… this is something we could dwell on, and create something new, perhaps even more stable in terms of urbanity

An interview with the German architect and urban planner Thomas Sieverts

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Urbanity (*Urbanität*) has played a significant role in the definition of urban design over the past few decades, in Germany as well as in Western Europe, in general. Triggered by Edgar Salin's analysis of the "cities without urbanity" at the eleventh annual meeting of the Association of German Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) in Augsburg in 1960, the concept has accompanied the postmodern renaissance of the traditional city as the setting of the contract for a new life and its corresponding culture. After being employed as the catchword of the failed attempt to plan "urbanity through density" in the newly built ensembles, the word became part of politics, and part of the competition between cities, based on the image of the crowded street, packed with activities, of the 19th century. The 1990s were still governed by these attempts to revive the traditional urbanity, albeit more and more criticized as devoid festivism. However, the industrial decline and the complex changes prompted by the 1989 revolutions turned the attention towards the social and spatial issues outside the historical centers, leading the way to two core ideas that have influenced the urban theories of the new millennium: (1) that the representation of urbanity as a purified image of the pre-industrial times is actually the trap of a nostalgia which has very little to do with the current urban phenomena; and (2) that the new urbanity has to be searched in the ruins of the industrial and the functionalist urbanism, in the informal, alternative, non-conventional territories of the sprawl.

One of the landmarks of this interpretative and operative turn within urban design is undoubtedly Thomas Sieverts' book *Zwischenstadt*, literally *the city in-between*, written in 1995-1996 and published for the first time in 1997.[1] This anti-conservative approach to urbanity seeks to demonstrate that the *in-betweenness* (between the historical centers and the unlimited land, between the inhabited places and the non-places of mobility, or between the temporality of local economy and the dependency of the global market) is not the source of all evil, but rather the celebration of the possible, uncertain and inciting. Based on his experience as one of the directors of the International Building Exhibition IBA Emscher Park between 1989 and 1994, Sieverts argues against the perpetuation of traditional images of sociability and of spatiality, built upon dualities such as city-territory, nature-culture, etc. The *Zwischenstadt* does not exist in opposition to another form of *ecumene*, but it emerges from its own spacing and temporizations, from the variance of its comprising elements. Thus, his examination of the *Zwischenstadt* begins with the reexamination of some core concepts like urbanity, centrality, density, diversity, and ecology.

Translated into French, English (one in the UK and another one in the US), Japanese, and recently into Spanish, the book is still highly relevant today, inviting us to cherish the casual, and teaching us how to see and make sense of the new urban dynamics. Moreover, Sieverts' capacity to capture the spirit of change has been highly valuable to the latest editions of *Europan Europe*,

1 Thomas Sieverts, *Zwischenstadt, zwischen Ort und Welt, Raum und Zeit, Stadt und Land* (Wiesbaden: Vieweg +Teubner Verlag, 1997).

of which he was president until recently. Just as the *Zwischenstadt* helped mark a cultural and professional turn two decades ago, *Europan 13* seems to be really marking a new inflection, not only in the way that we conceive of architectural and urban projects, but also in the methods that we use to make them happen.

In the light of the topic of our current issue, Thomas Sieverts granted me the immense privilege of an interview that tells a little bit about who he is, how the concept and the theme of urbanity have informed his practice as an architect and urban planner, and how he regards it now. At the same time, I was interested in his oppinion on how the professions of architecture and urban design have changed over the past few decades, and how he experienced all those moments of change in his career.

Daniela Calciu: *Although an interview can never pretend to become a Bildungsroman, I would invite you to retrace briefly the tale of how you became interested in architecture, planning, and urban design.*

Thomas Sieverts: My interest in urban design goes back to when I was nine or ten years old, directly from playing with boxes. And I remember we had to write a little essay in the 4th grade of the elementary school on our most loved play, and I wrote about the *Baukasten*… playing boxes, and how to build buildings. The teacher was very proud: "this boy has written that little essay!" he said. It seemed to be something really special. So I really have been discussing these things since 1945-1946 or so. Throughout my time in school I was designing under the bench, cities, buildings, things of this kind. And just before finishing school, we always have to write a kind of independent essay on a certain topic we are interested in. I wrote about functionalism, and tried to prove that in modern architecture everything can be explained by functions. This was impossible, of course (*laughs*). I met these problems even in that school essay, but this was my belief: I was a Bauhaus passionate, and a Bauhaus advocate, and a functionalist really to the bones in that time.

