

Architecture **of** **Transitional** **Justice**

The Cooperative as Part of Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Colombia

Federico Ortiz Velásquez



P5 Reflection

Explore Lab Graduation Studio 2020, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
Delft University of Technology

P5 Reflection Report

Architecture of Transitional Justice The Cooperative as Part of Post-Conflict Colombia

Mentors: Alper Alkan, Jan van de Voort, Aleksandar Stanicic

Architecture of Transition aims to address the participation of architecture within transitional justice, a judicial mechanism applied in the aftermaths of conflicts or dictatorships. The recent Colombian Peace Agreement between the government of Colombia and FARC-EP offers the opportunity to study the spatialization of political, social and economic concepts, where architecture could operate at the center of the healing, re-signifying, and reparative processes, taking as case study the rural municipality of Granada, Antioquia.

The research I carried out for the past months has provided me with the right conceptual and analytical tools to continue this project through the design of an architectural intervention that will respond to the specific political, socio-economic, and spatial conditions in Granada. The methodology I applied encompassed the understanding of the political context of the country in the aftermath of the armed conflict and the peace-making process, and the political concepts such as Transitional Justice through a literature-historical research about the Colombian conflict and the world wide implementation of Transitional Justice models worldwide; the diversity in perspectives and positions regarding the actors of the conflict through a series of interviews with the representatives of different parties; and the spatial comprehension of the municipality where the conflict staged, both on mapping and *in situ* levels, with a

photographic, journalistic and anthropological approach.

I have translated this findings into the architectural project as concept input in different degrees: the mapping and site visit exercise contribute in the site choice, where I decided to intervene two blocks, repairing the urban fabric and linking the project in the surrounding nature. The program choice for a cooperative is supported by the knowledge and sensitivity gained during the research and interview process, where the need for collective spaces and common goals find their spatialization through the creation of an Agrarian Cooperative, not only focusing on the economic and productive means, but the education, commemoration, and improvement of the daily life of the residents of Granada as well.

The project aims to answer the questions of how architecture can bridge the gap between the violent past and the promise of a peaceful future, focusing on the social and productive practices broken by conflict? And, how can the production-oriented shared facilities and public spaces revive the socio-economic infrastructure of Granada?

The results of the research have a strong sociological ground. During the site visit, I could experience the daily conditions of culture and behavior, the mountainous topography, and the economic practices that have taken place in this municipality for generations. The strong collective links between the residents and the agrarian background weakened by the conflict are the main two interests in my architectural design. Therefore, the project has a direct relationship between research and design, where research findings and insights gained by first-hand interviews and observations help me translate them into the design an agrarian cooperative and coffee production plant.

Land-Form, Built-Form, and Public Program.

The project faces the main activity hub of the town – the central square – on its upper part, while links the architecture and program with the Santa Barbara creek on the other side. In the square, the buses frequently arrive, bringing people and goods from the rural areas, therefore, the square bridges the territorial – rural – and the urban in space. Usually, the architecture surrounding the central square of rural municipalities in Colombia is mostly considered heritage, with churches and colonial buildings made out of rammed earth. Although Granada is not the exception, the amount of built heritage is significantly low. I propose to intervene in the northern block of the square due to the opportunity it presents, as it is filled with contemporary and self-made housing buildings, where the architecture could infill within the existing context and extend the operation towards the following block until it meets the main water body, the creek.

The links between urban and natural settings have been broken due to the irregular growth of the urban area, where the creek became open sewage; this project also seeks to provide the right spatial conditions for residents to meet again with their main natural resources and repair the broken link to the nature. The topography presents a minor slope – 7% – in the first urban block, while the second one has a more challenging topographic condition, with an average inclination of 30% until it meets the creek. The existing buildings already demonstrate some logics of construction, cascading the spaces until they reach the lower part of the slope, maintaining a certain rhythm in unity of the landscape, and allowing each house to have natural lighting. Other reasons – not visible on site – to intervene in such a challenging condition may be to prolong a flat surface over the slope to create more useful space, or to embed the massing on the terrain, creating a useful terrace space while connecting the main interior space at the ground level.

