

Self-Building the City

The architecture office of Recetas Urbanas (Urban Recipes), led by architect Santiago Cirugeda, proposes actions of self-building or auto-construction as a radical alternative to the 'official urbanism' dominated by established economic and political interests. The purpose of these projects or 'recipes' for intervention is to rebuild citizens' capacity to recuperate a critical conscience and respond to spatial injustice.

Strategies of self-building enable architects to answer to the particular needs of the groups with whom they work and the contexts in which they design. It is a model that accommodates the involvement of

people and communities in the creation and construction of their spaces.

In the present moment it is essential for radical architects and their communities to be more prepared and act faster, because the agents of 'official urbanism' continue to pursue their own interests every day, without needing to listen to ordinary people or reach a consensus to make a decision. Self-building allows the disenfranchised to take part in shaping their city.

The characteristics of the self-building approach may include: participatory strategies, fast development, appropriation of space, reuse of

...

...

pedagogical activities and, of course, the low cost of implementation.

This construction model, eclipsed by excessive legal regulations that favor established interests, needs to be revived as an option for critical intervention. It can serve as a counter-technique against more conservative, entrenched visions of urban development.

Such radical actions may provoke reactions, such as censorship or legal challenges by the government. Recetas Urbanas has endured such challenges in the course of previous projects in Seville, Spain such as the 'Chicken' House, The Nest, La Carpa Art Space

and the Proyectalab. Perhaps the most important goal is to provoke public debate.

The projects presented in the exhibition are licensed to the public domain and may be replicated or adapted by citizens elsewhere, including their strategic design and juridical aspects. Recetas Urbanas recommends that citizens conduct thorough research on the locations and situations in which they may wish to intervene. Citizens will assume any physical or intellectual risks produced by such interventions.

NB: Legislation on self-building does not currently exist in Europe.

~

Legal Architecture

Projects developed after demand or necessity of a group of citizens or even citizenship in general, which can be carried out within legal frames or within the deadlines specified by public administration. We include here some projects in which legality has been “induced” after slight modifications of laws and regulations—some politician’s open-minded attitude towards the law has been also helpful sometimes, though political arbitrariness has also played against the project, as it was the

case in the restoration and extension of the “Benicassim Prosthesis”. The project consisted on a multidisciplinary space, conceived to host different cultural activities. It was created with the will of solving the need for a creative and discussion space of Collectives and destitute people. Besides it, the project incorporated new spaces for the education and production, as well as two housing spaces for the guest artists. Though the project was developed within legality, it has been censored and finally closed because of a change of government.

Extralegal architecture

The legal nature of some projects relies on loopholes, that is, the absence of a specific regulation or an exact definition within a legal framework. These actions can stimulate a legal change for a further improvement of the juridical framework, or just stay as a transitory step.

We have also assumed extralegality or non-illegality when we have neither instigated nor required the supervision of the administration for a project's execution. For example our intervention in the Lecture Building of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Malaga, a project in keeping with the spirit of the newly created faculty's staff, very inclined to a conception of contemporary art as a cross-disciplinary field. The most important point of the experience,

however, is neither the "trench" itself nor its further actual usage, but the fact that people get organized and learn to think and work by themselves.

The creation of the network "Collective Architectures" in 2007 assumed likewise an extralegal structure. The network gathers more than 100 collectives which collaborate together and exchange architectural and management models, out of the juridical framework for professional associations.

The making of self-construction with all kinds of people over the last 20 years has been characterized by extralegality as a result of the lack of adequate laws and rules in the so-called first world, and has also generated a true methodology based on good practices which could get consolidated in a new juridical framework.

Illegal Architecture

Some projects become unambiguously illegal, since certain necessities or changes claimed by the citizens are not taken into account by current legal frameworks.

They may be considered as acts of civil disobedience or simply as a way to mitigate an emergency unable to wait for the administration deadlines or even a change in the law. It has to do with stability and improvement of a group of users.

A clear case of civil disobedience is the self-denunciation to the authorities for the construction of an illegal housing on a rooftop, in order to attract attention and propose a system of shared inter-generational housing to be included in European Plans for the improvement of urban districts.

Another example of illegality —which we assumed for two years— is The School Grows [La Escuela Crece], with civil and penal risks for Recetas Urbanas and the faculty staff of the public school of Design of Madrid as a result of the lack of public support.

Glossary

[extract from the book :

Trucks, Containers and Collectives]

The concept of “extralegality” applies to occupation strategies carried out by means of neither regulated nor prohibited methods of becoming owner of “things which are ownerless”. Unlike legal occupations (adhered to methods in accordance to the law) or illegal occupations (against the law), extralegal occupations take advantage of loopholes—areas where the

regulation is blurry or does not exist. The texts of legal regulations often oversimplify or limit rights because of their inability to enclose the great variety of real life. Extralegality does not mean “against the law”; it rather goes a step further, displaying possibilities not considered before. This way of acting can finally achieve a change in the legal framework, and so what was initially illegal becomes legal. This process may be called “induced legality” and clearly illustrates the last intention of these transgressions: to get to modify the law.