holistic' wholes of a region and dependencies among its parts. The use of such creative and comprehensive design led approaches in planning often raises high expectations, usually associated with the intense use of spatial representation such as maps, models, and other geographic imagery (see for instance Thierstein & Förster, 2008). Such representations are expected to 'explain' the region: to increase understanding of interdependencies across scales and issues, and to focus attention on the places and locations that are affected. They are also expected to be persuasive as visualised 'storytelling about the future' (Throgmorton, 2003); they provoke thoughts and feelings, and therefore function as a kind of invitation to individuals and organizations to get involved in regional politics and planning. In the context of interactive design processes, visualizations and spatial representations are seen to be platforms or dialogues, malleable collections of spatial information that expose conflict, facilitate learning, and mediate in the context of complex governance settings. However, despite an increase of use

and high expectation, there is little understanding of how design performs in planning: what are the interrelations between design and planning in this relatively unexplored field?

This paper investigates aspects of design practice: the performances of regional design in collaborative planning decision making based on a comparative case study research. The 'evidence' comes from a joint conference of Munich University of Technology and Delft University of Technology¹. This was an occasion to compare regional design strategies that are used in different European regions, to discuss the different facets and dimensions of these practices and to assess their performance. On the occasion of this conference an analytical framework was developed to distinguish settings, practices and performances of design led approaches. The framework is applied to three case studies. The results in our view give insights into aspects of institutional settings and design strategies and processes that have influenced performances of design practice. A main aim of this paper is to present results from analysis. It identifies aspects of regional settings, performances, design strategies and processes that have influenced design led approaches in these areas decisively. This is about the identification of lessons on how design contributes to planning and governance capacity in a multiactor setting of regions which do not have a clear match with administrative boundaries. The second objective is methodological: how to analyse practice from a theory based methodology?

The paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces an analytical framework to identify interrelated aspects of design practice. The section thereafter briefly present the three regions on which we base our analysis. The next main section of the paper presents results from the actual analysis. The final concluding section reviews implications of the results for further research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Few scholarly writings are dedicated to regional design and many of these build upon the seminal work of a small number of authors from the fields of architecture and urban design (Hillier & Leaman, 1974; Rittel 1987; Schön, 1983; Schön, 1988). These authors describe design as a reflective and argumentative practice, oriented towards the improvement of the built environment. Design has a holistic orientation also. It is an attempt at a comprehensive understanding of spatial development, a search for integral solutions that consider dependencies among parts. Since the built environment is a complex system, the act of designing is unlikely to evolve in a linear manner from problem definition to solution. It is more likely to be explorative, evolving during multiple synthesis evaluation iterations and steps in which problems and solutions are explicated, comprehended, reflected upon and adapted².

Writing on the use of design led approaches indicate that there are strong interrelations among planning decision making and design (Balz, forthcoming; Van Dijk, 2011; De Jonge, 2009; Balz & Zonneveld, 2015). A basic foundation of interrelations between design and planning is their common interest in plan-making, usually (not always) resulting in planning imagery. In the realm of design such imagery serves reflection and processes of abstraction as well as detailing. In the realm of planning: the use of imagery serves communicative ends and also has broader agency. In this realm imagery turns into spatial representation through which plan actors intentionally generating meaning by drawing on repertoires of existing symbols for the purpose of politics and planning³. Using notions from design theory (the iterative circles) and planning theory (planning cycles) a distinction can be made between (1) the setting as the specific planning context any design endeavour is embedded in, (2) the impact (performance) of design on decision making processes and (3) the characteristics of the design strategy and process. In this view: continuous rounds

The setting has been briefly touched upon in the introductory section: regional design takes place in a setting where a whole range of boundaries are becoming less distinct. 'Fuzziness' is probably an appropriate term here: It can be connected to spatial boundaries, but also boundaries between actors and

¹ This conference was entitled 'Shaping regional futures Mapping, designing, transforming!' and took place in October 2015. See: https://www.events.tum.de/frontend/index.php?folder_id=165. A follow-up conference took place in May 2017 at the University of Florence. See: http://www.dida.unifi.it/upload/sub/pdf/eventi/shaping-regional-futures/shaping-regional-futures_programme.pdf. Both links accessed June 2017.