Site Conditions – Site Strategy.

Firstly, the project operates as an infill rather than a tabula rasa approach. A selective demolition takes place, removing the buildings on delapidated conditions and poor infrastructure, making space for the new massing that aims to repair and improve the urban condition of the site through architecture as an in-between form of the present and the future of the town. The building grafts the program of the cooperative in the heart of the urban life of Granada, and enhances the repair of social links broken by the conflict. There is a direct relation with the square through the entrance hall, a volume with a modest proportion that suits its context and avoids a monumental presence on the site, while contrasting from the neighboring buildings with its materiality. Secondly, the proposed massing merges two main architectural concepts: courtyards and cascading volumes. These two concepts come from the study of the traditional and vernacular solutions for indoor-outdoor relations and the logics on topographic connections with the context previously acknowledged.

Programmatically, the cooperative is per se a collective institution where people work, produce and share together to reach common goals. The building, therefore, is a space where everyone has access and the public activities are strengthened, with spaces for gatherings and discussions, exhibition, manual work, administration, reflection, commerce, and education. The complexity of the cooperative's programs relies on the intermingling of activities, finding such connections in spaces considered as *freespaces*, namely the spaces for uses not yet conceived, defined by the local and cultural connections, rather than solely by geometrical schemes. Consequently, the project meant to act as a generator, allowing multiple reconfiguration options and adaptability.

Multiscalar Approach: Site, Tectonics, and Material.

The strategy for indoor-outdoor connections serves a double function. On the one hand, enhancing the collective activities with wider spaces – larger *freespaces* – where more people can meet and work together, children can play in the open spaces, and flexibility takes place as a gesture of anticipation, where the building is capable of adapting itself to future changes and needs. On the other hand, the courtyards help adapt better to the climatic conditions, with cross ventilation and natural lighting for each space. From the square to the creek, the experience of the cooperative's space unfolds a journey for local participants and visitors, an open system of public and semi-public spaces where the community plays a fundamental role in the social, economic, and political future of the municipality, sustaining the communal growth in the long term.

I apply a combination of tectonic and stereotomic operations in design. The massing of the cooperative complex follows a grid of 1,2m x 1,20m creating a module that prolongs or shrinks depending on the programmatic necessity. These modules appear as heavy masses that are “carved” from the two materials I will use, which are inherent in the identity of Granada: brick and rammed earth. Brick might be the most common building material employed in this region since the mid-20th century, easy to transport, build and maintain.

The Brick March, one of the most symbolic events that took place in Granada represented the reconstruction of the townscape after the bombing of 2000. Hundreds marched together holding bricks in their hands and, according to the interviews I carried out, those bricks were used for the reconstruction of the housing units. Although brick is the common building material in Colombia and its symbolic meaning in Granada is relevant, the Cooperative project demands certain degree of innovation and reinterpretation of the symbolism behind the material choice. I argue

that rammed earth represents this responsibility, a common material in the Andean region of Colombia since colonial times. Granada is not the exception, and many rural houses and public buildings have been built with this material, now replaced with contemporary building systems. Rammed earth can be employed for the materialization of the architecture of TJ to the smallest scale, encompassing the involvement of the community as part of the processes of production and maintenance it requires, contributing to the necessity of a collective work that builds social tolerance, and on the more considerable extent, maintaining the peace.

In my project, I propose to use prefabricated rammed earth wall panels as a mean to involve the residents in Granada in the construction of the cooperative in safe working conditions, similarly as the victims were part of the construction of Fragmentos, where women – victims of sexual violence during the conflict – built the aluminum plates which were later used to cast the iron from FARC's weapons, becoming the floor and main artistic installation. Consequently, the social and collective purpose of the project is inscribed in its realisation on the land, site, program and built form.