|76| Designing Consequences: A Historical Urban Analysis of the Centre Pompidou in Paris: 1970-Present

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Resumo

With the launching of an international design competition in 1970, the Centre Georges Pompidou now has a four-decade history in the heart of Paris. The conventional narrative of this history has focused on the innovative nature of the architectural design of the building. In this paper, I present an analysis of the project's accidental success of the project vis-à-vis the contemporary urbanism of Paris. When completed in 1977, the Centre Pompidou took the architecture world by storm through its highly-visible steel frame structure, large-span flexible exhibit spaces, its brightly-colored services such as water and ventilation pipes on the exterior of the building, an all-glass façade that created multiple transparences, and programming for spaces and events that included a mediatheque, a state of the art film theater, a library open to the public, a restaurant with a stunning view of the city, and of course, multiple exhibition spaces that attracted millions of visitors every year.

At the same time, this singular building generated a larger scale transformation of the urban area, largely by accident. The paper constructs a framework for analysis that reveals the urban consequences of individual projects over time. As the Centre Pompidou attracted increasing numbers of Parisians and visitors (over 150 million so far), private and public investment poured into the surrounding buildings in the form of retail (e.g. cafes, stores) and residential uses (e.g. apartments). It created vibrant public spaces by facilitating magnetic attractions in the form of regular and lively street performers and a colorful, sculptural water fountain. Street performers such as musicians, clowns, jugglers, and artists enliven what is otherwise a poorly designed plaza in front of the center. The colorful Stravinksy fountain attracts a mix of young and old, residents and visitors to sit on its edge, to stroll around it, and the most urban of activities—to watch and be watched. The paper concludes by highlighting two aspects of this analysis. First, conventional historical analyses of

architectural projects often tend to miss their larger and more significant urban consequences, including unintended consequences. Second, through careful historical analysis of the consequences and after-effects of a project (rather than only its design intentions), we can learn much from such accidental successes in urbanism and integrate these lessons into future projects.

Sample References

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