DC: *You were still in high-school?*

TS: Yes, still in high school. Then I worked as a carpenter for a year, and then I began to study in Stuttgart, which was also the strong hold of Bauhaus architects of that time in Germany. So I was really trained in my belief, and my conviction was that everything has to be taken back to functions and construction. Later, in 1957, I studied for one year at the School of Civic Design in Liverpool, and I did a lot on new towns and open space, but more on the planning side. Then, I went to Berlin, from 1958 to 1961, where I found a very liberal school and I could really expand on my special interest. I did my diploma when I came back from Ghana, and I took my thesis topic from that experience. They started there to fill the Volta Lake, this huge artificial lake, and they had to relocate some villages to the higher lands. My thesis was about moving those villages, and trying to find new types of villages. There were new sociological theories at work, and this was very nice. I had just come back from Africa, and working on my thesis and diploma project allowed me to stay there in my mind a little bit more.

DC: *How long did you stay in Africa?*

TS: Three months. I went there as a volunteer.

DC: *Were you involved in the relocation project?*

TS: No, I was not directly involved. I got my plans from Doxiadis, who did the planning at that time, and then I went back to Berlin, where I did this purely theoretical, very romantic study on clay and bamboo, and self-organized systems based on the kibbutz idea of Israel; it was a work I enjoyed very much. This was in 1962, and then I became an assistant at the university (*TU Berlin*).

DC: *How was the beginning of your career?*

TS: I was ten when the Second World War ended, and I was very much under the influence of the new freedom that followed. I call myself a winner of the war, because we were in a full freedom, we were in an age when we were breathing in endless possibilities, and were building

this new world. Everything had been destroyed so there was enough work for architects. The war had decimated the generation before us, so we obtained positions we could have never gotten in normal times. This is why I have always said that I was the real winner of the war.

DC: *Did you have a professor that stuck with you, or a mentor, or someone who supported or inspired you in the beginning of your career?*

TS: Yes, there was one professor I met when I worked in an architectural studio. We had to make a break of one year for a practice in an office and I met this man with whom I worked for the first competition on Great Berlin in 1958. You might know that scheme as well. I worked there as a student, and I was of course very proud. The office won that competition, and we went to visit Berlin together. I was so fascinated by Berlin that I decided to continue my studies there. So, after I returned from Liverpool, I went straight to Berlin, where this architect with whom I worked in the office had become professor. But I think nobody knows him. Fritz Eggeling is his name. I studied with him, took my diploma with him, and I became his assistant. After his death, we, his assistants, founded a firm which reached a certain fame. It is called Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin.

This was a time, in the 1960s and the 1970s, when the first urban planning legislation was being established in Germany. The communes were being compelled to prepare plans, but they had nothing at that time; there was no methodology in this respect. The Freie Planungsgruppe developed a new methodology, and new kinds of presentation, and new kinds of procedure for these communes. We worked for many cities, small cities in West Germany. We worked from Berlin since there were good flight connections to nearly every part of Germany. This was a very productive period, as it took about ten years for the communes to develop their own administration. We worked more or less as a kind of "hired administration" for planning for these communes.

I also became pretty early a professor at the Architects' department of the Art School in Berlin; now it is called the University of Arts (*Universität der Künste*). At that time it was a Hochschule, and its architectural department had quite a long tradition. I was there to build up the urban design department in this school.

This was a very lively time as well, full of political demonstrations, protests against the war in Vietnam… This was the time when I was picked up by the police together with my students, Easter 1968, and we were held all together in jail for 30 hours. And then I got the opportunity to go to Harvard as a guest professor in 1970, which was again an extension of my horizon, and the first encounter with computers. At that time we had punch cards, do you know these punch cards? (*laughs*)

DC: *I've seen them in technology museums.*

TS: Exactly! (*laughs*) This was 1970, the start of the computer business and the universities had the central calculation centers. You gave your punch cards and you got the printouts. Being this kind of rationalist, I was completely fascinated with these new methods that you could calculate, you could make mathematical models, dynamic models; it was Jay Forrester's system dynamics... Yet, before I went to Harvard, I also received the opportunity to go to the Technical University of Darmstadt, and I told them I would go, but only after Harvard. So when I went to Darmstadt, fresh after the American experience, I tried to introduce this kind of mathematical methods. We were a group of fierce believers in these mathematical methods, trying to model the dynamics of cities, to control them by these kinds of models. Nevertheless, this came rather quickly to an end, about mid to late 1970s. Margaret Thatcher rose to the power in Great Britain, and Reagan was elected president in the US, and they both introduced the neoliberal vision, which withdrew money from the state, money from the communes. Thus, the communes had dwindling means to steer their own development in an active manner, and the market gained increasing power. And of course, there was no support anymore for our research on transforming this kind of mathematical building model into policy. It was finished. But there was a period, I would say from the beginning of the 1960s to mid of the 1970s, when we strongly believed that it would be possible to model the development of cities. Only a few years later the mathematicians themselves said this was impossible. Simply because you cannot model hyper complex facts… because the chains of