² This section is based on: Balz (forthcoming).

³ A systemic view on these interrelations, has been developed by Schönwandt and Grunau, 2003.

different kinds of knowledge. Spatially, it is virtually impossible to demarcate ‘the’ region. Places have multiple characteristics and are connected in many different ways, leading to complex, multi scalar interrelations. Governance involves the continuous identification of planning problems and search for solutions, resulting in temporary and shifting relationships between public and private actors, political agendas, and territorial interests. What constitutes valid knowledge in such context is not self evident or even contested. Important questions are: do settings influence regional design? Can we identify aspects of regional design settings that are more decisive than others?

Performance in the context of this paper can be defined as the impact that design has on decision-making. If indeed regional design is about planning change and creating institutional capacity, what does this entail? Does it relate to a shared framing of territories; the formation of actor networks; the bringing together of different types of knowledge; the operationalization of planning in trajectories of concrete spatial transformation; or is it all of the above? Can we develop criteria to assess the transformative power of regional design? Where, why, and when does the impact of regional design depart from the impact of (formal) planning?

Also in relation to strategy and process the often highly complex spatial and institutional environment at regional level is of overriding importance as issues and actors are strongly interconnected. As a consequence, regional design evolves in a context of multiple and interrelated choices. It is about preparing and making such choices: During design processes, planning solutions emerge. But how to select relevant sub-spaces, activities, themes, and projects? Are there specific methods that are more apt than others? How to apply such methods in complex multi actor and multi scalar settings? How to bring the different language domains – verbal, visual, emotional – of regional design together?

3 THE THREE METROPOLITAN REGIONS

The above analytical framework and questions have been developed for the 2015 conference ‘Shaping Regional Futures’ in Munich (for more information see Förster et al., 2016). During the conference these were used for an analysis of regional design practices in three European regions. Representatives of three regions did receive the questions beforehand. In the next three paragraphs we give an impression of their responses.

For the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region (the Dutch acronym is MRA¹) the invited practitioners (one former senior planner from the Amsterdam municipality working for the MRA while the second one represented a major player in the region) reflected on how several regional design initiatives have influenced the formation of a vision of the so called Amsterdam Metropolitan Region. The city of Amsterdam with its 820,000 inhabitants (2015 figure) is surrounded by several small and medium sized cities and towns. Greater Amsterdam has 1.5 million inhabitants. The Amsterdam region is part of the Randstad Holland, the western and economically most vital part of the Netherlands. Spatial development of the Amsterdam region is the policy objective of several authorities and partnerships, each with its own vision of the future of the area, the MRA partnership among them. MRA is an informal co operation among 33 municipalities, two provinces, and one city region in the area. Its aim is to foster economic development and accessibility. It is rather common for sub national governments and coalitions among them to use regional design in the Netherlands. It is expected that design led approaches help to identify guiding principles for planning and also to clarify relations among governments.

The three representative from Zürich (two from administration and one from a consultancy) contemplated the making and use of the Metrobild Zürich². The Zürich Metropolitan Area is Switzerland’s leading economic region with 2,3 million inhabitants and 500 municipalities in 8 cantons. The region boasts a high quality of life, significant spatial diversity in a relatively small area, and a strong position as an international economic hub. Major challenges are its dynamic growth, social disparity, strain on environment and resources, and cooperation and competition among municipalities and cantons. In 2010, the Zürich Metropolitan Area started the Metrobild process to visualise the area from the perspective of three different

1 On the MRA see: <https://www.metropoolregioamsterdam.nl/pagina/20170515-mra-agenda-english> (accessed June 2017).

2 See the (German language) website: <http://www.metropolitanraumzuerich.ch/themen/lebensraum/metrobild.html> (accessed June 2017).

design teams. The goal was to create a common understanding of the functionalities, qualities, and potentialities of the Zürich Metropolitan Area.

