Regional designing: A strategic design approach in landscape architecture

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Regional designing is a strategic design approach in landscape architecture that envisions desirable future situations for regions in which the spatial situation is under pressure. This paper studies the principles that regional designers use to structure and organize their design process. The regional design principles highlight the extremely ill-defined, unstructured and volatile design situations that regional designing engages with. Moreover, the study reveals that the design process is an inextricable part of the broader process of change it aims to contribute to. This draws attention to a dynamic perspective in designing, to the interaction with stakeholders, to the position of the designer in the design process, and it calls for a (re)new(ed) culture in design.
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I n landscape architecture, regional designing is a form of large scale spatial design that develops visions and long-term perspectives for regions in which the existing spatial form and function are under pressure and need to be adapted. Such spatial situations are often ill defined and call for structural change. Regional designing envisions the possible and desirable future arrangement of settlements, infrastructures, water features, nature reserves and other land uses in a region, including the relationships between them, their aesthetic appearance, and how this can be realized in the future (Kempenaar, Westerink, Van Lierop, Brinkhuijsen, & Van den Brink, 2016, p. 21). It is a form of design that engages with strategies and societal issues, such as adapting to climate change (Brand, Kersten, Pot, & Warmerdam, 2014; Wilson, 2006), transition to renewable energy sources (De Waal & Stremke, 2014; Stremke & Koh, 2010), or structural demographic changes (Kempenaar, Van Lierop, Westerink, Van der Valk, & Van den Brink, 2016; Sousa & Pinho, 2013).

Examples of regional designing include the visions made for the Le Grand Paris exhibition in 2009 on the future urban development of the greater Paris region (Wells, 2009), the proposals for the Rebuild by Design competition, aimed at making the New York/New Jersey coast more resilient to future hurricanes (Bisker, Chester, & Eisenburg, 2015), and the 'Landschaftszug'

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approach for the spatial adaptation of the shrinking city of Dessau in Germany (Langner, 2014). In projects such as these regional designers aim to contribute to improving the spatial situation by producing long-term perspectives, strategies and pathways that can be used as navigation devices in the uncertain future that lies ahead (Langner, 2014).

Recently a comparable engagement with vision development and strategy formulation as in regional designing has emerged in other design disciplines, particularly in those that aim to contribute to a transition to a sustainable society (Bachman, 2012; Ceschin, 2014; Manzini, 2015). Several authors have argued that this strategy-oriented designing calls for a specific focus in 'how to' design. Bachman (2012), for example, states that aspects such as foresight, systemic relationships and interdependencies, need more attention in architectural designing. Thackara (2006) pleas for shifts towards 'sense and respond', 'deep context', 'seeding edge effects', 'smart recombinations', 'social fiction', 'design with people' and 'design as service' in order to design for a sustainable world, and scholars in product-service design emphasise the need for process-based, multi-scale, multi-actor and systemic approaches in design in order to arrive at sustainable design solutions (e.g. Blizzard & Klotz, 2012; Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016; Charnley, Lemon, & Evans, 2011; Coley & Lemon, 2009). The involvement of design in vision development and strategy formulation has broadened and altered the field of design, diversified design processes and expanded the field of expertise of designers.

Designers engaged in long term processes of change, societal transitions, vision development and strategy making face problem situations that are ill-defined and not bounded (Ceschin, 2014; Dorst, 2015). To respond to these situations, designers tend to take a system perspective (Bachman, 2012; Barnett, 2013; Dorst, 2015). Ill-defined and unbounded problems are not related to one particular component that can be isolated, but generally emerge from the relationships and the interactions between constituent parts. Moreover, strategic design approaches include people that have a direct or indirect relation to the problem situation in the design process (Blizzard & Klotz, 2012; Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016; Meroni, 2008). In a genuine dialogue, information and perspectives are shared and new partnerships and relationships develop. This is expected to lead to social innovation and sustained change (Hillgren, Seravalli, & Emilson, 2011). Furthermore, inducing change takes central stage in strategic design approaches, calling for knowledge of processes and how to influence them. This process orientation also alters the position of design: it can become a service or capacity that is permanently embedded in organisations (Dorst, 2015).

Despite the increasing involvement of design in vision development and strategy formulation in various design disciplines, research and reflection on designing engaged with long term processes of change has been limited up