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Extended Abstract

Participatory processes: challenges and opportunities for the architectural practice in the XXI century

Case studies on *Cooperativa Trabalhar com os 99%* and *Arquitectos de Cabecera*

Sociocultural and political transformations defied the architectural practice and questioned the principles of the modern movement, in the defence and struggle for the collective right to the city. Giancarlo De Carlo, Jane Jacobs, and Henry Lefebvre are relevant authors on this subject.

The aim of this dissertation is to understand the dimension of participation in the learning, practice, and ethics of the architect, reading architecture as an eminently procedural discipline in close relationship with social sciences, to respond to the human condition of living, interacting, and participating in communities.

As case studies, the collectives *Cooperativa Trabalhar com os 99%* and *Arquitectos de Cabecera* are studied and analysed regarding their theoretical bases, overall progress, and methodological processes. The purpose is to understand which challenges and opportunities are currently present in the practices of architecture and urbanism, recognizing the social responsibility and the political commitment inherent to a participative architectural practice that aspires to an urban and social transformation.

This dissertation, therefore, seeks to contribute to the understanding of how the teaching and practice of architecture can contribute to the building of a more just, equal, and democratic city.

Keywords: architecture, participation, methodology, education, politics

From struggles to rights

In recent years we have witnessed a growing social and political awareness, in which participation has been gaining relevance in the most varied contexts. Architecture has been no exception. This has been marked by the emergence of more responsible and inclusive practices, in which the growth of an activism is highlighted, where participatory practices can be inserted.

However, these practices are not new, and stem from the 1960s. This decade was marked by socio-cultural and political transformations, consequences of the growth of capitalism and a consumer society, with repercussions on the urban (re)design of modern cities.

Such changes created a widespread crisis, which extended to architectural practices. From questioning the Modern Movement and its understanding of cities and the social dimension of the architect, and in the search for an alternative, thoughts emerged dedicated to the intersubjective encounter between architects and residents, with the purpose of sharing architectural production.

Giancarlo de Carlo | the principle of participation

The group of young architects from CIAM – Team X – started developing a critical reflection about the established principles on architecture and urbanism, giving a special consideration to the social role of the architect, focused on real people's needs.

From this group, the Italian architect Giancarlo de Carlo (1919-2005) stands out as one of the pioneers in the reflection about the importance of participation in architecture and the definition of work procedures that included the user in the project's development. Through this methodology, De Carlo explored the relationship between architecture and urbanism, as a way of responding to social and political problems. Thus, he proposed and thought a repositioning of the architect's role as a formulator of hypotheses, in a permanent process of exchange and dialogue between the technician, the built space, and people's needs, recognizing the importance of communication and negotiation methods. In the early 1960's, he developed the Urbino Master Plan, introducing community participation in the decision-making process, exposing his proposals to public discussion. It should be noted the social and political dimension intrinsic to their training, their practice, and their perspective on teaching architecture, understanding discipline as a technical duty in a true exercise of democracy and citizenship.

Jane Jacobs | eyes in the city

Simultaneously, in the USA, Jane Jacobs (1916-2006), journalist and activist with no training in architecture, also revealed herself as one of the biggest critics of the Modern Movement's principles, arguing that to understand the city it is necessary to relate its social and spatial processes.

Jacobs defended that the city should be planned on a human scale, placing herself in the position of those who live and inhabit it. Thus, questioning a series of principles on functionalization and sectorization of the city, which placed the car as a central element, supported a series of protests for the valorization of urban life. Jane understood the city as a living organism, formed by an organized complexity and dependent on the interaction of all people and agents, what she defined as everyday urban ballet. In this sense, she studied urban life with her eyes on the city, through her experience and observation. From this study, she concluded four principles that she considered essential to the thinking of a diverse, egalitarian, safe and fair city: density of people in the neighbourhoods, mix of uses, existence of buildings in different states of conservation and small blocks.

Henry Lefebvre | right to the city

The demands that marked May of 1968, namely in Paris, are crucial for understanding the context in which the sociologist and philosopher Henry Lefebvre (1901-1991) defined and defended the concept of the 'right to the city'.

Given that cities have always emerged in territories with a surplus in production, architecture and urbanism have always represented a problem of social classes (Harvey, 2008). Thus, urban struggles also represent social class struggles, and vice versa (Lefebvre,1968). Lefebvre materialized the speech and actions of the people, stating that the right to decide about the city was a common right, rather than

an individual right, reinforcing the idea that the right to the city unifies the struggle of social movements. Hence, every citizen has the right to participate in the urban project, in a democratic process of the city, through the exercise of collective power.

