

CITY AS LOFT

Martina Baum

In *The History of the City*, Leonardo Benevolo defines the transition from village to city as being the point at which people started to practise different professions – in other words, the point at which complex networks emerged. A thousand years later, we might now define our own concept of urbanity analogously, as being the point at which new and unexpected networks are starting to arise out of combinations of old ones.¹

¹ Kees Christiaanse, 'Die Stadt als Loft', in *Topos* 38 (2002), p. 6.

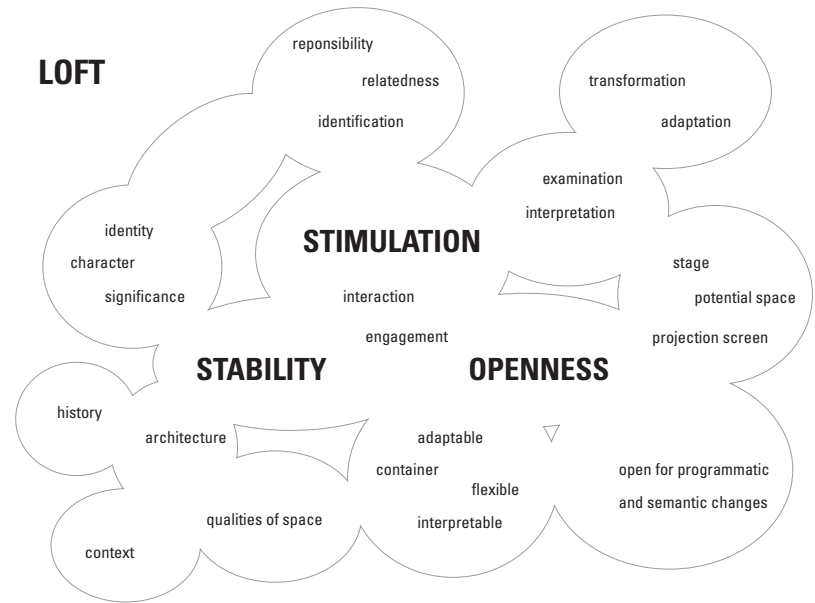
These ideas date from 2002 – and ten years later, they are as topical as ever. The need for urban qualities in cities has since increased throughout the world. Planners, developers and administrative bodies are thus all facing the question of how this need can be met. For us, it is an issue that has prompted questioning, analysis and reflection: which locations in the city have urban qualities and are able to allow new, unexpected networks to arise? What sort of conditions are needed to achieve this? Who are the people involved? And what effects do these locations have on their immediate surroundings and on the city they are situated in?

Over the last thirty years, the desire for urbanity, identity and identification has above all been projected onto maintaining and converting derelict structures dating from the industrial era. As a contrast to the characterless buildings and cityscapes that are the same all over the world, these locations stand for a type of architecture that has specific features and relates to history and context, while at the same time offering space for current and future needs. These are powerful, unique locations in architecture and urban-planning terms, and they can become spaces full of potential.

Through their architecture, history and identity, these locations are replete with meaning and have stability. In each city, they have a significance that influences the city's character; they refer to the past and are anchored in the collective memory. They are locations that have a name, that are rooted in the city's structure and thus enable people to identify with them. In addition, they are characterized by a strong architectural language and specific spatial qualities, both in the buildings' interiors and in the open spaces around them. The way in which the buildings were previously used is reflected in the architecture, fittings and elements remaining. These traces give the location patina and tell its story.

At the same time, however, these locations also show a certain degree of openness to new elements that makes them viable for the future. They can accept both programmatic and semantic changes, and this openness allows them to remain living, dynamic and also unique components in the city's structure. With their generous size and open ground plans, the buildings can be used extremely flexibly and can be adapted to whatever needs arise. The architectural structures are interpretable, presenting screens or stages onto which individual ideas can be projected.

