



# Attention, City in the making!

Participatory methods in Architectural and Urban Design:  
Creating public values for urban regeneration

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## Reflection and Appreciation

Of the development of a Graduation Project

### On the Project

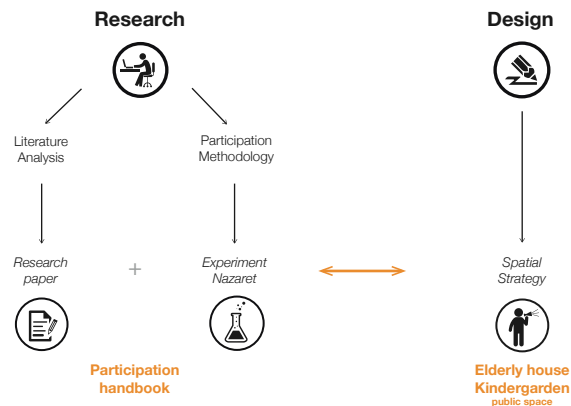
A graduation project is the culmination of a phase, the pinnacle of the learning process that will not only be the end but also the beginning of future interests and paths. In my case, the opportunity to explore my fascination on participation broadened my perspective on human interaction with and within buildings and had a major influence in my position as an architect.

Although my real interest did not seem evident in my first proposals for the graduation project, now looking back it appears as obvious to me: the reason why I became an architect and why I chose this graduation project is because I deeply believe in the power of architecture in politics, in the life of the city.

The project ‘Attention, City in the making!’ proves that making the city is a continuous process that should involve interaction from the main stakeholders: civic society, public sector and private interest. Specifically, the research focuses on how participatory methods in Architectural and Urban Design can help creating public values for urban regeneration, understanding that urban regeneration is a way of continuously making the city.

## On the methods

The project was divided in two parts—the research and the design— connected by an experimental case. The first would give the theoretical background and raise the questions that would be answered by the experiment and finalised in the design of a building.



Together with the literature analysis of relevant publications on participation, urban regeneration, public buildings and other related topics, the development of participatory processes gave coherence to the argument for citizen inclusion in the creation of the built environment since it would not make sense to advocate for such a topic from a merely theoretical approach.

The location chosen for the case experiment was Nazaret, a deprived neighbourhood of Valencia (Spain) presenting major challenges in terms of economical, social integration and spatial exclusion. Together with the two antagonist neighbourhood associations, a series of activities and meetings were scheduled to develop a project for a mid-term strategy and public building which, of course, would be decided by citizen participation.

Interacting with real actors while doing an academic project was a great chance to discover the real challenges and opportunities of the architect as a mediator and also gave freedom to engage with the community in a non-institutional way creating trust bonds while managing expectations.

Using the conclusions of the workshops undertaken in May and June 2015, a spatial strategy and the design of a public building were designed. The first one, dealt with the large urban scale in the mid-term and proposed interventions to improve the general situation of the area that would develop together with a new centrality, the designed public building. During the first set of activities, it became clear through interviews and workshops what the program and location of the project should be: a kindergarden and elderly house in the plot of the former military police house.

### **On the effects**

Besides being very enriching for the project to count with real citizen interaction, it was also very enriching personally to realize how much the architect can do for the city without laying a single brick, just by discussing, managing, collaborating with the people. The project also showed alternative ways of designing to the traditional commission-proposal scheme.

When it comes to academic outcome, the 'Attention, City in the making!' project demonstrated how empirical research projects can be feasible in architecture education working with real agents and real needs. Research conclusions also suggest that more integration of participative design methods in spatial planning should be implemented as the new development paradigm, which eventually should also be reflected in education curriculum.

### **On the relevance**

Nowadays, participation is a commonly used word in political and urban discourse. On the one hand, interactive technologies turned users into individuals that want to be heard and interact with their environment and make decisions about it. Platforms such as 'airbnb' or 'uber' make clear that individuals now advocate for platforms regulated by interactive feedback (ratings) and escape former institutional control.

Nevertheless, the actual definition and possibilities of participation in architecture and urban design is largely unknown. Therefore, the study of participatory methods is now more relevant than ever, especially related to technology, image and urban issues.

Saying that participation should become the new paradigm for spatial planning might sound bold yet participation in different ways is already a reality and architecture and urbanism should adapt to it.