The type of city we aim to inhabit is related to the way of life we desire. As such, to have the right to (re)make the city is to be able to change the way we live. In this way, participation in the transformation of cities allows its inhabitants, by (re)inventing and (re)designing the city, to (re)invent themselves (Park, 1967 quoted in Harvey, 2008).

From social responsibility to political commitment

The human condition of participating

The understanding of man as a social being goes against the thought developed by the German philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), regarding the need of individuals to act, relate, communicate, live, and act in community (Arendt, 1958). Such condition of action, understood as the maximum expression of human will, is fundamental to life and to political thought (Arendt, 1958), as an exercise of freedom and citizenship.

Architecture is characterized as an intellectual and creative work of action at the polis (Arendt, 1958), due to its relationship with political action and social action, in which it seeks to play an active role in improving people's lives. In this sense, it is crucial that architects reinvent themselves, assuming "an active role in improving society and with architectural proposals that promote relationships between people"[1] (Montaner, 2017, p. 131).

The human being also needs to make, take, and have part (Bordenave, 1994) of collectives. However, "the test of fire of participation is not how much you take part but how you take part"[2] (Bordenave, 1994, p. 23), in which we can distinguish an active attitude that is involved, from a passive attitude that can take part without taking part in. This level of involvement in the processes influences how people feel responsible, or not, for success and maintenance; and the feeling of belonging that, in the best of scenarios, people take as their own, and the process does not end, even with the removal of technical teams. The creation of inclusive and democratic methods of communication and discussion gives transparency to decision making, the sharing of responsibilities and the realization of processes and policies.

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[1] Translated from the language read: "um papel ativo na melhoria da sociedade e com propostas arquitetónicas que promovam as relações entre as pessoas".

[2] Translated from the language read: "a prova de fogo da participação não é o *quanto se toma parte* mas *como se toma parte*".

The architect's ethics

According to a responsible attitude, attentive to each context, activism had and continues to play a decisive role in the processes of socio-cultural, political, and urban transformation, being considered today as an "update of the human need for action"[3] (Montaner, 2017, p. 177). The participation of users in these processes denotes the social and political commitment inherent in the role of the architect, revealing an ethical posture (Montaner, 2017, p. 157),

Activism "is increasingly present in contemporary architecture"[4] (Montaner, 2017, p. 143). The turn of the century was marked by the emergence of a series of alternative initiatives. Groups of young architects, critics, and creatives questioned the discipline of architecture again, based on a hierarchical and conventional practice in the cult for the work of the author - autonomous and brilliant - and in the valorization of design and object construction. Thus, they sought to explore a new relationship between theory and practice, through alternative actions and methodologies.

We highlight the architect Jo Noero (1951) in defending the architect's social and political role, through a strict code of ethics (Montaner, 2017). The latter goes so far as to refuse projects that he considers merely sculptural or formalistic, immoral, or that are not useful or appropriate at a cultural and social level. Moreover, the architect and activist Santiago Cirugeda (1972), through the analysis of the vulnerabilities of the cities and in the social needs, has taken advantage of gaps in legislation to occupy poorly used spaces, transforming them into opportunities. His publications influenced the creation of a network of collectives, which collaborate with each other and share work tools and methodologies. From a series of collectives, Col.lectiu Punt 6 and Equal Saree stand out, adding a critical gender perspective to the prism of (re)thinking capitalist and patriarchal architecture and society.

The empirical experience in academia

In the relationship between theory and practice, based on social, political, ethical, and activist principles, teaching is increasingly playing a determining role.

We must be aware that education is a political act (Freire, 1968), as well as the policies that influence it, and the form and contents that are taught. It was in this sense that the philosopher and pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-1997) explored a new relationship between the teacher, the student, and the society, in a closer, more horizontal, and more collective way. Therefore, he understood the need to create tools and skills that are not only acquired in a classroom, but in collective praxis, understood as a process where technique, theoretical research, practice, and empirical experience are mutually nourished (Montaner, 2017, p. 178). Participation is one of these processes, since "one only learns to participate, participating"[5] (Bordenave, 1994, p. 74), and it is in this sense that the academy has a marked role in the renovation of architecture.

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[3] Translated from the language read: "atualização da necessidade humana de ação".

[4] Translated from the language read: "está cada vez mais presente na arquitetura contemporânea".

[5] Translated from the language read: "só se aprende a participar, participando".