These characteristics can be described as dynamic-stable. The simultaneous quality of stability and openness is what makes the locations so extraordinary and invites engagement with them. The resistance that has to be overcome during a conversion process seems to act as an inspiration to the users' imaginations in many cases. New patterns of usage and lifestyles often develop at precisely those locations in the city



Loft: dynamic-stable structures

in which it is possible for people to appropriate and modify spaces. Large numbers of people feel attracted by these qualities – particularly those who are able to develop new ways of life, activities and trends, and act as pioneers for social change, individuals who are willing to start experiments that can provide the basis for innovation and creativity. The users play a central, active role here, and in many cases they also contribute financially. Instead of being consumers, they become producers of spaces who actively contribute to shaping the city. This often leads to strong and permanent links with the specific location. On the one hand, the buildings offer a stable framework as the basis for durability, while on the other they provide an open stage for new elements. In combination with functional and social conditions, the context and the people who are looking for this type of space, living components of the city can arise that have urban qualities and create effects in the form of networks, value-creation chains and increased attractiveness that often go well beyond the location itself.

We use the word 'loft' as a term that sums up these urban qualities. In this sense, it is used to describe adaptable, flexible, and at the same time powerful spaces with identity in which people can live and work. The qualities of the loft are in that sense not limited to a single building – they can be transferred to the urban context as a whole. The concept of

the loft thus goes well beyond its conventional meaning and can be unsettling and provocative, as well as encouraging reflection. For us, the concept of the loft is thus not limited only to the usual image of brickwork factories from the late nineteenth century that have been converted into studios. It includes all buildings and open spaces that have the simultaneous quality of stability and openness described above. The range of possible users accordingly includes not only artists and creative individuals, but also everyone who interacts with spaces of this type, is stimulated by them and develops his or her own specific living or working environment out of them.

Adaptive reuse as a resource for sustainable urban development

For the purposes of sustainable urban development, there is no alternative to a thrifty way of dealing with resources, which include the stock of industrial areas and buildings. For us, the existing building stock must therefore be regarded not merely as a material and economic resource, but also as an important component that makes the city itself into a source of new developments and new lifestyles.

The architecture of existing buildings indicates its original usage and significance. As witnesses to the past, the buildings are part of each location's identity. However, the location's identity is shaped not merely by prestige buildings, but also to a considerable extent by the everyday buildings used for residential purposes, trading and production. These buildings also contribute just as much to identification and orientation and equally represent a social value. If the existing buildings are appropriately converted, they can remain as an active part of the urban structure and as a node in the network of relationships, interlacing and movement in the urban space. These locations thus also have a relational value.

This book is concerned with the legacy of industrialization. In the course of their existence, the factories changed cities and gave rise to new lifestyles. Social and economic developments during the last few decades have in turn had their effects on the way in which factories are used as production sites and led to their decline, as a result of which new patterns of usage and lifestyles have arisen. In addition to the economic, ecological and social aspects of sustainability, there is another that is relevant in this context: the opening up of new possibilities. If conversion approaches allow their users to appropriate the locations and the areas continue to be living components of everyday urban life, then they can make an important contribution to sustainable urban development that goes well beyond closed materials cycles and CO₂ balances. To us, sustainable urban development means working with what is already there – whether it is buildings, infrastructure, resources, or the people involved. The mixture and density of architectural structures, people and usages are important aspects too. They promote communication, exchanges of goods and information and thus also encourage the development of value-creation chains and networks. Active involvement in urban society and the added social value of pro-

jects and locations contribute to sustainable urban development. This view of sustainability formed the basis for our research, and the questions it raises are: what does a project that involves adaptive reuse contribute, and above all what added value does it create?

The transformation of industrial production sites into living urban components is a global phenomenon that is seen in many countries that are entering or have completed the transition from an industrial society to a knowledge-based and service-based society. Throughout the world, examples and strategies used in dealing with industrial brownfields are evidence of these processes. Research on the conversion of formerly monofunctional industrial areas into living components of the city provides valuable information that can be used not only for transforming similar building complexes, but also to provide important lessons for other restructuring processes in the city – for example, in monofunctional residential areas. When buildings and open spaces are being newly planned today, the question of their viability for the future also arises. If a building or space is open and adaptable for new requirements and future usages, while at the same time being powerful and meaningful, it may be capable of long-term survival. However, if ‘a building ceases to be versatile, its capacity for life is also called into question’.² This idea can be transferred from the individual building to the city as a whole: how can a city or a district acquire stability while at the same time remaining open to different usages, new models of living and to the future?