little errors in the system will blow up in no time and it is impossible to model dynamically the development of a city. But this was not known when we believed in this "new religion."

DC: *How did these changes impact on the professions of architecture, planning, and urban design? How did they influence your own career?*

TS: Then there came a time when participation started to develop. This was a completely new approach to planning. So if you try to divide the periods of planning after the Second World War, you could say that there are periods of about 15 years. First, the period from 1945 to 1960, which was the period of rebuilding of the West German cities. Then there came the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the "economic miracle" of Germany, and it came with the necessity to plan. Before, planning was poorly looked upon, partly because of Adenauer's and Erhard's policy of economic freedom. But when everything became increasingly complex, they needed planning, and city planning as well. This prompted the great legislation around 1960, such as the *Bundesbaugesetz*, the *Städtebauförderungsgesetz*, all these different laws that helped to plan the cities and to invest public money into urban renewal. These issues were debated and decided politically between 1960 and 1970. It was a very special period when city planning was a strong and highly regarded business. It ended around 1975, with the political and economic changes around the world, and when also the first fundamental critique of Modernism became actively apparent. The critique came, on the one hand, from the sociologists, concerned with the social consequences of Modernism, but also from "culturalists" and psychologists; as for instance, Mitscherlich's book, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden* [*The inhospitality of our cities. A deliberate provocation*]. By the way, this is a very bad book with a very nice title. Nobody reads it because you can just cite the title, but if you read it properly, it is a very bad book. The critique came from several sides, from the cultural critique, from the economic critique, from the political critique, and with all these, something completely different developed, which you could summarize as participation. More and more scientists but also political parties thought that city building should be democratized and there should be much more direct participation of the inhabitants. This lasted from around 1975 to the European break from 1990.

And after 1990 something completely different started. Neo-liberalism took over everywhere and planning went more and more to the private sector. In Germany, planning became and still is a matter of private developers; in Poland even more, in Romania I do not know… The influence of the state on public planning is very weak; it has been gradually weakened. So this is in short my view and my experience of the post-ward period from 1945 to the present.

DC: *What about now?*

It is still a time when planning has very little power, it is still a time when planning is a matter of the private sector, of the private developers, and I do not know if this will change. It might change a little bit now with the refugee crisis. There are so many refugees now in Germany that we might need to strengthen the public planning again. But it is a completely open question. Just now we are witnessing the start of the debate between the private sector and the communes. Only a few communes have kept their housing companies, so they have the tool to be active themselves, through planning and project development. However, most cities have sold them in this period of neoliberalism and of poor community; they reallocated the money, and were forced to sell them. So now, the starting point to do something publicly is not very good, because these cities do not have the direct tools anymore. It would also take a lot of time to buy the housing companies back, I am not sure this is even possible anymore. Munich is a little bit different because Munich never sold its housing companies so they are now in the lucky situation that they can plan and build as a commune. But in general, it is still a neoliberal period, and planning has very weak powers.

DC: *How does the concept of urbanity follow these structural changes in planning?*

TS: What has changed of course is the activity of urban renewal. This has slowly started in the mid-1970s and got its greatest momentum, I think, in the 1980s, until the European break; urban renewal was the main direction in that time. In Germany, it was in a way quite successful. Many small cities have never been as beautiful as they became after this process. But very soon, the economic crisis reached them, they tried to redevelop on small parcels and small shops…

this is all gone now because economically you can't keep them anymore. So, the centers of these beautifully urbanely renewed old cities in Germany are economically pretty dead. And this brings us to the other problem, of economy. In Germany, and in all European cities, I think, urbanity has always been coupled with shops. And this coupling doesn't work anymore. The small shops are dead nearly everywhere because of the internet shopping, and the big shopping centers, so the economic fate of the core of the cities is very critical and nobody really knows how to solve that.