Ateliermob

From the studio to the cooperative

As a result of the 2008 crisis, and with the cancellation and interruption of many works, Ateliermob faced an internal reflection on which was the way forward. Reinforcing the collective's thinking about the social and political role of architecture, they sought to understand how their practice could serve people, and where the work of architects could be effectively useful (Ateliermob, 2013).

Trabalhar com os 99% began, as an extension of Ateliermob, to develop a series of architecture and social design projects, eventually forming a cooperative in 2016. As its designation indicates, they seek to develop processes with and for the 99% of people who have never used architecture services and never worked with architects, either because they do not consider them necessary or relevant, or because they do not have the financial means to do so. The genesis of the cooperative is based on yet another axis of action, which is linked to the desire to have political participation, from its presence in the territories to decision-making processes.

Once in the neighbourhoods, forever in the neighbourhoods

In this section, we focus on the work developed in a series of neighbourhoods in the city of Lisbon, where we seek to explore a work process in which people are accounted for, developing projects that go beyond architecture. This view leads them to free themselves from typical orders and financing, looking for others, both on a different scale and in nature.

Three territories were analysed - *Terras da Costa*, districts of north and south *PRODAC* and *Rua de Marvila* - in which the collective has worked in recent years and developed a series of processes.

During this study, we sought to understand the social and political contexts in which these processes developed, which methods were used to include people in the processes of discussion and decision, which results were obtained from them, which entities were involved throughout the process, and which was the path and the evolution of the work over the years, to identify a collective work mode.

Que praça queremos? | Praça de Todas as Nações

Following the same analysis points, we developed an analysis on one of the last processes developed by the collective, of which I was able to be part and understand through my experience and observation.

The project started from a collective work to resist evictions in the centre of Lisbon, evolving into a participatory process over a square in the heart of the *Anjos* neighbourhood, as a claim for public space, thought and conquered by the people who inhabit the territory.

Arquitectos de Cabecera

Origin | from university to city

Arquitectos de Cabecera (AC) emerged from a student movement at ETSAB in 2013, in response to the social, professional, and academic crisis that was being felt. During assemblies, students and teachers recognized the lack of timeliness of the exercises and the lack of contact with reality. Questioning the teaching model in force, they proposed an altered teaching system, i.e., an academic program and methodology that was more attentive and committed to the needs of society and the city, putting students in contact with the people (Bilbao, Bohigas, 2016).

Its designation arises from the analogy with the *medicos de cabecera* (family doctors), for its understanding of architecture as a public service. Relating the exercise of the architect to that of a doctor, as a technician who knows his patient, his history, and his context - fundamental professional for an efficient and democratic system, through a work of proximity and continuity with people.

The desire to take these reflections outside the academy and act actively in the city emerged, explaining the usefulness of the profession and the university, making students' skills available to the needs of people, through a workshop in the medieval center of Barcelona.

Experience | in the city

In 2015, the AC participated in an exhibition at the CCCB, which proposed a reflection on the problems in housing and in the public space that the city of Barcelona and Medellín faced, bringing together different universities, associations and collectives, both Spanish and Colombian. Of the different parts of the exhibition, the elaboration of feasible proposals and actions with the neighbors stands out.

They installed an *oficina de atención al ciudadano* workshop in the public space, duly identified and open to the whole community, to collect and meet the needs of the community. In order to better understand the nature of the proposed action with the workshop, we looked at the analysis of two cases developed: the request of Sarah, a resident of the Raval neighbourhood, who requested help to improve the living conditions of the building she occupied with other people; and the request of Fundación Tot Raval - which brings together more than 60 entities in the neighbourhood - which sought support to prevent the eviction and demolition of a building that housed several collectives.

Change | at the University

A change in the study plans of the university, led this academic proposal to become a curricular unit. Following this achievement, the ACs were challenged by the municipality of Santa Coloma de Gramenet to develop a project in one of the city's neighbourhoods: Els Safaretjos.

This was organized in three distinct, interdependent, and complementary moments (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2017): a 3-week summer workshop, the first approach to the study of the neighbourhood; the first semester, where the proposals set out in the workshop were developed; and the second semester, organized a neighbourhood party. In order to unite people and combat the lack of feeling of belonging to that place, the result of the lack of some social cohesion.

During the in-depth study of the latter, we analysed the social and urban context of the territory, the tools and methods that the team of students used in organizing the event, the way it took place and the conclusions that could be drawn from it, in a way to be able to understand the CA's work methodology.

Final considerations

This dissertation allowed the comprehension of participative processes on the conception of the architectural project, as the research was directed towards the understanding of their contexts and motivations, the various implicit issues in the very act of participating, and to its real materialization, both in practice and in teaching architecture.