The Ruhr Region is a region with a long albeit complex history of cooperation. The present cooperation is known – in English – as Ruhr Regional Association¹. Two representatives – one from academia and one from the Association – reflected on the Ideenwettbewerb Zukunft Metropole Ruhr (an English proxy is Ideas Competition)². With 53 communities and 5.2 mio inhabitants in an area of 4,435 km², the Ruhr region is the 5th largest conurbation in Europe. The very polycentric region has been experiencing ongoing structural change since the 1960s, and managing decline and conversion will continue to form a major challenge in the coming decades. The Ruhr Regional Association is a municipally founded association, which has had its own legislative and regional planning powers since 2009. In order to create a statutory regional plan for the whole area, the association started a regional dialogue in 2011 – including an international (ideas) design competition which was seen as a new planning approach. Expectations were high: inspiring views from outside, outlines for new directions, enabling participation, creating transparency and openness, and initiate discussion and dialogue.

4 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 SETTING

The parallel workshops on the cases Amsterdam, the Ruhr, and Zürich raised a number of critical issues concerning the regional design setting. Probably the prime one can be phrased as: Fragmentation and fuzzy boundaries everywhere! The experts from all three case studies stressed the administrative fragmentation of their region, and the multiple overlapping sets of boundaries and ‘regionalisations’. First seen as an anomaly and barrier, this condition turned out to be the ‘normal’ context within which regional design operates, i.e., a context of ambiguity. Institutional fragmentation and fuzzy spatial boundaries are a structural characteristic of the setting within which regional design evolves.

Cultures and traditions in cooperation and consensus finding matter a lot. Within a fragmented governance landscape, and against a background of multiple perceptions of what a region is and constitutes, regional actors and organisations nonetheless showed a capacity for joint discussion and consensus finding, albeit in various degrees. This capacity was associated with differing characteristics of the institutional context within which regional design initiatives evolve. The policy culture in the Zürich case is strongly influenced by the general, Swiss tradition of direct democracy and a culture of finding consensus and agreement, stretching out to intellectual discourse as well. In the Ruhr case, the ‘Regionalverband Ruhr’ is the umbrella organization of a spatially highly complex region. In spite of a long tradition of political struggles between individual cities, there is now a regional association – established in 2009 equipped with legislative and regional planning power – the result of structural change since the 1960s and continuing attempts to manage decline and conversions since then, for instance, through the International Exhibition (IBA: Internationale Bauausstellung) Emscher Park.

Compared with the Ruhr Area the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region is a relatively small region. With the informal co operation among 33 (number at the time of writing; 32 at the time of the conference) municipalities, two provinces, and one city region, over the course of ten to fifteen years it has become a rather intimate club – a dense social network of actors who are all familiar with each other. They started to gather to respond to what was felt as institutional fragmentation.

Looking at these three case studies, regional design takes different forms and organizational settings, and also effects and impacts vary greatly. Important incentives for regional design are making funds available for the design as such and the presences of mechanisms to connect and embedding in formal planning. Cultures and traditions in decision making matter for regional co operation but are not sufficient to stitch a region together. There is a need for additional incentives and benefits for regional cooperation and design, which together can be labelled as formal planning conditions. In the Amsterdam case, the prospect of external money from central government unified actors and has become a major incentive for regional

¹ See: <http://www.metropoleruhr.de/en/home/the-ruhr-regional-association.html> (accessed June 2017).

² See: <http://ideenwettbewerb.metropoleruhr.de/startseite.html> (accessed June 2017)

design initiatives exploring the future. The Dutch state maintains control over the largest part (over 95% of all taxes) of tax revenues. The planning system requires effective regional governance arrangements to claim financial support by means of argumentation. In the Ruhr region, the regional design competition 'Future of the Metropolis Ruhr' was the prelude to the revision of the formal regional plan. The ambitious regional design endeavour was also associated with the urgency of addressing economic structural change, and the need to take politically binding planning decisions which require sound argumentation.

