



Reflection

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REFLECTIONS OVER THE GRADUATION PROCESS

The openness on the Urbanism studios allows us to research and design based on our interests and ambitions. The students are challenged to confront their ideas in the quest for a more pragmatic, analytical and academic view of urbanism and all aspects involved. The methodological framework is an important tool for guidance throughout the entire process, but it is also not fixed and subject to changes according to the findings during the development.

FIRST STEPS (THE DETOUR)

My graduation started in the search for participatory and therefore more inclusive practices in Architecture and Urbanism. Within the studio topic "Complex cities: inclusive cities" I emerged on the quests for how theory and practice could relate to each other promoting better practices (socially, economically, formally, etc.) in complex environments. That led me to expand my research horizon going from the theories behind the provision of a more just and inclusive environment such as the ones expressed by Marcuse and Fainstein; to the tools, new forms of organization and methodologies to implement it in the writings of Saskia Sassen, Di Siena

and Salinas. Furthermore, I also went through the theories in search for new economical models, complimentary to the current capitalist model, aspiring a more just and inclusive order. These ideas are presented by David Harvey and De Soto, mainly.

Looking at the practical field, Giancarlo de Carlo was precursor when introducing the participatory and open processes already during the 60's and 70's. The Villa Matteotti and Urbino projects proposed to rethink the modernist planning in which the urban planner would draw the city solely according to his own beliefs. Instead, the society and the user would play a more central role on decision making in order to achieve more assertive spatial solutions. Nowadays, Fainstein describes it as the Just City approach to planning. Di Siena, has been working in a pragmatic way with collectives that include vary professional expertise and work in a horizontal hierarchy, involving many different stakeholders into the process. Richard Sennett and Patsy Healey frequently write on the matter. The question nonetheless was 'how to work this topic in my graduation project'? It was a long and difficult process to go from the theories to the design.

THE CHOICE OF AN AREA

The decision on the area was of major importance to establish a connection with the theories read so far. Therefore, some characteristics were fundamental to make

São Paulo and the Largo do Arouche the research site.

São Paulo can be characterized as a divided city where the formal and informal are present but are physically and socially apart. The origins of this process can be traced back to size and scale of urban expansion that generated a deficit in the physical and social infrastructures. As a result it emerged the squatter areas: favelas and also irregular settlements in watershed areas. This division perpetuates inequalities as many people aren't given the conditions to work within the system and therefore can't increase wealth; in the other hand, the other part of society has available state-of-the-art technology and vast wealth. These disparities happen because the market is the driving force on building the city and the welfare state can't balance the situation. Spatially, it creates barriers such as the walled buildings and also the un-walled represented by a segregated environment.

These same conditions seen throughout the city can be seen specifically in the city centre. There, the urban growth was determinative for the current aspects of abandonment, segregation, social exclusion, gentrification, deterioration and more recently speculation. Thus, within the city centre I chose to focus on the Largo do Arouche region. An area spatially formed by the impact of infrastructure resulting in a set of left over spaces. Located on the border with the formal city, it has nearby

two metro stations, regional roads, local market and service and leisure venues. Many actors are present, configuring a tension condition, but also a space for opportunities. The transformation of the elevated road nearby in an urban park by the population, the artistic occupations together with social movements set the region in a progressive standard where popular participation in the urban life is already consolidated.

INCLUDING PARTICIPATION (FIRST REFLECTIONS)

The distance from the research area and the turns on my thesis, so far, led me to explore a work focused on developing a space conditioned for people occupation and therefore participation; a difficult aspect to measure. A condition I was already foreseeing and confirmed by Richard Sennett on a conference organized at TU Delft. For him, constructing the commons has a limit on the physical scale and there on it is needed collaboration. No single person can design the commons, it is needed the interference of others with the space. Within this context my design had little to do with participation.

The quest for introducing participation on my design introduced the experimental character to the work. I detached a bit from the traced framework and started trying out to implement ideas and test some of the theories I read. Thus, on June 2016, I conducted an experimental workshop

aiming to fill in the gap on participatory design into the thesis. This workshop intended to test, regarding limitations, the interference of different groups in a design process. It gave me data to hypothetically work with people needs in an experimental way.

The preparation of materials for the workshop gave me tools to guide the process focusing on topics I am interested on and in a certain way, to slightly delineate the outcome. Therefore, many of my ideas for the area were present in the final result according to the focus I've put on the presentation at the beginning. Nevertheless, also as expected, a great amount of new ideas and different visions were presented. This confirms my ideas that urban development from a plan or a blueprint produce a huge gap when compared to another's wishes. Thus, the process of the workshop showed me a new role in the profession of architects and urbanists: the manager. As Di Siena says and Zus studio described in their work for De Dépendence, the urban planner is assuming new roles and planning become an extended work instead of a "thought-through plan that is implemented phase by phase" (Zus-schieblock, at zus.cc). This means that, we are not only designers any more, and our commitment to the plan starts before the design phase and the entire process hasn't a settled end date. So, it starts by discovering the place through its actors, it involves the design and gives the actors the chance to interfere and change, extending the

planner commitment.