2 Gerhard Müller-Menckens, *Neues Leben für alte Bauten – über den Continuo in der Architektur* (Stuttgart: Koch, 1977), p. 12.

Structure of the book

This publication examines the subject of adaptive reuse in terms of ‘city as loft’ from various points of view, reflecting various approaches



Research collection of 140 reuse projects worldwide

and strategies for conversion, and it considers the prospects for reusing other types of building. We searched for reused industrial areas all over the world, and in addition to the large number of relevant projects we also found that there is a strong interest in exchanging information and in networking on the topic. *City as Loft* brings all these

findings from research and practical work together and makes them available for others to learn from – for other projects, plans and tasks. The book provides insights into transformation strategies and the ways in which converted areas function, as well as into the urban context in each case. It also examines the parameters and the protagonists that proved to be decisive for the developments concerned. The core of the book consists of thirty portraits of converted industrial areas all over the world, which we have selected from a total of around 140 projects. The selected projects illustrate pathways to transformation that have been taken, on various scales and with various approaches and protagonists. Common to all of them is the previous industrial usage and the loft quality in the sense explained above. All of the projects have the dual quality of stability and openness described, which stimulates users to become active in these locations. The most important question for us was what urban qualities can arise from these basic conditions and which parameters are important in the process? We regarded the locations as ‘breeding-grounds’ and investigated the development, influence and effects of projects developed on this basis.



Loft: adaptable, flexible, and at the same time powerful spaces with identity in which people can live and work. Studio, Kunstpark Ost / Munich

The variety of the projects presented also reflects the wide range of conversion approaches that appear to be possible in this type of location. From areas for art and culture to locations for the creative economy, leisure and recreation, production and various mixed uses, a very wide variety of approaches are used. Various operational and financial models offer examples of successful projects, including some that are outside the scope of the classic type of property development by large investors. The tremendous importance of the protagonists involved in these enterprises – the initiators, operators, planners and users – is clear. It is only through their commitment, their vision and

their active work that it was possible for the projects to be implemented in the ways described. The studies thus provide not only insights into the architectural and spatial aspects and approaches to conversion and reuse, but also information about the people involved and the roles they played. On the basis of the 'breeding-ground' concept, we document each development, with reflections on external influences such as market demand, legal frameworks, and financial and organizational support systems.

The thirty projects are arranged by geographical zone, as the developments are always closely linked to the economic, social and political situations in the specific countries. At the beginning of each section, this background is explained by an author familiar with the specific regional conditions. In the United States and western Europe, the subject of converting the architectural legacy of industrial society has been a topical one for several decades already. Starting from the first reused districts, such as SoHo in New York in the 1970s, the subject became increasingly important in the 1990s in western Europe as well in parallel with the change from industrial society to the information society. This led to a large number of projects being initiated during the last twenty years that tested a wide variety of approaches, concepts and strategies. Against this background, most of the projects we present here are selected from the North American and western European context. In other parts of the world, this type of transformation process is still in its infancy; in addition, appreciation of the significance of the industrial legacy there is often (still) not yet as strong. However, interesting projects and strategies can already be found there as well, a few of which are presented among the project portraits. The way in which the research results have been converted into clear and informative graphics by Joost Grootens makes the wealth of information collected easily readable and allows comparisons between the projects. The portrait texts explain the aspects that are of interest to us and the general conditions for each project.

The project portraits are accompanied by essays written by internationally active experts in the fields of architecture, urban planning and urban research. The essays consider the 'city as loft' and adaptive reuse, as well as offering perspectives for future development. The social and historical significance of reuse is discussed, as well as economic considerations and new forms of reuse, the future role of production in the urban context, and planning approaches.

In ten interviews, various people centrally involved describe transformation processes and everyday life in reused industrial areas. Operators, investors, users and representatives of administrative bodies have their say, as well as architects, urban planners and landscape architects. Three photographic essays take an artistic approach to the topics of atmosphere and identity at three stages of transformation: brownfield, temporary usage and permanent reuse. *City as Loft* is a compendium of information, ideas and reflections on the topic of adaptive reuse that is intended to stimulate further thought, comparison and debate.



The qualities of the loft are not limited to a single building – they can be transferred to the urban context as a whole. Flea Market, Blå / Oslo