

E13 TH

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What build environment for a declining economy?

Finding a general theme that can relate multiple challenges is something that makes the discussion on complex and challenging. In order to find common grounds one can argue for generic themes that can be applied almost independent of contextual and site specific differences that always appear among the participating sites. And as a local organizer, while working with finding sites and collaborations with municipalities I have also felt that a broad theme creates more possibilities since it has a tendency to include most of our urban challenges. A clear example of a broad theme following this would be the theme for E9, which was “Sustainable city and new public spaces”, its hard to find urban situation where this would not apply.

Still I would argue for a need for more precise and challenging themes that can help identify and discuss contemporary issues present in Europe today and personally I think that the current theme, “The adaptable city” is working rather well. If we want the competition to generate new ways of thinking the theme and subtopics must encourage experimentation and avoid stereotypical preconceived concepts. As for the the proposed strategic concepts of resilience, adaptability and economy the operate in both parallel and opposite ways and opens up for combinations such as adaptable resources or resilient economies. I also find it crucial to describe that a theme is a starting point where the local conditions can create different answers. Europe is a polarized landscape where national as well as regional conditions call for rather different interpretations and calls for a plurality in terms of strategies. A new development in Valencia has a different economy than a redevelopment in Zürich, and resilience can deal with social issues in a square in Amsterdam, and maintenance in a public park in Leipzig.

To me the structure is fine but it would be good to relate the open topics to a set of rather specific questions that can help them become more generative. In the context of Stockholm we can clearly see how legal and economical forces are shaping the city. And economy work in two ways. Lack of profit is a obstacle for urban development in less attractive areas at the same time as demand for housing on attractive land promotes conventional investor driven development. I propose that we try to identify a set of questions that describe both the theme, as well as the contemporary challenges that Europe phase. I start with this:

The built environment is a engine for economic growth. But a declining economy, clearly visible all across Europe today(in rural as well as urban situations), building on less attractive land is unprofitable. What type of planning actions can be used and what types of new possible landscapes (built or not) can this generate?

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