DC: *So where does that leave the question of urbanity?*

TS: What's happening really? I think that nobody knows what is happening to urbanity. But there are quite a number of conferences and discussions on this matter because of these ongoing problems. And I think the notion of urbanity in the conventional sense is pretty shallow. It is a kind of "cappuccino urbanity" and has no real vitality anymore. Yet, if you look for new kinds of urbanity, then I think you can observe it in how the refugees are received in Germany by all these voluntary helpers. I think this is urbanity in a very vital sense. That is real urbanity. And I think urbanity is also vital in all these kinds of self-organization that we can notice everywhere. You can begin for example, with the parents who organize the kindergarten themselves, a common practice that became manifest in the 1980s, but which draws its origins in that spirit of 1968. This is, I think, a piece of vital urbanity. You can also observe new urbanity in the initiatives people take, for example, in the new city games they invent. Flash mobs to get people together and play, city running and city discoveries, and all these. I think it is great urbanity which happens, which can only happen if people are free to group themselves and to do activities. And of course, all these popular public gardening, urban gardening, guerrillas, all that, is also I think a beautiful new urbanity which has nothing to do with the old 19th century urbanity.

DC: *In the first chapter of the book about the Zwischenstadt, you wrote that urbanity is about qualities such as knowledge of the world or open spirit, tolerance, curiosity or intellectual acuity. Are these qualities that grow exclusively in traditional urban spaces of sociability, or, as your text would imply, do they manage to grow in new spatial forms, and engender new processes?*

TS: Yes, I do believe this to be true. I think it is even truer today than it was when I wrote it. But this conservative kind of urbanism really was, and still is, a strong movement in Germany, with Hans Stimmann in Berlin and the patterns of the 19th century… there are still many professionals carrying these ideas. But I think this is not leading anywhere. We can observe new things that will lead to new forms of space, as well. We do not know exactly how they will look, but they *will* create their own spaces.

DC: *There are some common metaphors trying to describe how the city works. The most common of these, especially when talking about urbanity as the complex correlations between space and life, are the theatre and the workshop. These are also present in your assessment of the new conceptions of urbanity. What correlations can we draw between the two, and who are the main actors of each?*

TS: These things that we have just talked about, the urban games, use the city as a stage. It is used as a stage even in situations nobody thought it was a stage. But if you have these city marathons, or city blade nights, when thousands of people go on their blades through the city… it is just one big stage. The traditional approach to urbanity used to make us think that only the city center, the main square can be stages. But the recent experiments show us that other parts of the city can also be the stage of successful new forms of urbanity. Take for instance the big streets in the Ruhr area when they closed the highways for one day. Then thousands of people poured into the highways, and suddenly the highway was a new stage.

Regarding the city as a workshop, we can talk about creative quarters. In Munich, they created a quarter for artists, for inventors, for young pioneers and start-ups; this has transformed a whole quarter of the city into a workshop for certain groups. You know that there are sociologists to say that certain start-ups, certain inventive, creative firms need this kind of milieu, a milieu where they meet each other, because they need a certain number of similar people to create something new – like the Silicon Valley, for example. You can assign a whole area of the city to this, but I think this also happens spontaneously to certain firms, certain leading people, and certain

personalities who create this in a city. But there is no doubt for me that this is a new kind of urbanity.

The two forms are very lively in our cities, if you observe them correctly. You have to see them. And you will see that urbanity is not dead, it has just transformed into completely different forms.

DC: *Where does this leave the urban designer? How is one to relate to all these?*

TS: This is a completely open question, I think. Urban design in the conventional form is in a way important; but not so much. If it is not deeply engrained into cultural activities, it cannot be very influential. The traditional understanding of urban design, as creating beautiful gardens, beautiful parks.., they are nice, and they might foster and sustain tourism, but I think the real question of urban design is in the connection with other forms of cultural activities. For example, my son is an artist and he organizes guided tours through the periphery of cities. He walks two or sometimes three days through the periphery of cities and he shows that the peripheries are not ugly, they are not non-descript areas, but they have their own history, and their own soul, that people can really express themselves in what they build by themselves, and so on… so he shows that there are very vital active cultural activities to be observed. And I think this kind of curated tours could be one tool of urban design to improve the emotional relation of the people to their environment.