Here, my quest for participation grew; I wanted to understand how participation works and how it can be implemented in all steps of the project, thus I needed to design.

From that it also emerged my main research question: "How can participation promote structural changes in Largo do Arouche?"

THE DESIGN

As I argue at the begin of the thesis report, the problem in São Paulo's current planning system – where a plan usually in form of written guidelines for the entire city is made – is that it lacks a finished design. This would set a goal to specific and current demands and allow it to be feasible. For that reason, I had first to deliver a finished design.

The ideas from the workshop together with the literature I've been reading since the very begin of this graduation project, some lectures I attended, reference projects I researched, analysis I did and information I got from the site and informal talks with friends and colleagues gave me the basis to start designing the space.

Changing the quality of space by reducing disproportions (such as oversized streets and downsized sidewalks), creating the sense of a local region and giving it a pedestrian friendly composition, giving

the oppressed a central place in order to integrate, linking the local sphere to the regional (the square to the elevated road/park) and identifying plots for new equipment and new developments were the main strategies used. The design of the singularities and detailing of each area (benches, usage of the square, etc.) was based on reference designs and experiences. Exponential are the experience of Aldo van Eyck with the playgrounds and the Ibirapuera Park Marquee of Oscar Niemeyer. They were used to try to reproduce the same spatial change and quality.

Designing the entire project myself would be repeating the existing practices and theories that are ideological and utopic. It was nevertheless, a necessary step to go further to the next stage of urban development: the strategy for building up.

THE STRATEGY (FURTHER REFLECTIONS)

Public construction in Brazil is trusted to the Government and sometimes to the private capital. It is evident that according to the proportion of our social, economical and infrastructural issues, local matters are not prioritized and have accordingly, less funding. There is already in São Paulo a financial "device" that increases the onus of urban development to the private sector.

The CEPAC (Certificate of Additional Construction Potential) is used to buy more construction area to a particular site (as

the name self-explain) or to change the function determined at the master plan. These devices are sold by the Government and negotiated at the stock market. The revenue from these operations is necessarily used on urban developments of adjacent areas.

My questionings on how to include Civil Society into this equation of sharing the onus for urban developments gave me the idea to combine the CEPAC instrument with the now popular crowd funding (following the experience of the Luchtsingel in Rotterdam). Therefore, in the specific case of Largo do Arouche, the CEPAC's would be used to fund my plan in a crowd funding base: implementations on constructive potential or building function monetarily equivalent to percentage of the project. At the same time, the plan would be open for voluntary contributions. The entire process would be registered in a transparent and open way through an online platform, as usual in a crowd funding. The usage of this structure guarantees the establishment of a symbiotic environment: as much density, the more the urban quality; the more urban quality, the best circumstances for private developments; less density, the less urban quality; and so on.

At the end, some questionings emerged over the constant factors and variables of this project. What should be fixed and what should be conditioned to social appropriation? Through the building of the

project and all the social and spatial research I did on inclusion, integration and urban quality, I consider very important and a fixed design the location pointed on the master plan for each activity or new equipment. For instance, the central placement of the homeless structure is imperative for a change in the social structure, as well the acceptance and inclusion of these actors into the society.

Nevertheless, my entire design was based on concepts of dynamic and amorphous spaces. Through readings on dynamic architecture, especially on the work of Vacancy Studies by RAAAF, my thinking was motivated to deconstruct the meaning/ symbolism of things as we know and therefore transform the public space in a place of limitless possibilities. This way, since the design conception we open up to possible changes and create a space that changes itself and has multiple ways of occupation. This guided my intervention by understanding the historical usages of public space in Brazil: an important place for social interchange. It was a place for trade and very used by children to establish "playing" connections. Therefore the selection and placement of activities by deconstructing the current public space and constructing it through the multiple interpretations of the past can generate an amorphous and dynamic space and consequently more likely to human appropriation. There stands my limitation as a designer. The formalist visuals and compositions of this new space are going to be

conditioned to human interaction in the best of the hypothesis, because this means it succeed.

THE NEXT STEPS (DECONSTRUCTING THE STEPS)

Finally, It is still important for me not to forget the broader picture of my research: finding solutions for a global networked generic condition based on the used methodology. I started from a generic global condition on a large scale: the theories on the social matter on the urban field. Thenceforth, I zoomed in looking for correspondences of these conditions in a city, in this case São Paulo representing a medium scale. And zoomed in further and further until the micro-scale represented by the Largo do Arouche region. With its particularities and also general problems my goal was to test particular solutions in order to arrive at more general principles applicable elsewhere. To get there I had already to deconstruct and construct even my views and perceptions realizing that the entire process is open and complex and that is the reason for the huge gap between practice and theory yet. Now, the final question worth consideration and further reflection is "Is it possible to use this method and this strategy elsewhere in a network of local interventions

