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Re-thinking the way of living in European cities

A new way of developing the city is slowly emerging. The scale, the pace and the parties involved are changing. Detailed blueprints no longer determine the future development of the city; urban development has become more fluid and intangible. Quantity no longer sets the tone, professional developers no longer have a natural dominance and large scale urban transformations have gone out of fashion. Of course this has to do with the economic crises - big plans need large amount of money -, but it is also a sign of the times, an indication of changing views on the way we organize urban transformations.

Small scale interventions, bottom-up initiatives, cooperative building and redevelopment of existing buildings; they all show a changing attitude in urban planning. They demonstrate that planning has become more open and receptive and that valuable transformations are not necessarily the outcome of clear-cut and fixed plans.

This new way of urban planning paves the way for new (housing) typologies, for new relations between private and public domain, for new ideas on power consumption and on the use of natural resources. It gives the opportunity to re-think the way we organize the way of living in the European city.

Some topics to explore:

Individuality and community

Social changes like the increase of one person households and the increase of senior citizens call for other forms of housing projects in which communal and service facilities play an important role. Reflecting upon how this type of projects can be integrated in the city and in what way cities can profit from communal housing is essential. In this respect design research of redevelopment of existing buildings could be interesting as well as exploring possibilities for integrating environmental concepts.

Co-determination

Difficult economic times entail a (temporary) withdrawal of professional developers. This withdrawal triggers off and intensifies new developing models, like building cooperatives that take matter in their own hands and create, through a process of co-determination, a block of houses themselves. This new type of development shows great promise in terms of urban diversity and vital neighbourhoods. Reflecting upon in what way cities can stimulate and support this new type of development is elemental as well as exploring new housing typologies that allow for people's different needs and lifestyles.

Frame and flexibility

What components of the city can be considered flexible, fluid and what parts can be seen as the city's backbone? It is a call for innovative projects that are able to extend or find again an identity of structural elements of the city (built or landscaped) in a context of significant changes. What are the city's main principles, what is its essence? In what way can natural resources form an integral part of the city's structure?

longer permanence. Neither marriages nor corporations, ministries, professions, governments, families, buildings, tools, churches, dresses, banks nor even States now have any reason to last longer than the duration of an average human life, and more often than not, in the course of their lives, the mortals constantly see (all these things) decaying and falling. (...) If the industrial revolution ended up with the book and the post-industrial revolution put an end to books, who will be left to talk about these non-recyclable lives?"

With everything losing consistency, we ask ourselves how we can go back to thinking about concepts like continuity and permanence, duration, memory or even transcendence, from an architectural perspective?

We are also faced with a pressing dilemma. In the midst of a city of garbage like Detroit today, we can hear a silent scream alerting us to the colossal mistake of basing the fate of societies on exponential growth that does not stop to think about the direction that this growth is taking.

Unfortunately, in Spain we are also familiar with irrational growth. In recent times our entire country – its cities, suburbs, coastline and countryside-, has witnessed the madness of unfettered property speculation and watched the economy come to a screeching halt. The unfortunate outcome of this unsustainable development has been thousands of abandoned half-built constructions, architectural corpses left lying across the country, the lasting physical consequences of a collective failure.

The concerns, interest and also the anger that these events and their dire consequences have aroused amongst citizens and professionals in both Spain and Europe have been set out in numerous papers and reports. One example is a photographic inventory of abandoned speculative construction in Spain, entitled "*Ruinias Modernas, una topografía del lucro*" (Modern Ruins, a topography of greed) by Julia Schulz-Dornburg, a Barcelona-based German architect. Another more politically-oriented work is the report on the "*Impact of extensive urbanisation in Spain on individual rights of European citizens, on the environment and on the application of EU law*" by Danish Euro-parliamentarian Marguete Auken, ratified in March 2012, which describes urban atrocities committed in Spain and the irreparable damage that they have caused.

For our part, in the sphere of academic research, we have addressed this issue with ideas for new planning strategies that can lead to proposals for sustainable futures. In particular, during the last academic year we organised an international seminar entitled, "Lifeless architecture. How to deal with contemporary architectural corpses", as part of the Master in Advanced Architectural Projects at the Madrid School of Architecture in the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

A hundred years ago, around 1912, during a tumultuous pre-war period of crisis and uncertainty, silos and other structures from the industrial revolution inspired architects in their pursuit of the spirit of the times. Throughout the 20th century, the meaning of industrial structures evolved and continued to be a point of reference for critical and renovative positioning in approaches and architectures, brought on by the development of the Modern Project and the process of modernization.

While not wishing to downplay the controversy, the fact is that those ruins of the industrial revolution remain in our collective imagination as symbols of progress and driving forces for our general well-being. Meanwhile, in the last five years, more contemporary ruins have appeared in our immediate environment, the result of utterly sterile and frenzied speculation. These recent unfinished projects have left shattered landscapes and mountains of architectural rubble, powerful symbols of the failure of today's predatory economy, although they may well also be regarded as catalysts for new critical attitudes that strive to rethink the future.

These modern ruins, like pained bodies, are a powerful call for the immediate proposal of **innovative**

ideas and strategies for projects that can recover the identity of the place and encourage environmental consistency through the **poetic practice of an economy of scarcity**. The mechanism of pain was developed in the course of biological evolution as an alarm system to warn animals of potential harm. Similarly, in urban territories and "natural" environments as well, the wounds and deformities produced by an unfettered urge to urbanise and build in record time are warning signs that we must now interpret in order to heal a wounded body that is shadowed by multiple threats; **the architectural corpses that have remained are proof of a failed system and a lurking danger**: the way of building, living and thinking –of being a human on Earth- in our environment must be reconsidered urgently.

The problem exists, it is urgent and it needs solutions. We propose a proactive approach as an excellent opportunity to **involve willing and/or affected construction companies, public and private bodies, professionals from multiple fields and citizen groups**. This approach should provide solutions for recently created waste material, a serious problem that will be **inherited by our societies of the future**. **Young architects** will thus no doubt be particularly interested in providing ideas and strategic policies with a future perspective. These large-scale residues of the housing boom are severely affecting the economies of individual citizens as well as the corporate and public sectors. The usual way of solving the problem based on "more growth" has already proven to be utterly ineffective. The first task is therefore to stop and think about what to do with these corpses scattered across the country after the battle. In other words, we must **think and propose ideas and strategies** that generate **remedial initiatives, recycling, review, recomposition, revitalization, renunciation, reuse, etc.**; initiatives that are able to accept and absorb the failed attempts at unfinished, never inhabited buildings which, since the crisis, have become lifeless and memoryless architectural ruins.

This contemporary architectural waste, spread across town centres and peripheries, villages and coastlines, near and far, not only in Spain but also in many other parts of Europe (from Iceland to Greece, from Italy to Russia and Ireland), is unfortunately a negative expression of our time. Fortunately, the projects focussed on these undesirable constructions that we manage to tackle and complete may well be a symptom of a new era. They will open avenues to encourage an architecture of our time that is more in keeping with limited material resources, respect for the environment and safeguarding harmony in people's lives.

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