DC: *I think this is a very important idea, that beautiful and meaningful design is the one which helps people to establish a relation with the city, and to care about its places.*

TS: It is what I "preached" in my last lectures. If we do not foster, if we do not improve people's emotional relation to their environment, then what we do makes no sense. And this becomes more and more important because of the alienation of the people from their environment. Their alienation from the environment is growing quickly. The environment becomes more and more abstract. It becomes more or less a money making machine, used by the developers, or they are dominated by large advertising billboards… and the forces that alienate the people from their environment are growing. If you think about all the electronic media coming in, they make their own world… Let us take the simple example of the navigation instruments in the car or in your smartphone. They make it superfluous that you have an inner representation of the world you live in, which every child has to learn to orientate in the city. The youngsters do not need this anymore, they just put their destinations into their smartphones and they don't even know where they are and they drive the car following the instructions of the navigation system. But they do not know where they are.

DC: *How do you think this contributes to how we imagine ourselves as townspeople, as dwellers of the city?*

TS: Well, the media have taken over, in less than a generation. The entire development is so young! Only now we have the first generation that grew up completely with these new tools. Even you grew up without these media, and I thought I could escape it, that it would develop slower… but the new generation, they grow up with them from the very beginning… at the age of three they can use a smartphone. And I think that this will deeply change people's relation to their environment; just not in the way we maybe imagined at first, when we thought the media would make space superfluous. Even if the media can work without space, it does not mean that space will lose its meaning. But the relation will change, as the simple example of the navigation system shows.

DC: *However, we can find ways to bridge the two worlds, to make them enhance one another…*

TS: That is what I observe with these urban games. They lead people to completely different parts of cities, parts where they would have never gone before, if not led by smartphones. In this way, the smartphone is simply a prerequisite for getting to know the city in a completely different way. I am sure that nobody could have foreseen this interesting fact. It is something which develops spontaneously, and suddenly gains an enormous echo. And I am sure that we could observe many such things that we never could have foreseen otherwise, but they are something completely different from the conventional forms of urbanity.

DC: *I can think of a number of examples, starting with two high school teenagers on the summer vacation, in a Romanian city called Galați, where "nothing happens". They suddenly decided to have the largest water splash event in a park. They created a Facebook event, and several hours later, there were three hundred teenagers in that park. Young people who had never met before, and who became a community for an afternoon.*

TS: Yes, and a strong community!

DC: *Such happenings show us how the new social media does have this power to support alternative communities, to mobilize great numbers of people in short amounts of time, to help communities happen…*

TS: Yes, indeed. I do not have a real grasp of the media myself, I'm a completely analogue man, but what I observe is fascinating. It has to do with imagination, with adventure, with many different things, and I think that it has just started. We are developing many varied forms of urbanity. We can call it urbanity, because you need a certain density of people, even if you have it by smartphone, you still have to go there, you need physical movement, by fun and of fun.

DC: *And also in more serious terms, of social cohesion, and in the affirmation of solidarity, as seen in the recent social movements and in how the refugees are now being received … we have witnessed manifestations of incredible solidarity that we were unaware existed anymore…*

TS: This is a surprise for everybody. We can be very optimistic that this is possible.

DC: *We have this somewhat cynical way to say that everything is now about the individual, that we have withdrawn from the political life, and from social life, but then a crisis happens, that reveals the contrary.*

TS: Interesting thing, you can't make a prognosis of what happens, but you must be open to observe, so you can support it. This I think is interesting. This can only happen in cities, it is not a matter of the countryside. And you can see this with these new social movements. All of them are happening in cities.

DC: *It also calls into question the notion of community, beyond the traditional sense, based on kinship and proximity, and also beyond friendship and intellectual interests…*

TS: And that's what we now can observe…, and it will develop its own cultural forms, I am sure. I am just coming from a conference in Lausanne on the "horizontal metropolis". The debate was about the *citta diffusa* by Bernardo Secchi, the *métapolis* by Francois Ascher, the *Zwischenstadt*, and the new geographical research of the enormous transformation that brought us from the loose agglomeration of single-family houses which was the case when I wrote the book, to the enormous rate of interdependence and specialization of the different pieces of the *Zwischenstadt* today. They each gain their own functions, they are specializing and they are gaining a close interdependence; so we can already observe, functionally, the growing of a kind of horizontal metropolis. But again, it has no cultural equivalent yet. And the whole administrative setup is still traditional. The communal boards are still in place, we have no regional governments, at least not in Germany. The notion of central city that dominates the periphery is still valued, despite the dwindling power of the central city. This was the thesis of this "horizontal metropolis". Talking about it, I said everything is true, but there is no equivalent emotionally or consciously in the head of the people that we are talking about. And it might grow with this new kind of new combinations of the electronic media, actual space, and sports for example. Traditional urbanists might regard them as anti-urban, or anti-urbanity, but they could be the seeds of a completely new urbanity. But I think we have to work on this cultural dimension. Therefore, I think traditional urban design, which is only handling the physical side of the problem, is not enough; it must be combined with cultural events and techniques.