In Switzerland, central government provides funding for its 'agglomeration programs', and the second tier level of the cantons has to provide matching funds. The Metrobild Zürich project was financed by the various cantons and municipalities which together form the 'Metropolitankonferenz Zürich' – the Zürich metropolitan association. The Metrobild initiative was meant to provide a common ground for developing a subsequent 'strategic spatial concept', which was eventually approved in November 2015.

In all cases, former experience with urban and regional design matters greatly. Such experience is an important resource for the regional design practices. The regional design endeavour in the Ruhr region built upon experiences in the 'IBA Emscher Park'. This was the first international building exhibition in Germany with a deliberate and distinct regional focus, which took place over an entire decade, from 1990 to 2000. The aim of this exhibition – mainly financed by North Rhine Westfalia – was to bundle public and private funding in strategic projects. This approach of steering structural economic and spatial change by means of small, locally motivated interventions came to be internationally known as 'perspective incrementalism' (see for instance: Lane 2000): a 'cloud' of local interventions held together by a perspective on the region's future. In 2010, another lighthouse project was started: 'RUHR.2010 – European Capital of Culture'. This mega event was expected to contribute to a stronger identity for the region, and to foster culture and creative industries as an economic base. Both events prepared the way for regional design reflecting on a common future for the region.

In the Zürich case, different regional design approaches from inside and outside public administration served as references: the 2005 'Urban Design Portrait' of Switzerland by ETH Zürich Studio Basel; the 2011 study 'Glattal – an Emerging City!' by the architects group 'Krokodil'; and the 2012 'Spatial Concept of Switzerland', meant as an informal planning and policy guideline at the federal level. These initiatives were not seen to have a direct influence on the 'Metrobild Zürich' process. It was, however, argued that images and narratives from these projects stayed in the minds of actors: they enhanced imagination, and also informed expectations concerning a new regional design initiative.

In the Netherlands design led approaches in planning are frequently used – a tradition that can be traced back to the emergence of urban planning at the turn of the 20th century. No one at the conference mentioned a link to specific design projects such as in the cases discussed above: It seems that it is quite natural to design for the purpose of planning.

There was agreement among experts that initiating a regional design endeavour within the fragmented landscape of governance – 'Setting the Stage' – is already an achievement in itself. Regional actors and institutions are generally quite hesitant to invest money and time in endeavours that have no predetermined result. For instance, in the Zürich case there was a remarkable consideration of the role that perceptions of regions play in setting up the stage for regional design. Here dominant perceptions and the focus on planning issues were identified from the outset and monitored via processes. Looking across the cases, there was agreement that regional design marks neither the beginning nor the end of a regional dialogue and cooperation process. Setting the stage for regional design seems to be half the battle in the sense of shaping mindsets about the present and future state of the region.

4.2 PERFORMANCE

When it comes to the performance issue, the regional design processes in Amsterdam, the Ruhr and Zürich could not be assessed on their long term impact yet as all discussed cases were relatively recent. However, the discussion allowed comparison of expectations on the performance of regional design. In all three case studies the experts stressed that regional design is a way to initiate and facilitate joint discussion and to provide a 'designerly' context for discussions and negotiations between administrations, societal actors, and civil society at large. They emphasized that regional design practices are not meant to define and identify a 'product': a concrete planning solution. This was summarized as 'Regional design as

a catalyst to qualify the region'. Design initiatives take place to improve deliberative processes. In fact, regional design proposals may disappear after having contributed to decision making. This does not mean that the actual content of regional design does not matter, on the contrary: insights into particular spatial environments, what constitutes these, how they develop, and how they might look in the future are crucial to initiate and steer discussion and dialogue. Insights into the qualities, strengths, and threats that spatial development holds and can hold in the future are a crucial factor in changing the minds of actors.

Experts in all cases agreed that regional design – the products as well as the processes – is highly instrumental in the identification of joint planning issues. Spatial representations and discussions about these focus attention, often on intricate 'soft' spatial qualities, strengths, and future potentials. The selection and detailing of these issues and bringing them to the attention of local and regional actors was regarded as a crucial design activity in all three case areas. The Zürich experts stressed the importance of design in 'framing', constructing a basic agreement on relevant planning issues in the region, agreement on outline challenges, problems and tasks that regional planning should deal with. One Zürich expert noted that the design process was shaped by a search for "public goods" in the Zürich Metropolitan Area: Once they were 'discovered', they continued to play an important role throughout the entire regional design process.