In the course of the research we understand that the questioning of the practice and teaching of architecture has been a constant throughout history. However, the topic of participation has gained prominence in contexts of social, cultural, political, economic, urban, or housing crisis, due to the transforming role of the urban architectural process.

The study on participatory processes in architecture demonstrated the interdisciplinarity and complexity of the implicit issues in the act of participating, demonstrating its pertinence in a work that is articulated with social sciences. The relationship with social responsibility, political commitment and the architect's code of ethics grew to be evident.

The comparative analysis of the case studies showed that both are representative of the way in which participatory processes materialize in an attentive and critical teaching, in a concrete and inclusive practice, and in democratic policies committed to society and the city.

The case studies have different fields of action - *Cooperativa Trabalhar com os 99%* in a professional scope, and *Arquitectos de Cabecera*, in an academic scope -, therefore differing in their modus operandi. *Cooperativa* claims to try not to follow a predefined 'methodology'; nevertheless, we were able to underline a position that has been consolidated with its practice. AC, on the other hand, define a series of methodological steps that, serving as guidelines for students' academic work, seek to function as an open and adaptable formula. Still, we can identify similar and representative aspects in both methodologies.

These processes can start from the request of the people or of communities themselves, from signaling by the case studies, or even by entities, public or private, that create a bridge between both parties, distinguishing themselves from conventional order or contest projects.

While diagnosing the contexts, both teams go to the 'blank slate' territories, seeking to know and understand people's needs through contact with them - in an objective way and free from pre-established analyses - with the intention of devising solutions that are concrete and feasible, and that effectively improve people's lives, moving away from the idea of the hero architect. In this sense, and understanding that they are not the only ones operating in the territories, they seek to work with local entities, as an active agent that joins a process that does not begin or end with it.

Due to the understanding that architecture is not an autonomous practice, and investing in the exchange between different areas, case studies are interdisciplinary teams. These are often associated with other case studies, in a network - both nationally and internationally -, following principles of horizontality, collaboration, and cooperativity, in which the success of some turns is the success of all.

By observing and interpreting the city as overlapping layers of information, case studies use different approaches to explore the territories: assemblies or meetings with communities, for a more general study; surveys or interviews, for a more specific analysis; installation of local support offices, for a greater presence in the territories, and consequently greater proximity to people; and actions and dynamics with and for communities, in order to provoke stimuli in the territories, which enrich the diagnoses.

Throughout the processes, case studies seek a balance between their technical skills, people's desires and needs, and circumstances. This process of continuous work of sharing, dialogue, and mutual learning, promoting possible social changes, seeks to be more valued than the physical materialization of the built spaces. In the work of AC, we highlight the consistent production of a technical *dossier* that comprehensively documents the process, and that is delivered to all the entities involved.

However, the fact that case studies have different scopes ends up distinguishing them in their field and time of action. While *Cooperativa* seek to assume responsibility for outlining performance strategies, AC seek to develop specific skills in students, for a more humanistic, broad, and committed future practice. Participatory processes, as they involve the inclusion of people and social, cultural, political, and urban transformations, need and take their time. This time is longer in the work of *Cooperativa*, since it accompanies different interventions in the territories, sometimes conditioned by politics and bureaucracy. In AC, the time of action is subject to the academic calendar, sometimes proving to be conditional on the completion of some processes. For that same reason, they ended up creating the *Asociación Arquitectos de Cabecera*, to also impact the architectural practice.

Participative architecture is not just a way of thinking and feeling. It is a way of being and acting collectively. It demands a strong relationship with the human and social sciences, based on a continuous exchange through horizontality and dialogue, true instruments of democracy. In this process, the architect has a mediating role, i.e., he is the technician with the skills to establish relationships, understand problems, and formulate solutions, based on an educational action with people. Hence, the teaching of architecture must come from a dialectical practice with reality, through pedagogies and methodologies that use participatory experience.

We conclude, therefore, that the action of architecture ought to continue to be a driving force for transformation, following new contemporary challenges which go beyond social and political issues, covering themes such as sustainability, gender equality, and quality of life (private and public). It is relevant, particularly in view of the current pandemic situation, to consider and value the real needs of all people.

With this thesis we intend to persist in the search of how professional and academic environments can enrich and complement each other, to develop critical thinking, and to value the social and political relevance of architecture. This research intensified our interest in continuing an active and transforming participation, for a more just, egalitarian, and truly democratic society and city.

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