DC: *This is also true for the new forms and methods of economy, such as the emerging way of funding projects through crowdfunding. This is not just about financing a certain project, but also, perhaps more important, about building a community around an idea, like in the case of that new bridge in Rotterdam…*

TS: Yes, this famous bridge in Rotterdam! I saw it a few months ago. It is a beautiful example. And I think this is just the beginning of completely new forms of urbanism.

DC: *In a way, they all relate to the need for cultural occupation of the* Zwischenstadt*, which brings me back to your conclusions following the IBA Emscher Park: that we need to open new domains of urbanity in the* Zwischenstadt*, and we need to have culture grow over the former industrial sites. The possibilities to turn industrial landscapes into cultural resources are still not obvious in many Eastern European regions, and the will to reactivate them for cultural and social purposes exists only in the minds of very few. How did the IBA come about?*

TS: One of the IBA roots is that the Ruhr area itself had a very short history. There was nothing before 1850. Then, they suddenly discovered coal and the enormous revolutionary development of the area started. The coal had its time between 1850 and 1980 or so. This is a very short period, and one that did not produce many historic monuments. There was a growing feeling that an area without history has no future. Strange kind of feeling! Thus, in the early 1980s emerged a strong movement to preserve industrial heritage. Before that nobody had looked seriously at the industrial archaeologies, and there was no popular opinion in favor of the industrial heritage and its preservation. This has radically changed. The IBA started officially in 1989, under several premises. One was that this area is not economically improper; it did not lack land or infrastructure. The official policy of the state has always been oriented towards the need for more highways, for more industrial land. The IBA showed that what was actually lacking was culture. It is very difficult to get new people into the area if you do not attempt to have more beauty, more culture… if you do not awaken the consciousness that this is a very interesting area. This was more or less the starting point. It was not a matter of material lack of certain elements; it was a lack of quality: climate quality, landscape quality, architectural quality, and restoration... The area was dominated by the mining industry, which paid very good wages… but in this highest populated area in Europe, there were no universities until 1962. Prussia considered that this was a working area, that we have just raw material economy, that there is no need to invest anything into cultural needs. And this only started to change in the 1960s. Imagine! The first university came in 1962!

So the IBA started from the premise that what is really necessary to overcome this deadlock development is to improve qualities; qualities on several levels: quality of the landscape, which was in wide parts pretty ruined and poisoned by the industry, we had to work on this problem. We had to work on the quality of architecture, as well: we have very good industrial architecture from the 30s, but after the war, what was built there is very banal, with few exceptions. And these were the reasons to start the IBA Emscher Park, with the idea to improve the quality of the whole industrial province. It was a huge area. We did not want to plan anymore; there were hundreds of plans. We wanted to make projects, to build things in the short ten years that we had for the program, so as to enable the area to run by itself.

And a lot of projects were realized or started to be realized in these ten years, and we hoped that this IBA would change people's attitude and awareness, that there would be a new spirit in the Ruhr area. This was too optimistic, of course. It takes more than ten years to change the spirit of a region, but at least it started. And I think the idea is still valid. Most projects are successful. I myself built one of the big parks in Bochum, the Westpark, with my office, after 1994, when I finished with IBA as one of the directors. This was a very nice professional experience. We had about 15 years to do it. It takes a lot of time but if you are continuously working on such things, it is a great experience. Now this idea of the IBA has become really popular; everybody wants to have an IBA, with more or less reason. It has become a kind of export article of Germany.

I think the IBA itself could be repeated, but these kinds of events always have a certain "window" in history, a proper moment when they can be done. They cannot be done before, they cannot be done after, but they can only be realized in this period. This was the case for the IBA. Of course, when we conceived it in the 1980s, we could not foresee the European change, and suddenly much of the money set aside for the IBA had to go to the East. This changed the realization of the IBA, but it was still a very rich time and there was enough money left.