4.3 DESIGN STRATEGIES AND PROCESSES

The experts at the conference agreed that the performance of regional design can partially be attributed to the use of imagery: 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. Images allow for new readings and understanding of the region. Design imagery may be provocative but on the whole the performance of maps, models, and other spatial representations is not easy to predict. Is it possible nevertheless to 'plan' the impact and performance of imagery? Experts from the Zürich and Ruhr cases noted that competition settings foster the emergence of surprising and new imaginings and imageries. Some even favour a 'guerillia tactic' in the production and use of imagery. They argue that new and therefore influential representations always comes from outside public administration – from design initiatives at universities or in the context of private or civil initiatives, for instance.

A reoccurring issue in discussions on images is their narrative nature. The actual performance of imagery is closely connected with the storylines they imply. New reasoning in and through imagery broadens the horizon in discussions. In this respect, images of regional structures can have a unifying force. An example is the ring of 19th century fortifications at a distance of about 25 kilometers from Amsterdam, which is regarded as part of the identity of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region and imaged on local maps of Amsterdam as well as regional imagery. As already explained above, the regional design practices in the three case regions are rather novel, making the impact rather difficult to detect.

In all cases, particularities of the region were an essential ingredient in design proposals. These particularities are often formed by numerous highly 'typical' smaller spatial entities within the region. They were regarded as building blocks. Identifying similarities across local, municipal levels turned out to be an important step in the representation of regions, but also in identifying 'fields of action'. In the regional design propositions for the Ruhr region, comparable neighbourhoods within municipalities became more important than administrative units themselves, for instance. A crucial design step in the Zürich case was the identification of differences among smaller entities or subregions as major constituent parts of regional diversity. Also in the Amsterdam case, the recognition that the region is highly diverse contributed strongly to a shared image of the region.

Mapping was an integral part of all three regional design cases. Mapping was seen as a process of joint fact finding, supporting a search for evidence of what connects the various parts of a region, and what constitutes interdependences between issues and places. Mapping was also regarded as an important tool in portraying possible and desirable futures. Several tools and instruments in mapping were discussed. Design experts in the Zürich case argued that Geographic Information Systems (GIS) turned out to be a powerful tool in both the analysis of regional data and the creation of imagery of regional futures. As noted above, the development of a common visual language was an explicit aim of regional design processes. Graphic designers who are skilled in moving between two and three dimensional images are particularly in demand on regional design teams.

As was noted above, regional design processes are processes of identifying planning issues and bringing these to the minds of actors. In this sense, they were engaged with the naming of issues and in this way creating a vocabulary for regional planning. That does not mean that the (new) vocabulary necessarily lead to a joint understanding of the region. Planning experts in the Zürich as well as the Ruhr case noted that the results of regional design competitions tend to be rather complex: designers often suggest multiple layers, issues, subregions, actors, and time horizons. This complexity in content, form and language may appeal to experienced urban and regional designers, architects, and academics, but threatens and repels politicians and planners that are responsible for letting these complicated constructs fall 'on the ground'. 'Make it simple' could be a strategy connect design to the realm of planning and politics. Design experts responded that simplicity can be extracted from complexity: an act of translation. In the Zürich case, a basic rulebook relying on a simple distinction between stable and dynamic spaces within the region was based on rather in depth analyses, for instance. Another comment on a design vocabulary concerned text and image: Crystal clear textual naming and labelling as well as mapping and drawing are equally important instruments in clarifying issues. Through this, regional design may help to establish narratives of the region, and these can become important drivers for regional discourse. It was argued that the multiplicity of notions in design proposals functioned as a fertile breeding ground for storytelling in the Zürich and the Ruhr cases. Designers proposed what was generally regarded as a a full and rich image of the region, a repertoire of notions that inspired planners.

