

Infrastructural and Ecological Urbanisms

The evolution of American cities is intrinsically linked to the progressive development of infrastructure, and the role it has played in supporting the territorial colonization of the expanding metropolis. From the Haussmannization of Paris to the New Deal and WPA in America, the ambitions of modernism could not have taken hold without the enormous ideological and economic investment in engineered public works projects and the

belief that the technological restructuring of the city and instrumentalization of the landscape would inevitably lead to the modernization of the metropolis.

Julia Czerniak
Syracuse University

Within the contemporary context however, the extreme deterioration of the mechanistic life-support systems upon which our cities depend, the chaotic suburban sprawl and decreased urban densities that they have enabled, and the environmental problems resulting from the infrastructural transformation of large-scale landscapes, have questioned the role, scale and design of infrastructure in the making of the city and the capacity of architecture and urban design to contribute to its redevelopment. In addition, the predominant role that landscape plays within this largely infrastructural milieu through the pervasiveness of horizontal urbanization in America, the evolution of the megaform as a hybrid of architecture and landscape, and the rise in import of ecology in dealing with infrastructural recycling through the bio-remediation of vast post-industrial sites and previously acculturated geographies, has brought focused attention to landscape urbanism as both a discipline and practice. Unlike architecture, landscape has historically been uniquely positioned to understand both the scale and continuity of vast terrains and the temporal nature of living systems and has made great strides in contributing to our understanding of cities as urban biospheres, rather than as a collection of static and discrete cultural artifacts. Moving forward, and building on the contributions of landscape and ecological urbanism, we might therefore question how we bring a critical context to these issues while re-envisioning the multi-scalar roles of infrastructure and landscape in the remaking of the contemporary megalopolis