DC: *Looking back, do you feel it has achieved its purpose?*

TS: It has achieved that the Ruhr area has become an area with a culture that brought it back on the European map. I think this is the greatest achievement. The big festivals in Bochum and the Ruhrtriennale are very successful. Several concert halls have been built, several orchestras were founded… so this area has been revised in a fundamental way and this is the successful part of it. And it has encouraged many people to try new things in the Ruhr area, which was completely unthinkable before. But of course the Ruhr area is still in huge lethargy. As I said, we were too optimistic to think we could change the mentality of an area so deeply engrained with the old industrialism.

DC: *But if the mentality is not deeply changed, has the quality of life improved, at least? Can you see more creative or more meaningful ways of life that are being developed for/by the people who live there?*

TS: Yes, and it started with the universities; they fostered a real change in the Ruhr area. But you must look very carefully to the kind of historical time, to the historical "window"… We do not necessarily need more IBA, but I think that we need to have more experiments, to have more formats in what we do, formats where certain rules are relieved and something new could be tried for a certain period. This is a lesson you can learn from the IBA. It can take new forms, but it always has to have a field for exceptional experimentation, where you can really try something relevant for the society. This is important. If it is just urban design, if it is just beautiful architecture, beautiful parks, it is not enough.

DC: *This brings us back to the role of the urban designer, which has more to do with the beauty of the relation between subjectivity and urban space, rather than just creating beautiful images. And I think that this idea is very present in the word* anesthetic *in the sense that you use it, as what goes beyond our conscious perception of a place…*

TS: Yes, of course, I think this notion of *anesthetic* is central to this debate. Because anesthetic does not mean ugly, but it means "not seen at all". And that is precisely what I feel is growing. We talked about this abstraction, that the people live in their media world, we have less and less real contact to one another and actually in the space… this is all anesthetics. It renders people to see actively emotionally. If you, as an urban designer, are not able to pursue it fundamentally, your projects will stand technically, will stand economically, but they will never lead to urbanity.

DC: *Because we need to develop the cooperation between space and action, to use your words, and to think in terms of soft urbanity, as temporary or provisional solutions but which give beautiful experiences, and meaningful experiences in a given situation.*

TS: It is what we can observe with these games, and in these spontaneous appropriations of the environment by the people… this is something we could dwell on, and create something new, perhaps even more stable in terms of urbanity.

DC: *Coming back to this notion of "zwischen", in-between, are these new forms of urbanity between the individual rights to property and the collective right to the city? Will they force us to expand our views on ownership?*

TS: This I think is an interesting view… the idea that it is not the property that matters, but the use of it. And the use is something you could share. And this, I think, is a sector of what is happening in the city, a dimension that will grow. I am not quite sure of how developers will really react to this in the future. We must not forget the other movement, even stronger I'm afraid, of the gated communities. Their property is really used in a very dangerous way for the city.

DC: *Withdrawn from the life of the city…*

TS: Yes, completely. Controlled, and if you have private control over a public space, it is not public space anymore. And what we observe is that this private control is growing everywhere. But there are strong counter-movements, the sharing ones, like this kind of occupation of empty space, regardless to whom it belongs. This is, especially in Berlin, a very strong trend: to occupy a space illegally, and to use it while trying to get some kind of tolerance for it. This is another

interesting piece of urbanity, a very interesting piece. But we cannot forget the countermovement of privatization, which is important and dangerous.

DC: *We can see its dimensions most clearly, I would say, in former Communist countries like Romania, where the individual property is above everything else, with no real room for negotiation…*

TS: This is also the case in Poland, a kind of counter-movement to the Communist period. In Germany, we have a strong history of collective movements, but it is difficult enough. And the communes are poor, they do not have the money to compensate, they have to let the developers go. So the financial balance between the public sector and the private investors is important. But in the Eastern European countries, I would imagine it is even more difficult, because collective property is regarded as corrupt and connected to the old regime.

DC: *The younger generations were raised in a world where everything is open and up for negotiation or renegotiation, but the older generations do have certain taboos, which sometimes pose barriers against the expression of new ways of life, and new forms of urbanity…*

TS: … and new ways of property. What is property? What kinds of duties are connected to property? This is a great debate in Germany, because the Constitution says property is connected with duties to the public, but they are not specified, and the property law is overwhelming in this respect. At least we have a kind of constitutional point. Yet, it is always an enormous unresolved fight between capitalism and communalism.

Nowadays the debate is for the refugees. The communes ask if they can use the private property for refugees. Maybe if the crisis becomes too big; but for now this is taboo. Property in our society is regarded as a very high degree of security.