Discussions on design products and processes addressed the issue of how to connect design with planning processes. It was argued that from the outset designers should be sensitive towards the planning setting in which they work while at the same time claim a kind of free space in order to remain innovative. Potential commitment of local and regional actors should be carefully and continuously considered, specifically when regional design strategies aim at implementation. In the Amsterdam case, the importance of the embedding of design in formal planning was heavily emphasized. This means, for instance, that it is critical to take notice of existing plans. In general, designers should be skilled in working in an often contentious political context. They should also be aware of pragmatic or even opportunistic behavior that occurs in the context of complex social networks.

In all parallel workshops, it became evident that regional design is not a straightforward process, but often requires different steps and stages. In all cases, there was not one 'final' design product, but many in-between products that were presented, discussed, modified, and then presented again. Usually a broad range of different actors joined in, which turned regional design into a dialogue on planning. Such design processes resemble joint decision making processes. The difference is that the decisions are not about concrete projects or interventions but about understanding and the content of the design 'story'. To synthesize and link the diverse and often conflicting requirements and expectations of a broad range of different actors and institutions in one design process was seen to be a critical design activity. It is about informing others and being informed in a multi actor, collaborative setting.

Initiators, audiences and design commissions. Although in all three cases regional design evolved as a collaborative process, the concrete design practices differed in the organizations that initiated the design. Also, the design 'audiences' and the 'openness' of commissions differed to some degree. In the Ruhr and Zürich cases, designers had an open brief. Designers (and also the jury of the Zukunft Metropole Ruhr design entries) appreciated this freedom. The Metrobild Zürich process was carefully placed outside the daily routines of public administration. The temporary architects group 'Krokodil' designed a regional strategy without having an official mandate to do precisely this. They used the freedom given to turn towards a public audience and acquire public attention for their proposal, an effort that they called a 'guerrilla strategy'. In contrast, the Amsterdam case design processes had, through their thorough embedding in planning, a much more pragmatic orientation. They followed the negotiation patterns in the domain of planning and policy making. On an abstract level, one could say that all three design processes run parallel to political processes but that the connections are different, resulting in different degrees of freedom in relation to design content.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we has set ourselves two objectives: 1) how to analyse regional design in planning context from a theory based methodology; 2) to identify lessons on how regional design contributes to planning

and governance capacity in a multi actor setting of regions which do not have a clear match with administrative boundaries.

In relation to the first objective we think this paper addresses a gap in the literature. There is an abundance of theoretical literature on design especially in relation to cognition but fewer literature on the relation between design and planning, let alone literature on the level of metropolitan regions (some major exceptions are mentioned in section 2; interestingly quite a number from Dutch authors). Our contribution to the literature is an analytical frameworks which in our view contains three critical issues about the relationship between design at the one hand and regional planning and governance on the other: 1) the setting, which is about spatial and multi actor characteristics of metropolitan region; 2) the performance, which is about the various kinds of impacts design can have on planning and governance which in our view are mostly in the 'soft' domain of thinking about a region; 3) the actual set up of the design strategy and design process.

This framework has been developed on the occasion of a dedicated conference on regional design. It was developed at forehand and used during the discussions which involved academics as well as participants in three major examples of design exercises in metropolitan regions. It should not come as a surprise to the reader that such discussions can be very lively (sometimes even frenetic) addressing a wide range of topics and experiences. Nevertheless our analytical framework proved to be very useful in streamlining the discussion in the stage of: what have we (=the attendants of the conference) learned? On performance the results of the conference are relatively limited. Performance research is notoriously difficult especially when the main question is not about implementation – meaning in this context: physical manifestation of design on the ground – but the effects of design on thinking about a region. To make further steps fieldwork is needed with interviews and questionnaires as major research tools.

The analytical framework which we developed and sketched out in this paper needs to be refined. The authors of this paper intend to do that through a variety of follow up activities. One of the intentions is the organisation of small, dedicated conferences on regional design in various metropolitan regions. One of these already took place in Florence, May 2017 leading to an extension of the network of interested scholars and practitioners. There are more to come. The lessons which can be learned from the practices in the three regions addressed in this paper form a good starting points to be tested, amended and elaborated.

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