DC: *These are definitely some of the core issues that the urban designer has to become aware of, to understand, and to develop new techniques and new methodologies to tackle the multiple factors that determine the urban processes that he might envision. Given your recent experience as president of* Europan Europe*, I would like to wrap up this interview with the image of urban design as it appears through the lenses of this platform for cross-national and cross-disciplinary encounters.* Europan 13 *is trying to address all the changes that we have talked about, and all these incremental steps towards new modes of reading and of building the city. How are these efforts received by the municipalities?*

TS: There is a great schism between the Europan program and the realities of the communes. It is a kind of ideal which we try to formulate in the goals, but we are completely relying on the communes to offer sites and to offer programs which fit into the ideas of Europan. So there is a big tension between the reality of the communes providing sites and programs, and the programs of Europan itself. And as Europan does not have much money, the competitions are completely dependent on the communes, on the sites and programs that they offer.

DC: *Has Europan been a more or less honest reflection of the things that the profession is dealing with?*

TS: Yes, I have only been for four years with Europan, but I was from the very beginning impressed by the standards of the debates, especially of the young scientific committee; they are all young people. So the level of the debate is great, but the problem is to find communes who take this as their own policy.

DC: *Has Europan had some role as an educator in the field of urban design and planning?*

TS: It is not easy to estimate, but it has played some role. I think especially that it should take this role in your countries, and in the south, Greece, Italy, too; the problem is similar. But with the financial dependence on the communes, its influence is limited. However, I reckon that it has educated quite a number of young architects to think and to work in new lines of policies.

My impression was that the level of the debate inside Europan is much more advanced than that of the communes and of the architects who participate. Furthermore, the problems become more and more complex, and it becomes more and more difficult for young architects to build something. Europan started with more straight forward building programs that the winner could build right away. Now, the programs become more and more complex, and it takes so many years to build them that it is more and more difficult for the winner to see the project through. And so

we discussed that the communes are urged to employ the winners also in the process of political preparation of the site, and I do hope this will be the case. But of course, there is nothing here for architects who only want to build. They are not geared for this kind of professional thinking. And there's another problem in Europan, that there's a discrepancy between the complexity of the program and the time it requires to be accomplished, if at all, and the desire of the young architect to build quickly, to start his office with this project. The schemes became more and more theoretical, communes say we'll ask the young architects to think of something, but we are not sure we can build it.

DC: *There were some discussions for the current edition, arguing that the challenges posed by the competition are becoming too complex for the young architects to address. Is it only the lack of experience, or is it also that the schools of architecture are lagging behind these new trends?*

TS: Oh yes, this is very true. Most schools in Europe are still very traditional, teaching a very traditional notion of architecture. And I think Europan tries to break things up, to open the notion of architecture and urban design. Yet, it depends completely on the community that offers the program, and it depends on the young architects, too. I think there are certain schools that take up *Europan* programs, but they have not really penetrated the debate. Those who participate are enormously involved with the debate.

DC: *Is there a connection between what* Europan *has achieved thus far, as a highly institutionalized approach to the city, and the other emerging forms of urbanity that we touched on before?*

TS: No connection yet. It is an international competition, with so different conditions for the profession. Conditions in Spain or Italy are so much different from the conditions in Holland, Sweden, Germany. And this is again one of the really difficult problems of Europan. It has to find a compromise, or the common denominator between these different conditions for the profession. The northern countries think it's necessary to have the chief architect, the civil servant responsible for planning, in the jury, because he has to be a kind of messenger to the political decision maker. But other countries say "Oh, no! This would mean that we could have corruption in the jury and we cannot do that." The jury should be a purely professional body and the civil servant can give advice before, but he is not allowed to decide, to vote. So fundamentally different estimations of what administration is! And the idea that there might be an uncorrupted civil servant is not impossible, but it is improbable for Spain, or Portugal, even for Italy.

DC: *Has the competition managed to find an answer to that difficult question that occupied its title for several editions in a row, "reinventing the European urbanity"?*

Europan has enormous ambitions even to reach at least a little bit in the participant cities. But there are so many countries, with different situations, and different bodies of architects, it is not easy to find a common denominator. The debate itself is really good, and useful, if not so much for the cities, at least in the minds of the participating young architects. For quite a number of them, winning an *Europan* edition ensures the start of a successful career, and the chance to have an impact on the cities where they work. Therefore, the impact of Europan might be indirect, but nevertheless important!